



# Teaching Observation Report

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## Context

- **Instructor:** Ava Chen
- **Department:** Wowza! Discussion Series
- **Date of Teaching Observation:** Friday, March 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2024
- **Course Title and Number:** Wowza! Discussion Series
- **Attendance:** 13
- **Classroom Location:** Zoom
- **Teaching Consultant:** John Staunton

The observed session is part of the CIRTLL Wowza! Discussion series, aimed at giving students both at Columbia and outside of Columbia an opportunity to go over literature related to education in STEM. The Discussion Series uses the Dead Ideas podcast to help give a foundation for those discussion points as well as incorporate an expert opinion and second source. For the observed session, Ava's primary objective was to ensure participants had a good time and were able to engage in meaningful discussion. In particular, Ava helpfully identified a few learning objectives for the session at the start:

1. Reflect on person experience
2. Identify limits that prevent instructional development
3. Discuss possible ways to spotlight teaching.

In service of these learning objectives, Ava planned on using multiple breakout rooms with structured questions to motivate and facilitate discussion on questions having to do with teaching development and the extent to which there is any innate or natural teaching ability.

## Pre-observation meeting summary

In our pre-observation meeting on Monday, March 18<sup>th</sup>, 2024, Ava articulated an interest in feedback on her ability to facilitate a discussion. In particular, she wanted feedback on whether or not she appropriately navigated the balance of giving new information while still facilitating productive discussion among the participants.

At the start of the session, Ava planned on telling participants that I was going to be involved as an observer and that the observation was meant for her own pedagogical development, all the while I would participate in the discussion during breakout rooms.

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## Observation comments

### ***Observation 1 — Ava created productive spaces for discussion through a well curated selection of meaningful questions.***

#### **Evidence of effective practice**

- Throughout the session, there were 3 breakout room components. In the first breakout room, the questions centered on two easy to answer questions that involved student background and experience. During our post-observation debrief, Ava demonstrated a lot of intentionality behind question selection for the breakout rooms. She understood that the audience could involve undergraduates, graduate students, and even a CTL director once. Each of the questions was tailored to bring out the unique experience from each potential participant within the breakout room. Indeed, in each of the breakout rooms, each of the participants were eager to share their experiences.
- The second question related to how we as participants interact with other teachers in our department is a very relevant question and sparked a lot of positive interaction and anecdote sharing between the participants in the second breakout room.
- Although the third breakout room was shorter due to time constraints, the participants were still able to share experiences with one another, indicating an awareness on Ava's part of how long was needed to get the necessary parts to the breakout room activity.

#### **Suggestions for future practice**

In our debrief meeting, we discussed how there are multiple ways of engaging participants using the discussion group model. Some potential future practices include:

- *Whiteboarding:* We noted that in a previous experience Ava had, Ava found whiteboards to be a nice place to write down ideas that could then be shared with the wider group. While this was part of a more dedicated workshop, such activities could be used in various places and lower the need for participants to unmute and speak up in the big group as there's already a jumping off point for discussion.
- *Poll everywhere:* We discussed how deliverables could be obtained in multiple formats. If a whiteboard type activity feels too intense for a session that is meant to be more relaxed, a place to submit a sentence either for a word cloud or a track of all responses on a single screen could similarly serve as a good jumping off point.
- *Question Modeling:* We noted that there were moments when the discussion felt like the contribution a person made ended once the thought was spoken. It can be helpful for discussions to unpack those thoughts further with model follow up questions from the moderator. Such follow up questions or invitations for follow up questions from the rest of the group can yield more nuanced discussion.

### ***Observation 2 — Ava incorporated multiple opportunities for groups***

## ***to share their realizations with the larger group.***

### **Evidence of effective practice**

- In a slight lull period after coming out of the breakout rooms, Ava was able to chime in and share her own experience. Modeling a response to her own question in this way invited more responses from the group afterwards.
- In this particular session, participants in different breakout rooms had varying preferences for sharing information. In particular, some students found that they wanted to thoroughly think through their point and share a written response in the chat while others were more inclined to unmute and share incomplete thoughts more immediately. Having both responses be incorporated into large group discussions demonstrates not only the ability to hear different points but to also ensure that everyone feels included in the discussion. Ava paused at multiple times allowing for both types of responses to develop. In our post-observation debrief we discussed the importance of leaving silence periods as that has been shown to increase both responses from quieter students as well as the level of nuance in the given responses.

### **Suggestions for future practice**

In our debrief meeting, we talked about ways one might incorporate more discussion in a large group setting. Some strategies we discussed include:

- *Breakout room flexibility:* The logistics of running breakout rooms can be quite difficult and so when there are only a few minutes left, it may be beneficial to encourage large group discussion if possible. In our post-observation debrief, we discussed how the number of participants determined the plan for breakout room usage. For example, below a certain number, the entire discussion would have happened with one group, but the number of participants in this session straddled the boundary between too many and just enough for a large group discussion.

## ***Observation 3 – Ava creates a welcoming environment for all participants.***

### **Evidence of effective practice**

- The phrasing of her personal experience after the first breakout room made it feel relatable and not only led to more participation afterwards, but also helped people feel comfortable sharing their own frustrations.
- Ava was attentive to both in-person comments, hand raising on video, and the chat. This can be logistically difficult, but important in making sure you are allowing participants to engage in the way that works for them.