



Reviews

Thinking Like a Teacher: Observational Assessment to Improve Teaching and Learning

by Samuel J. Meisels, Helen L. Harrington, Patricia McMahon, Margo L. Dichtelmiller, Judy R. Jablon. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon, 2001.

It was Arthur Costa and Robert Garmston in their 1994 book, *Cognitive Coaching: a Foundation for Renaissance Schools* who, for me, first pointed out a sensible model containing four cognitive stages of teaching which included, planning (reactive stage), teaching (interactive stage), analyzing and evaluation (reflective stage), and the applying stage (projective stage). The synergy of these stages created a level of tension and excitement in teaching that I witnessed first hand. Thinking like a teacher was, and still is, very different from my experience as a student, audience member or follower: The book entitled: *Thinking Like a Teacher: Observational Assessment to Improve Teaching and Learning*, captures a perspective educators can easily relate to and make use of. One of the authors, Samuel J. Meisels of the Erickson Institute is a seminal researcher in the area of assessment and evaluation and adds an aura of credibility to the text.

Upon reading this book I was struck by the author's efforts to include three distinct types of hands-on assignments throughout, including 'in class room' tasks, 'out of class' tasks, and 'in the field' tasks. This approach brings concepts to life (authenticity) and encourages users to become active learners. As a result, this fortified focus concerning observational assessment supports beginning teachers as they polish critical assessment skills. In particular, Chapter 3 illuminates portfolio collection, which assists beginning teachers and others as they attempt to document learning (gather evidence). The reader is then confronted with narrative assessment, in the next chapter, in a manner that causes readers to become aware of bias and provides direction concerning the summarization of pupils' strengths and needs.

The book illustrates the 'Work Sampling System' in a practical and instructive manner by supplying directions and worksheets to ensure that teachers can use observational assessments to record and track students' learning in a variety of grades and subject areas. *Thinking Like a Teacher* helps beginning teachers' link child development, instruction, and curriculum to teaching, learning, and assessment in a logical way. The book supports beginning teachers in their effort to make prudent decisions while gaining an understanding of what to attend to while observing pupils. As an outcome, readers will be able to determine more easily, what they should document, how to assess students' performance, achievement, and readers will realize how they can attain educational standards by using performance assessment in the classroom.

The text is organized in a useful manner for instance; a synthesis in the form of summaries and references appears at the end of each chapter in an effort to guide the reader towards a

logical point of understanding. The authors explain that the 'Work Sampling System', is the centerpiece of good teacher preparation. In doing so, beginning teachers will become better observers of learners and learning. Thought provoking questions are posed as the authors ask, what does it mean to observe? Teaching philosophy is illuminated via various assignments and the reader is shown how to conduct focused observations in view of developmental guidelines. In addition, the appendices are useful sources of direction concerning the work sampling system and supply the reader with observation handouts as well as examples of completed summary reports. In sum, this supportive text propels the reader into an area that is often difficult to comprehend.

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