CHAPTER THREE
THE PREOBSERVATION MEETING

Hi, Jay! Are you free to come to my room for a fifteen-minute preobservation meeting right before school begins on Thursday morning? Margaret said she could make that work, so I wanted to check in with you. I promise to keep the meeting short so you can get to class on time! Send me an e-mail when you get a minute. Thanks!” Heather finishes typing. She’s scheduled her preobservation meeting for three days from now and knows she has a bit of preparation to do. First, she’s got to figure out her focus question. She can still hear Fernando’s advice ringing in her mind: “The more specific, the better!” She pulls out a clean sheet of paper and writes at the top: “What I’d really like to know about my teaching and my students.” Her list gets more detailed as the minutes pass.

It happens in locker rooms across the country. Sometimes the voices are loud and sharp; other times there is earnestness, singing, even prayer. Before the big game, athletes and coaches gather for a pregame meeting. Sometimes this event looks like a huddle or a pep talk; usually it focuses on clarifying strategy toward a common goal. People walk into this meeting as individuals but walk out united as a team, ready to play full force toward achieving their goal. Collaborative ventures of any sort—in boardrooms, on sports fields, or in school buildings—are set up for success when all parties engage not only in the “main event” but also in the preparation that occurs prior to the event. Just as coaches assemble their team prior to each game, lead teachers invite their peers into their classroom for their own pregame assembly: the preobservation meeting. These pregame meetings share the same objective: to clarify the focus for the main event and outline roles.

Teacher-driven observation (TDO) is a collaborative form of professional development that is situated in the classroom and is teacher led from start to finish.
As the observed teacher, you take charge. You bear responsibility for leading this voyage, requesting the collection of data that will help you improve your teaching, and ultimately committing to tangible improvements that you can implement to support student learning. That’s why you are called the “lead” teacher. It all starts with the preobservation meeting. As you read on, you can expect to generate ideas that are specific to your classroom and your own preobservation meeting.

In this chapter, we’ve assembled all the tools you need to create a successful preobservation meeting. First, we describe the purpose of the meeting so you have a clear sense of how it directly helps you accomplish your goals. Then we help you create a detailed focus question and select a method of data collection that will help your colleagues gather exactly the information you need to answer that question. We also help you think through which peers you’d like to invite to do your observation. Schedules can be busy for teachers, so we’ve compiled some useful suggestions for coordinating everyone’s time in the observation process. We’ve also provided a list of common missteps to guide you through a successful TDO experience.

**THE PURPOSE OF THE PREOBSERVATION MEETING**

The preobservation meeting is arguably as important as the observation itself in that it sets the stage for the observation, providing all parties with a clear idea of what you, the observed teacher, hope to accomplish. This meeting takes you out of a passive role and places you at the helm of the process.

The preobservation meeting has three components (figure 3.1). First, you articulate your focus question. Without this integral step, observers would enter your classroom without a focused lens, ill prepared to collect data that inform your teaching and improve the learning that is taking place in your classroom. Second, you present the context for the lesson to your observers, who may be unfamiliar with the content you are teaching. Third, you and your team agree on logistical details for the observation and the post-observation debrief. In short, the preobservation meeting ensures that all participants are prepared to contribute.
The Preobservation Meeting 43

FIGURE 3.1. Components of the Preobservation Meeting

PREPARING FOR THE PREOBSERVATION MEETING

As any educator knows, when it comes to pulling off a plan, the devil is in the details. In the case of TDO, this couldn’t be truer. To maximize your effectiveness, you must identify your focus for the observation and nail down the logistics.

Failing to identify and share your focus with observers is akin to enlisting the help of a Realtor in house shopping without having first defined the criteria you are looking for in a new home. The Realtor is likely to take you to homes that reflect her own interests rather than your own. Without a narrow focus, TDO will produce mediocre results at best. You will not get data that you seek and will be unable to gain insight that will lead to improvements in teaching and learning in your classroom. Simply put, if you don’t name a focus, how can you expect your colleagues to collect relevant data?

Identifying a Focus Question

At its fundamental level, becoming a transparent teacher through TDO is about deciding what you want to learn. Selecting a focus question for your observation is your opportunity to articulate the area for this learning. As the leader of this process, you are best equipped to create a question that probes into the relationship between your instruction and student learning. While you may be tempted to identify several focus questions, you should select only one for the purpose of TDO. This ensures that your observers collect focused and relevant data in your classroom. If you try to answer multiple focus questions in a single observation, you risk answering none of them well.

Because our answers can be only as good as the question we ask, it’s worth putting some effort into creating a pertinent, narrowed focus question. We can say this all day long, but that won’t necessarily help you do it. So let’s walk through the process together.
You already know the goal of the focus question: to learn something specific from data collection about the relationship between your instruction and student learning. Now we’d like you to imagine you are a fly. (Trust us on this one. Besides, at some level, haven’t you wondered what it would be like to watch what goes on in your classroom?) Just become a fly and find an imaginary perch on the wall of your own classroom.

You now have a new vantage point. You have access to your blind spots—areas you either aren’t or can’t be aware of while you teach. Teaching takes a lot of concentration. But from this new (albeit imaginary) perspective, what might you see? What questions come to you? Jot down your ideas now, and we’ll continue. For more detail, let’s zoom in.

**Key Point**

The goal of the focus question is to learn something specific about the relationship between your instruction and student learning through data collection.

First zoom your attention onto you as a teacher. Watch how you walk around the room. Listen to what you say and how you respond to student questions. Become aware of moments in the lesson when you’re implementing the new strategy you learned last month in professional development. From this vantage point, how’s it going? What would you like more information about? These areas could highlight potential blind spots that data could illuminate. Effective focus questions related to instruction might be, “How can I more effectively use reading workshop as an opportunity for students to interact with text?” or, “To what extent am I scaffolding the higher-level thinking questions I ask my students?” Even if you haven’t perfected the wording, write down your thoughts right now about any areas where you’d like to have more information.

Next, zoom your attention onto your students. How well are they getting what you’re saying? Watch where their eyes look as you’re speaking, and listen to the comments they make. When do they zone out? You’re already aware of many
things as their teacher; for example, you know their test scores and their habits, so you don’t need to look for this information in your focus question. As a fly on the wall, what things about your students can you see (or imagine) that you aren’t aware of as you teach? Some helpful questions in this lens might be, “Which type of instructions best promote on-task cooperative group work, especially when I’m not hovering over a particular group?” or, “Am I using the gradual release of responsibility at a pace that promotes students’ understanding of how to calculate molar mass?”

Write down any thoughts you discovered in terms of things you’d like to know about your students. Don’t worry if your questions aren’t as refined as the examples we listed; you’ll get there. For now, just write. The beauty of observation is that its goal is to collect data on a question you care about, and data illuminate blind spots.

If you’re still working to come up with a focus question, table 3.1 lists some key resources that focus on teaching and learning strategies. In fact, if you haven’t come up with a focus question about an existing need like the examples we just provided, you could create a new need by trying out a new strategy from one of the resources in the table.

The focus question you select should be one you cannot answer on your own; rather, it should require the collection of data from classroom observation. Consider the difference between asking, “Are my students able to solve multistep word problems?” and, “How do the questions I ask in class scaffold students’ understandings of the steps required to solve multistep word problems?” The first question can be examined alongside student work samples, whereas the second requires examining a teacher’s questions alongside evidence of student understanding such as student dialogue or student steps toward mastery of an academic task. Your observers are a valuable resource; be sure that your focus question requires the collection of data you otherwise do not have access to in the midst of teaching a lesson.
TABLE 3.1 RESOURCES FOR RESEARCH-BASED TEACHING AND LEARNING STRATEGIES


Key Point

*The focus question a lead teacher selects should be one that he or she cannot answer alone.*

Sometimes it’s helpful to see how another person does it. Let’s go back to Heather’s story. Earlier in this chapter, we saw her schedule her preobservation meeting. At this point, she’s creating a focus question that will help her teach her seventh-grade math students more effectively. Notice how the question she comes up with provides the essential context for data collection during her observation:

Heather’s students have been learning to calculate the surface area of three-dimensional objects. Some of them get it, but others need a bit more guidance. She has been using the gradual release of responsibility to help them work these calculations independently, without her prompting. Her strategy involves teacher modeling (“I do”), shared engagement in the task (“We do”), and then student independence in task completion (“You do”). This is the space where things get a bit hazy for her because it doesn’t seem to be working. Well, it works in class when the students are partnered, but less so when they get to their assessments. This seems like a good area to focus on during her observation.

In developing a focus question, Heather thinks back to her class yesterday after lunch. She was working to improve the “we do” stage of gradual release, when students take increasingly more responsibility for completing the task, and noted...
the challenge of the transition from “we do” to “you do.” From the questions her students asked, she could tell that some were more prepared to move on than others were. Those who could independently apply the formulas didn’t have questions at all, but those who were struggling sometimes didn’t even know what questions to ask; she could see the look of confusion on their faces. At that point, she started posing guiding questions to help them get through the calculations.

Heather decides this would be a good place to have Margaret and Jay’s input because it’s something she can’t quite see clearly on her own. She writes her detailed focus question on her paper: “How are my words and actions contributing to students’ taking on responsibility for calculating the surface area of three-dimensional objects?” Reading through it, she smiles. Fernando would be pleased with that level of detail.

**Selecting a Data Collection Method**

Armed with a focus question, you must now define the methods your peers will use to collect data during the observation. Typically you will request that at least one of your observers collect data involving the teacher and another collect data involving the students. This enables you to collectively examine the relationship between instruction and student learning in the postobservation debriefing. Although there are many ways observers can collect data, the most common methods are listed in table 3.2. We discuss the use of these methods in more detail in chapter 4.

Each focus requires the collection of different data. The following examples illustrate how lead teachers may link their focus areas to the collection of relevant data:

- A middle school physical education teacher wants to learn how she can more effectively group students to encourage student participation in class. She poses this question to her colleagues: “Which grouping strategies best contribute to student participation?” She requests that observers each observe one group of students and use the method of scripting to record how students in that group participate in the class activity, providing data that will inform her future grouping strategies.

- A ninth-grade algebra teacher wants to increase classroom engagement, particularly as it relates to students’ participation in class discussions. Having recently implemented the strategy of cold calling, the teacher wants to know how he can more effectively frame questions so that they are accessible to all students. He asks his observers, “Am I providing adequate context for the questions I ask when I cold-call?” He requests that the observers script his questions and students’ responses, providing him with a better understanding
TABLE 3.2  METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method of Collection</th>
<th>Results: Data Collected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scripting</td>
<td>Teacher instructions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher one-on-one conversations with students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student responses, categorized by:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Student volunteers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Student responds when called on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Student initiates a comment or question related to lesson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Student initiates an unrelated comment or question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student answers, categorized by:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Single word or phrase with no additional detail or support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Answer with details to support answer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Answer with explanation of thinking or processing used to develop answer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student side conversations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counting</td>
<td>Teacher questions, categorized along Bloom’s taxonomy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher instructional time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student work time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number of students who are on task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Instances of specific student behaviors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tracking</td>
<td>Teacher movements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher eye contact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student movements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student attention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Group dynamics</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

of when students get confused. These data will help him scaffold these questions to encourage whole class participation and engagement.

Due to the sheer volume of data in a classroom, from dialogue to task to attention, many data sources could inform an answer to your focus question. Just as your question narrows the critical context of the observation, your data collection
method will direct attention on that area. Let’s examine how Heather identifies a relevant data collection method:

Heather rereads her focus question, looking for what data her observers could collect to shed light on the issue: How are my words and actions contributing to students’ taking on responsibility for calculating the surface area of three-dimensional objects? She knows how Jay and Margaret could collect many data from sources while they’re in her room. They could script student conversations or describe the tasks in which students engage. They could record how she moves in the room and how that affects student attention.

In the context of her lesson and her goal, Heather decides to have them collect data on the questions she asks and the questions her students ask. This information, she believes, will illustrate the distribution of responsibility for the academic task in her classroom. It’ll shed light on her broad concern: Is she leading the learning, or are her students doing this? She decides to have Margaret script the questions she asks students (and count the total) and Jay script student questions (and count the total). Under her focus question, she writes, “Data collection methods: Scripting and counting.” She’s confident that these data will help her answer her focus question and, more important, improve her instruction.

At this point, we’d like you to look at the focus area you came up with and glance back at table 3.2. Write down which data sources and data collection methods seem most relevant for your question. If you want further information on data collection methods, read on. We go into each of these in greater detail in chapter 4.

You should recognize that there’s no right answer in this process; each pairing of a focus question and data collection method will yield interesting results. You should use logic to decide which would be of most value to your question, your students, and your learning.

**Determining Who Will Collect the Data: Inviting Peers**

Now that you’ve identified the what and the how of data collection, it’s time to identify peers who will be most helpful in collecting the data you need. While this might seem like an easy task, it actually requires just as much thought as identifying what data observers will collect.

We recommend you invite between two and four peers into your classroom. Our experience has demonstrated that the collective insight of several teachers contributes to a more comprehensive data collection. The perspectives and expertise of the group is particularly relevant during the debriefing conversation when you are collectively making sense of the data and the implications for your classroom.

Each person in your building has had different experiences, resulting in a diversity of perspectives and insights that can support your efforts to improve your
TABLE 3.3 PROS AND CONS OF CATEGORIES OF PEER OBSERVERS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories of Observers</th>
<th>Pros</th>
<th>Cons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A peer who teaches many of the same students you do</td>
<td>Has knowledge of students’ abilities</td>
<td>May have difficulty collecting unbiased data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A peer who works with an entirely different group of students</td>
<td>Has no knowledge of students’ abilities that could potentially interfere with data collection</td>
<td>May have less understanding of your students’ unique needs or strategies that have been effective with these students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A veteran teacher</td>
<td>Depth of experience; has had more experience to refine strategies and understand a context in which they are most effective</td>
<td>May be less familiar with new practices that have emerged in the field; has used practices for an extended period of time and thus may not remember the process of learning and refining them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A new teacher</td>
<td>May be closer to recent education research; hasn’t yet established firm classroom routines so may be able to see other ways of doing things</td>
<td>Has less experience applying strategies to the classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A peer with deep knowledge of your subject area</td>
<td>Can better monitor students’ understanding of classroom content; familiarity with instructional strategies as they relate to content</td>
<td>Curse of knowledge: it’s harder for these observers to put themselves in the role of learner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A peer with little or no knowledge of your subject area</td>
<td>Able to see past content and instead look at instructional strategies; may have a lens that allows them to see new ways of teaching content</td>
<td>May have a harder time assessing student understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A teacher of a lower grade level</td>
<td>Has knowledge of what students should enter into higher grade knowing; may offer insight into why students with lower levels of ability are struggling with content</td>
<td>May not have knowledge of what students should know and be able to do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A teacher of a higher grade level</td>
<td>Can offer insight into what students will need to be able to do in upcoming grade levels; may offer insight into how higher-functioning students could be more challenged</td>
<td>May not have knowledge of what students should know and be able to do</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
instruction. Incredibly experienced and effective teachers can leverage their peers to improve—even when those peers are less experienced. Therefore, identifying which colleagues you will ask to engage with you in this process will require some thought about what insights specific individuals bring to the table. In table 3.3, we detail several common peer categories, along with the corresponding pros and cons.

As you consider whom you will invite as observers into your classroom, we encourage you to think outside the comfort zones that exist in schools—most commonly, within grades or departments. Transparent teachers recognize that the colleagues with whom they have worked the least may in fact bring the greatest value to an observation. For example, at one school we witnessed a fifth-grade teacher inviting a third-grade teacher (among others) to observe in his classroom and collect data focusing on students’ use of graphic organizers as a reading strategy. The third-grade teacher observed a small group of students struggling to use the strategy because of poor decoding skills. Her ability to notice this learning problem was due to the fact that she was commonly presented with this issue in her own classroom—an issue that the fifth-grade teacher had overlooked because his students had all entered his classroom as “readers.”

Teacher-driven observation is the most beneficial for you and your observers if you seek out and invite a diverse group of peers who both share your desire to improve teaching practice and represent a wide range of backgrounds and experiences. Take a minute to write down a few names that come to mind as possible observers; feel free to refine this list as you read on. Teacher-driven observation is all about learning from your peers and the data that they collect while observing your practice. For this reason, you’ll want to seek out and invite peers who have a sincere desire to learn along with you and are invested in the improvement that will result from this process. Our experiences have shown that it is from these individuals that you will be able to collect the most useful data to inform and improve your practice.
Ironing out the Logistics

As the lead teacher, you are in charge of planning for logistics. This means that you’ll need to think through two elements carefully: details and scheduling. In terms of details, you’ll want to walk into the preobservation meeting with a plan for the entire process: when the observation will take place, where your colleagues will stand or sit during the observation, how they’ll interact with your students, and when and where the postobservation debriefing will take place.

Scheduling, perhaps the most complicated logistical matter to tackle, depends largely on you and your observers’ availability. Because classroom observations pull several teachers away from their day-to-day schedules, you might need to get creative. For situations where common planning time does not exist, the preobservation meeting can be completed in as little as fifteen minutes—a time frame that can easily occur before school on the day of the observation or after school the day before the observation. You could also potentially schedule the meeting immediately before the observation (when your observers are available) by asking another colleague who has a planning period to cover your class for fifteen minutes while you lead the preobservation meeting. And of course everyone has to eat lunch; if your lunch periods overlap, you could use fifteen minutes of this shared time for your discussion. Although this list of suggestions is not exhaustive, we have seen teachers experience success at using these three scheduling techniques.

Take a moment and write down what timing seems to be most feasible for the observation. You might know already when the colleagues you selected are available, but if you don’t, consider what timing would be best for you. There are ways to make this meeting happen without much inconvenience. In chapter 6, we discuss several creative ideas. As the leader in TDO, your preparation for the preobservation meeting has a direct effect on the overall outcome. Your peers will find value in being part of a focused process that is designed to improve teaching and learning. By ironing out the logistics, you are setting up yourself and your peers for success.
A PREOBSERVATION MEETING IN ACTION

Having prepared for the preobservation meeting, you are now ready to open your doors and invite your peers to engage in TDO. We will continue following Heather as she prepares for and conducts her preobservation meeting. Her experiences illustrate how preparation builds the capacity of all involved to contribute meaningfully to the observation process.

On the morning of the observation, Heather arranges a circle of three chairs at the back of her classroom, and, as planned, the preobservation meeting starts promptly at 7:45 a.m. She’s feeling confident in her ability to equip Margaret and Jay with the information they need to collect relevant data, building their capacity as observers. Heather greets her colleagues and hands each a copy of the preobservation protocol (see figure 3.2). “I promised we’d be brief! This protocol will structure our conversation and ensure that we finish the meeting in the fifteen minutes available before the school day begins,” she says.

FIGURE 3.2. Protocol for the Preobservation Meeting

Facilitator (teacher being observed): Heather

Focus question: How are my words and actions contributing to students taking on responsibility for calculating the surface area of three-dimensional objects?

Protocol

1. Lead teacher provides logistical information for both observation and postobservation debriefing. (2 minutes)
   - Observers ask clarifying questions. (1 minute)
2. Lead teacher provides the context for the lesson and shares the focus question. (3 minutes)
   - Observers ask clarifying questions. (2 minutes)
3. Lead teacher explains data collection templates and assigns roles for collecting data. (3 minutes)
   - Observers ask clarifying questions. (2 minutes)
Heather begins the meeting: “You’ll be observing my seventh-grade math class, which meets during period 3. It’ll be most helpful to me if you can come to my classroom from 10:00 to 10:20. As a reminder, we agreed to meet here in my room to debrief as soon as school lets out. If we start right on time, we’ll be done by 3:15. Before I describe the context of my lesson, do either of you have any questions about logistics?”

“So, we don’t need to be in your classroom for the whole period—only the time you identified?” Jay inquires.

“Right—just that twenty minutes. Of course, you’re welcome to come earlier or stay later, but I know your time is valuable, and I’m also confident you’ll be able to collect plenty of data in that time frame.”

Next, Heather gives her colleagues a one-minute summary of the unit she is teaching on calculating the surface area of three-dimensional objects. She also outlines the strategy she’s implementing: “You’ll recall that the gradual release method is the ‘I do, we do, you do’ strategy. Earlier this week, I modeled how to calculate surface area of three-dimensional objects, and yesterday we did several examples as a whole class. Gradual release can be a powerful process for supporting student learning, but as you know, I’m not able to fully assess how effectively I’m implementing the strategy while I’m teaching. I’m particularly interested in what works well and what doesn’t work as I release responsibility to students. That’s where you come in.” She pauses and both nod, following her reasoning.

“You likely have already thought of this, but I’m wondering how you might release responsibility at different paces for different learners,” Margaret asks.

“Great question, Margaret. It’s been on my mind as well. I have been structuring my questions to speak to different learners, but that’s something I’m hoping you can watch for in my class today. We should revisit this idea when we debrief this afternoon.

“Of course, the additional challenge is that some students are ready to do the math independently, and others need more collective practice. During the time you’ll be in my room, I’ll be releasing responsibility to the students—asking them to solve problems in small groups and then coming back together as a class to review their work. What questions do you have for me at this point?” Heather asks.

“Sometimes I find it difficult to step back. It will be particularly helpful for me, Margaret, if you will script the questions I am asking my students so I can examine how I am releasing responsibility. I’d also like to have data on the questions my
students ask so I can see to what extent they are taking responsibility for the task. Jay, will you script the student questions? Also, would each of you tally up the total of the questions you script? Those numbers could come in handy. Thanks!”

Heather passes out the data collection forms (see figure 3.3): “Here’s a template you can use to record the data. I’ve created this template so that you’ll have all the information that you need in one place. It includes my focus question as well as the method of data collection that you’ll be using. Any questions?”

**FIGURE 3.3. Data Collection Template**

*Grade level observed:* Seventh grade  
*Subject:* Math  
*Date:* November 6

*Focus question:* How are my words and actions contributing to students taking on responsibility for calculating the surface area of three-dimensional objects?

*Data collection method:* Scripting and counting

*Note:* To download a blank version of this data collection template for your own use, go to www.eddirection.com/templates.
Jay nods, “When I script student questions, do you want me to also record which student asked the question?”

Heather responds: “That could be quite helpful, particularly because you already know these kids from your social studies class. Any other questions? No? Well, I’m really looking forward to having you help me collect this data! Thank you for your time. I’ll see you today during third period, and we’ll meet here again at 3:00 for the debriefing.”

COMMON MISSTEPS

The success of TDO depends largely on the thoughtfulness and intentionality of the planning that precedes the observation itself. To help you steer clear of avoidable hiccups and take charge of your observation, here are some of the most common missteps we have seen in preparing for TDO.

Neglecting to Prepare for the Preobservation Meeting

You get out of this meeting what you put into it. If you shortchange your preparation time in identifying a focus question or selecting data collection methods, you shortchange your results. Both you and your colleagues benefit greatly when you take the time to plan details and logistics. With clarity in these areas, you can be confident that TDO will provide you with a wealth of knowledge about your teaching and student learning.

Choosing a Superficial Focus Question

Superficial focus questions—ones you’ve already answered or that concentrate on topics tangential to student learning—undermine your ability to leverage TDO as an opportunity for learning. As long as your focus question can be answered with observable data and is grounded in an area that is important to teaching and learning, you’re on the right track to having a meaningful TDO experience.

Not Taking the Lead

As the lead teacher, you are responsible for driving the TDO process. Teachers experienced in the process of TDO know they can blame only themselves if they...
fail to reap learning from the process. By stepping up to lead this process, you are taking the proverbial bull by the horns and ensuring that this process provides meaningful insight into your daily instruction.

**Approaching Teacher-Driven Observation as a “Model Classroom” Observation Process**

TDO is not about finding “model classrooms” or finding an “expert” teacher and asking for feedback on how you can become an expert. Success in TDO depends on your willingness to engage with your peers in collecting data. We encourage you to consider the knowledge and skills that each of your colleagues can bring to the table.

**Failing to Open Yourself Up to Improvement**

Going through the motions of TDO without truly opening yourself up to feedback and learning will result in a loss of precious time. Committing to being open to improvement, even when you feel vulnerable, is the first step in becoming a transparent teacher.

**FINAL THOUGHTS**

In a world of private practice, opening your classroom door requires much more than having observers sit in your classroom as you teach your students. Successfully taking charge demands thought and preparation, a process that begins long before you find yourself teaching a lesson as your peers observe and collect data. The preobservation meeting is the first stage in opening your door: it’s the pregame meeting where you equip your peers with the focus they need to collaboratively offer valuable insight into your teaching and learning.

In the next chapter, we jump into the observation. We discuss in greater detail the three main data collection methods so you can choose which one (or more) you’d like to have your observers leverage on your behalf. We also explore the role of the observer and offer tips for getting the most out of the observation day.