**Tips for Classroom Observation**

Observing is the process of studying classroom activities to determine teaching strategies and student responsiveness.  It can be used to gain insight into planning, organization, approaches, methods of presentation, behavior management techniques, and individual student differences.  Gaining familiarity with classroom organization and established rules and procedures will give the observer insight into classroom functioning.  The observer may also note methods to motivate students and keep them focused on the instructional activity.  Studying the personal qualities of the teacher that helped lesson presentation and his/her relationship with the students may help mold the student teacher’s personal teaching style.

Careful observation and critical analysis is often more beneficial if structured and planned.  As there are a variety of ways to do this, the observer should first decide the purpose and method of observation.  If the student teacher has already had the opportunity to analyze his/her teaching, he/she may wish to focus on specific qualities that will improve his/her skills.  The purpose of the observation may influence the method selected.  It is important to remember that the value of a good observation lies in obtaining objective data on what is happening in the classroom.

Before observing your cooperating teacher it would be a good idea to share your plan with him/her.  Ask for ideas on what to observe and how to focus your observations.  Let your cooperating teacher know that you are merely collecting data to help you better understand the classroom.  Before you observe show your cooperating teacher how you intend to record data.  After the observation ask him/her to help you analyze the information.

Below are a few methods of structuring an observation:

1.         Noting Classroom Organization, Procedures and Common Student Characteristics – This type observation yields an overall perspective of classroom functioning and is often a good format for someone new to the setting.  The observer uses a four-column sheet to list characteristics of  (a) the physical arrangement, (b) the daily procedures and routines, (c) the transitions, and (d) the students assigned to the classroom/program.

2.            Scripting Lesson – The observer keeps a running record of everything that happens during the instructional period to get an overview of the lesson.  The idea is to write down everything that happens without making judgments.  Afterward the teacher and observer can discuss and analyze the data.

3.            Completing a Lesson Plan – Using a formal lesson plan format, the observer completes the categories to get an understanding of how the lesson was organized.  Objectives, materials, methods and procedures, individual student adaptations, homework assignments, and student evaluation should all be noted.

4.            Identifying Problems & Solutions – This type of observation gives insight into the teacher’s ability to solve problems as they arise in the classroom.  The observer records problem situations and how the teacher resolved each problem.  As a good teacher often “prompts” appropriate behavior to avoid problems, the observer may also record the “prompts” used to prevent problems.

5.            Tallying Reinforcement & Correction – The observer uses a tally sheet to develop an understanding of how the teacher keeps the students focused during a lesson.  On a two-column (reinforcement – correction) sheet the observer records the words or actions used by the teacher to reinforce appropriate behavior and redirect inappropriate behavior.

6.            Recording Events Related to Specific Student – To develop a better understanding of one student, the observer concentrates solely on that student.  He/She records all events and behaviors related to that student.  Afterward the teacher and observer can discuss and analyze the information.

7.         Time Analysis – The observer notes the time that the teacher started each “piece” of the lesson to examine the “pace” of the lesson and how the teacher manages to fit the structure of the lesson into the allotted time period.  Time spent introducing the lesson, passing out materials, reviewing past learning, teaching a new concept, practicing new learning, assigning homework, cleaning up, etc. can all be documented.

8.            Teacher & Student Movement – A seating chart and arrows are used to document movement throughout the lesson.  Notes can be made on the chart to record conversations and activity at various locations throughout the classroom.  Using a different color arrow for teacher movement will give a better idea of how the teacher circulated among the students.

9.            Directions/Response Record – A two-column (teacher directions – student response) sheet is used to record the teacher’s directions and the associated pupil response.  This can be used to emphasize he importance of providing clear, concise direction to the class.

10.            Question/Answer Record – A two-column (teacher question – student answer) sheet is used to record all the questions that a teacher asks and the corresponding student responses.  Data from this observation will give insight into the type of questioning used to elicit higher level thought from the student.

11.            Discussion Analysis – The observer uses a seating chart to document the interactions that the teacher has with individual students.  It can be used as a tool to identify how many students are involved in classroom discussion.  If the class is broken into smaller groups, the observer may record the discussion interaction in one of the groups.

The student teacher should use observation as a tool to obtain factual information that can later be analyzed to gain better understanding of instructional procedures and classroom interactions.  This understanding will help the student teacher refine his/her teaching skills.

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