

Week 2: Adjectives & Objectivity

I. Highlights

- A. Adjectives provide color & character to otherwise flat descriptions.
- B. 3 purposes of adjectives: convey feelings, description, or differentiation
- C. Your personal values and beliefs and the context of your observation can affect what you see and how you describe it.
- D. Objective observations include factual details that everyone would agree on: how many objects, colors of things, relative sizes, specific behavior (without interpreting its cause or value).
- E. Be thoughtful about the words you use with parents, either in person or in notes home. Your descriptions reflect on you as a teacher at least as much as they reflect on the child you're trying to describe.
- F. Remember to call them "children" or one "child," not kid(s). A kid is a baby goat. Use professional language when writing documentation for this class.

II. Homework

- A. Go back and answer any questions classmates left you in their replies to your introductory post. (It's courteous & professional to follow up.)
- B. Due Wednesday: Read Cohen Ch. 1 + two handouts on ANGEL. Post your original response to the forum by Wednesday at 3:00.
- C. Due Thursday: Read Nilsen Chapter 1.
- D. Due Thursday: Bring one full-length color photo of a person.
- E. Due Thursday: Read the description of the case study assignment. Bring your questions to class. We'll work on this project most of the semester.

III. Adjectives

- A. Adjectives give our writing some color / personality / feeling.
- B. “The child walked down the street.” is very flat. Was it a slow trudging walk? A fast bouncing walk? Was the street empty? tree-lined? noisy? Adjectives help us paint a mental picture for the person reading our documentation.
- C. Adjectives serve three main purposes:
 - 1. To reflect our **feelings** about what we’re seeing (so sometimes these can be more subjective or emotionally charged than other adjectives)
 - 2. To give a **description** of what we’re observing / describing (such as its size, color, texture, shape, etc.)
 - 3. To provide **differentiation** between things we’re observing (example: saying half of the children were muddy and half were not is a clearer image than just saying there were 10 children outside)
- D. There can be some subjectivity in our choice of adjectives. Is it ever possible to be 100% objective in an observation? It depends. Maybe not.
 - 1. For example, a scene may look “messy” to me, but “comfortable” to you. We have different perspectives.
 - 2. Your background, culture, **personal values**, etc. affect what you see. Be self-aware enough to know if you’re recording something because it agrees with your values or because it conflicts with them.
 - 3. For example, when you see muddy kids, do you see their joy in messy play, or does it feel improper for children to get messy? Do you worry about the laundry and logistics of getting them cleaned up before lunch? Those thoughts can change the tone of your adjectives in your observation.
- E. Small group activity: Looking at a photo, list adjectives about the picture overall or any details that stand out to you.

1. This activity is to help us practice spontaneously generating language to describe what we're seeing. We'll need this skill to do our observations. We'll do more activities like this during the semester.
 2. Some words people offered: daunting, focused, overwhelming, impoverished, difficult, rusty, muddy, old, uncomfortable, rough, varied, trapped, isolated, exhausting, heavy, slushy, industrious, enormous, exploited, gloomy, burdensome, risky, monotonous, repetitious, beautiful, joyful, connected, lost, desolate, affectionate, calm, admirable, Asian, windowless, smokey, ad-hoc, dreary, steamy, mysterious, engaging, shadowy, tropical, carefree, connected, cluttered, rustic.
- F. The **context** of your observation changes what you pay attention to, which changes what you see and how you describe it.
1. A pediatrician will mainly see things about the child's physical or mental health.
 2. A 7-Eleven store owner may see the child as a shoplifting threat and watch for behavior problems.
 3. A parent who's concerned about something may be watching for signs of that problem.
 4. Observing a child I know well (such as a child in my class) is very different from observing a new child in someone else's center.

IV. Observation

A. "We do not really see through our eyes or hear through our ears, but through our beliefs. To put our beliefs on hold is to cease to exist as ourselves for a moment."

—Lisa Delpit

1. What we perceive reflects our individual culture and experience
2. We don't just objectively see a child with mud on her shirt. We have an immediate emotional or mental reaction to the whole situation based on our beliefs: we see a joyful child playing in the mud, or we see a neglected child whose caregivers are failing to keep her clean, or we see a problem because she'll track mud into the classroom, etc. It's not just the mud, plain and simple, the way a camera would see it. We're human.
3. It can be a scary thought to set aside all of your past experience/knowledge about yourself. The idea of ceasing to exist for a moment is scary.
4. Some people can get defensive about their own thinking because it can be hard to acknowledge that there are other possibilities, perhaps that your view of a child until now may have been inaccurate or unfair or incomplete.
5. You will notice what you're looking for or expecting more often than you'll notice the opposite. (For example, if you believe Jessie is a troublemaker, you'll see a child next to her crying on the ground and assume Jessie pushed the child down. You don't just see a child crying next to Jessie.)
6. Our beliefs can include a very strict sense of right and wrong, which causes us to judge everything that happens according to those rules. It can be helpful to set that aside and train yourself to be aware of all the pro-social things this child does (even if it's just baby steps) instead of seeing the child as "always a problem" because their behavior often falls into your "wrong" behavior category.

- B. Every individual human brings their own lens to an observation.
1. It's human nature to make assumptions about what we see, so we have to do our best to consciously restrain that impulse, especially when making first impressions of children we don't know.
 2. It may not be possible to be truly 100% objective, but we can try.
- C. What is an **objective observation**? It includes factors or details others could readily agree upon. Think about empirical, observable, non-emotional factors such as:
1. The **number** of objects in a group (such as chairs in this room)
 2. The **color** of objects (such as the classroom chairs being blue)
 - a) "Blue" can mean a lot of different shades of blue, so it may not be specific, but it is objective
 - b) It can help to specify "navy blue" or "denim blue" to paint a clearer picture
 3. The relative **sizes** of objects or people (Which child is taller?)
 4. **Behavior** as it occurs, but *not* interpreting this behavior.
 - a) "Child A punched Child B." is an observable fact.
 - b) Saying the child is aggressive is not an observable fact. Maybe the punch was in self-defense. Maybe there were other factors involved. This is not necessarily an aggressive child. ("Aggressive" is one of the most overused words!) We need more information.
 - c) Be careful with your verb choice. Did she punch or hit or slap or poke or backhand...?
- D. This is a skill-building class that will give us opportunities to practice observation and documentation skills. Your observations don't have to be 100% perfect. Observation and documentation are skills you'll build throughout your

career. No one is 100% perfect at them. There's always something new that can challenge your understanding.

V. Talking to Parents

A. Pretend you're Joshua's parent and you get this note at the end of the day:

"Joshua was very bad today at circle time. He never listens or sits still. He always wiggles and disturbs his neighbor. Today the teacher had to with him and hold him."

1. Parent is likely to feel angry and defensive. Very judgmental tone in the note.
 2. "Never" and "always" imply this is true 100% of the time, which is almost certainly untrue. How frequent is this behavior? How long does it last? Use quantitative language (measurements) to be more objective. For example, he "jumps up and down" is not as helpful as "jumped up and down 20x in one minute."
 3. The parent could easily ask what's wrong with the teacher that they're not engaging the child or seeing any of the child's positive attributes. Be thoughtful about what you give to parents because it reflects on you as a teacher even more than it reflects on their child.
 4. The phrase "had to sit with him" implies the teacher resents being with him
 5. This note uses emotionally charged words that don't tell us much. "Disturbs" is vague. Is he yelling at other children? kicking them? tickling them? taking their toys? Be specific.
- B. Compare that to, "Joshua sits still for approximately one minute at a time then gets up and stands or walks away. Each time, the teacher brings him back to the circle of children and sits him back down. When sitting he pokes the child next to him and talks to him. The teacher sits next to Joshua and asks, 'Will you sit on

my lap?’ He nods his head and climbs into the teacher’s lap. He leans against the teacher’s chest, sucking his thumb, and listens to the story for five minutes.”

1. This is much less vague, more objective, with a softer tone that won’t make the parent so defensive.
2. The teacher seems caring and aware, is meeting the child’s needs.
3. This gives the parent and teacher more specifics to reinforce with the child at home and at school. “Be a good listener” is too vague for young children, but “Remember to sit on your bottom when the teacher is talking at circle time.” can work.
4. This provides valuable documentation for parents and teachers in case the child’s behavior does not improve and a bigger evaluation needs to be done.
5. Documenting what you see in a way that promotes collaboration with parents is an important skill. Once you master the basics of documenting at all (which we’ll cover in this class), focus on learning to use documentation as a tool for opening conversation and collaboration.

VI. ANGEL

- A. There’s a new folder called “Handouts and Forum.” This is where all our assignments will be.
- B. Whenever you see “+ Handouts” that means there are 1-2 supplemental articles posted. Read those in addition to the assigned chapter. (There are two this week.) Write your original response based on all the reading together.
- C. The forum spells out the assignment/ prompt each time. Read the directions and review the grading rubric Leslie posted.
- D. You have to post your own original response before you get access to see other people’s posts. (This is how she makes sure you’re sharing your own ideas.) Once you post yours, you can read and reply to the others.

E. Take notes or use a highlighter when you're reading. Write about two ideas, phrases, quotes, vignettes, etc. that were meaningful to you. Maybe they resonate with your experience as a parent or teacher or show something that you feel is important for new teachers to learn.

F. Quizzes

1. We have two reading quizzes due by September 17th.
2. Quizzes are 15 questions each, timed at 15 minutes each. You get two attempts, meaning you can take it and then retake it once. Each attempt is 15 minutes at the most.