

Teaching Observation Report

This report was written by a staff member of the Center for Teaching and Learning at Columbia University. It is strictly confidential and intended for formative purposes.

Instructor: Manasi Jayakumar

Department: Psychology

Date of Teaching Observation: 10/21/2019

Course: PSYCUN1001

Attendance: ~125

Location: 501 Schermerhorn Hall

Observer: Dr. Ian Althouse

PRE-OBSERVATION MEETING SUMMARY

At our pre-observation meeting Manasi clarified that this would be a one-time teaching opportunity while the instructor of record was away for a conference. Manasi gave a guest lecture on October 21st on the topic of memory. This is an introductory-level lecture course that meets twice weekly. The observation took place halfway through the term. Given the one-time nature of the observation, Manasi was focused on learning about three aspects of her teaching: clarity of the organization and presentation of material; clarity of communication during the lecture; and students' engagement with the lecture and her as the instructor.

OBSERVATION COMMENTS

On October 29, 2019 Manasi and I debriefed my observation notes from her guest lecture in The Science of Psychology course. We discussed her instructional strengths in the areas of organization and visual aides as well as areas to grow and enhance her practice.

Manasi's organization of the content and flow of the class session was a clear strength of hers. Not only did she spell out the session's learning objectives through a clear statement to the class, but she then demonstrated how the class would accomplish those goals through a series of steps, which outlined the arc of the class session. She also managed students' expectations by clarifying parts of the session they would certainly accomplish and what they would get to if there was time. As she moved through the class, Manasi used a visual diagram to show how the umbrella term "memory" can be subdivided into different types of memory. Each sub-type was indicated by a box with a distinct color. This visualization, a family tree of sorts, made very clear how topics in the session were related and Manasi used this tree as a touchstone throughout the session, returning to it and animating transitions in the discussion from one subclass of memory to another. This made it clear to students where they were in their progress toward the session's learning objectives and also gave clear sign posts about topic areas. Students frequently showed acute attention to these transitions, spending time alternating their attention between their notes and Manasi's presentation.

Communication during the class was generally quite clear and benefitted from Manasi's thoughtful organization of the session. Moreover, Manasi was very explicit about describing concepts and used the visuals on her slides to support her oral delivery of information—consistent with recommendations for teaching in an inclusive manner. As a specific example, Manasi used a flow diagram to illustrate the information processing model, breaking it into three pieces defined by distinct colors and boxes connected by diagrammatic arrows. Manasi checked students' understanding and received enthusiastic nods across the room. So as not to mislead students, Manasi acknowledged that, though the process is less discrete than the flowchart, the students can and should conceive of the process as discretely broken into these pieces for the sake of this course and for their exam preparations. This was not only an example of how she supported students' understanding of her lecture with visual aids, but also one of many instances in which Manasi set explicit expectations for student learning.

Manasi and I also discussed the pace of her lecture, which had a tendency to be quite quick. A consequence of this was that student responses to questions were limited or, in many cases, offered with hesitation. During our debrief she and I decided on two strategies she could use to help slow herself down and monitor the pace of the lecture. The first strategy Manasi will use is to plan out specific moments in the lecture when she will ask complex questions (i.e., 'why' or 'how' questions about process or analysis) and have students do a think-pair-share exercise to build in the time for thinking and increase likelihood of diverse student responses, while checking in with herself about her pace of delivery. The second strategy is that when she asks simple, fact recollection questions (e.g., 'what', 'where', and 'when' questions) Manasi will mentally count to 10 to avoid calling on the first hand raised and ensure students have had time to process her questions and formulate an answer before being called upon to respond.

The last aspect of Manasi's teaching that we discussed during the debrief was student engagement with the material and her lecture. An effective aspect of Manasi's approach to teaching during the observation was how she engaged students in different modes throughout the hour. Students listened and took notes as she spoke, answered questions she periodically posed to them, watched short videos intently, and participated actively in a mini-experiment to observe how sensory memory can be engaged. Nevertheless, during the class, students spent a lot of time engaged with their notebooks and devices where they were taking notes and not connected to her as the speaker/presenter. Manasi and I discussed how this could be related to her status as a guest lecturer or that, due to the pace of the lecture, students were anxious to capture everything being said for processing later because it was challenging to process it all in the moment.

Manasi and I brainstormed possible alternatives to improve connection with the instructor. First, Manasi suggested that since the pace of her lecture may have impacted student engagement the strategies she will use to slow herself down will have the added benefit of improving engagement with her by providing students time to process her lecture and take synthesized notes rather than transcript-like ones. In future courses, having students write a brief reflection on what was least clear to them (a "muddiest point" exercise) at the end of class could help her to formatively assess students' progress and inform the content of the following class session. Manasi will also try moving around the room to activate different seating areas in the lecture hall and encourage students to attend to her presence as instructor. Moreover, this movement would encourage her to pause her speaking momentarily and give students an opportunity to process her lecture. Noting that many questions were answered by the same few students, Manasi