

The top 5 reasons every teacher should have an intern (at some point)

1) Reflection

Reflection is the most obvious reason for having an intern. If you are even a slightly contemplative person, having someone else watch you teach all the time and watching someone else teach all the time will automatically trigger reflection of one's own teaching craft. I'm always looking for ways to improve my teaching. It's what I've always done throughout my 17 years in the field of education. I have been lucky to have found mentors who were also very reflective and would encourage this self-reflection. Attending graduate school after teaching for five years was one big reflection fest. Reading Paulo Freire's "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" also reminded me of the importance of "praxis" which he writes is action+reflection. How can you possibly improve your craft without critically reflecting upon it and refining it? I think many teachers might not do this because they don't have to or they chose not to. They don't have an intern asking them questions about every move they make. I was talking to another educator who said he would never want an intern because what if the intern showed him up, was a better teacher than he? I told him that nothing replaces years of experience—not energy level, nor new ideas. And if the intern did show me up, than I would be a better teacher for it!

2) Humility

My intern, I soon discovered, is more fluent than in me in the Spanish language. This taught me some humility and once my ego got beyond that fact, I was able to start asking *her* for help. Why *not* learn from my intern? I asked her one day to listen to the Spanish that I spoke with the students and give me corrective feedback. I was relieved to hear that I didn't make huge or many errors, but I did make some. This showed my humility and bravery. I had to swallow my ego to ask for this feedback.

It was incredible to work with someone who is not a native Spanish speaker yet knows the language so well. I learned a ton from her, not just about the language but also about Chilean culture since it's where she spent two summers. I haven't traveled to a Spanish speaking country in over ten years, so for me it was a real treat to work so closely with someone who has traveled abroad so recently. She won a Fulbright to Colombia next year, teaching English to university students. I'm thrilled to set up skyping opportunities with her and her students to learn more about the culture in Colombia along with the language.

3) Professional opportunity

Several doors have opened for me now that I have mentored two interns through Bowdoin. I have met and have had extensive conversations with two Bowdoin professors in the education department. I've attended and observed a panel discussion at Bowdoin on elevating the status of teaching. The panelists included three superintendents, an MEA executive, and a Portland teacher. It was yet another reflective experience, listening to others talking about the status of teaching on a larger scale than just in the classroom. Also, I believe that I was asked

to participate in the Danielson evaluator training as I've successfully mentored two interns and have enjoyed it thoroughly.

This year I was also asked to lead one of the action teams here at King, specifically the literacy action team. One of our meetings involved an explanation and implementation of a peer observation protocol. My intern shared her experience with the protocol that I used with her much of the time, which was a three column chart with observations, questions, and comments. After many teachers questioned this protocol, we revised it to only focus on what teachers are doing well. It made me realize that teachers are not ready for this kind of peer feedback quite yet. Next year, my colleague and I plan to run a PLC focusing on teacher driven observation in which all of the members of the PLC are willing to open up their classrooms to their colleagues.

4) Observation

a. Observing my intern

I teach using a methodology called TPRS®—Teaching proficiency through reading and story telling. Therefore, my intern was basically learning this approach as well. I observed her as I would observe any one trying this methodology, the end goal being that the teacher uses the target language during 90% of the class time and it is comprehensible, contextualized and compelling for students.

After observing my intern several times and writing about everything I saw her do, I began asking her about specific data she wanted me to collect. Some specific data she asked me to record were:

- equity of student participation
- number of comprehension checks
- transition effectiveness
- her use/overuse of “ok please, and thank you”
- how she worked with a particular student

I had offered to collect this kind of data for her after getting the idea from the mentor training course I took through the district. In this mentor training course we also learned about the different kind of voices we have as mentors. That tuned me into my intern's voice and her ability/difficulty in using it as she taught. I brought her attention to this as did her supervising professor, who ended up bringing in a voice coach from Bowdoin. This voice coach observed my intern and both allowed me to sit in on the debrief, which was endlessly fascinating to me. Some issues the voice coach addressed with my intern were:

- the connection between voice and gesture
- importance of eliminating distractions (how you wear your hair as a teacher-is it distracting for you?)
- wait time after asking a question (the coach mentioned that in Finland teachers wait 20 seconds after they ask a question)

- Strength of presence and grounded-ness as a teacher in the classroom (the coach talked about cows are herded-important to have a firm yet guiding hand)

The visit from the voice coach was the highlight of my mentoring. Ever since teaching using “TPRS” Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling, I’ve wondered about the role and importance of the teacher’s actual voice during the story asking. I find the use of voice endlessly fascinating because I feel that it can make or break a class. There’s a professor at Harvard (Nancy Houfek) who teaches a class called *Vocal Production for the Stage* and some day I will find a way to take that class. Or perhaps we can have her come up to Maine to do a workshop for teachers. I feel that as teachers and mentors we don’t always address something as obvious the actual voice of the teacher. We are often “on stage” as we teach.

Collecting objective data while my intern taught gave me some insight into my own students. For example, I counted during one class students who raised their hands and answered the questions. It turned out to be the same four students. When I return to teaching those students after the break, I will now be more aware of this participation imbalance. I probably wouldn’t have been made aware of this unless I had an intern or an observer who was specifically collecting data on student participation. This makes me think that I do, in fact, want someone to collect data on student participation while I teach!

b. Being observed by my intern

My intern observed me for the first three weeks of her time here at King. I was a little nervous for the first day, but then I got completely used to having someone watch me teach. I feel that it made me teach even better because I had to think more carefully about my plans and intentions behind my plans. I had to provide the rationale for everything I delivered. I had to walk my talk. So, if I told her about the importance of writing learning targets on the board and going over them with the students, I had better do it also! It kept me on my toes.

5) The craft of providing feedback

The mentor training which the district offered this winter helped me hone my skills around listening reflectively and providing feedback. About three weeks into my intern’s teaching, we decided to sit down and reflect upon the bigger picture of her teaching. In which areas was she succeeding? In which areas was she still struggling? I already had a few areas in which I wanted to give her constructive feedback, but I decided to ask her first what she thought. And she came up with them herself! I thought, WOW! She is also highly reflective and intuitive so it wasn’t a surprise, but I’m glad I made the choice to empower her to come up with it herself.

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Mentorship Reflection

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