

Faculty toolkit

Best Practices One Pager

Subject area: Gathering information through observation

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College/University: Marshall University, Huntington, WV

Tool: Candy observation

Narrative: I have used this tactic several times to introduce the notion of observing as an information gathering tool.

I start class as a classic lecture, but with a story that I had visitors at my home the night before and had made a variety of candy available to them, but unfortunately I bought candy in excess. I ask them to please circulate the candy bowl during class and help me dispose of my candy surplus.

Unbeknownst to the majority of the class, I had arrived early and given the first five students in the room a "secret mission."

Do not let your colleagues see this message.

As we do the candy exercise you will be a participant observer. Make your candy selection along with the others, but then observe them closely, making notes about their responses. What goes into making a candy selection? Is anyone opting not to have candy? Why? How do they go about opening the candy? What do they do when they take a first bite? Who consumes quickly? Slowly? What are they saying during selection and consumption? What questions would you like to ask them? Discreetly record useful reactions that might generate INSIGHTS about consumption.

About half way through the session, we turn the discussion to the candy observation. The "secret mission" students tend to start the exchange, but most other students quickly join in, even though they had not been assigned to observe. The details they see are amusing, but they also demonstrate the abundance of information that can be gleaned from systematic observation. Butterscotch is "granny candy." There is distinct candy etiquette when consuming in public. If a trashcan is not immediately available wrappers are folded neatly and set aside for later disposal. There are repercussions for he who takes the single piece of pricey Godiva chocolate. "Bite size" means one bite to men and three bites to women. It's pedagogy wrapped in an entertaining exercise.

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