

Observation Techniques

As a cooperating teacher, you have the unique opportunity to observe your student teacher multiple times. Most of the time, you will be watching the “big picture” and commenting on everything from classroom management to lesson implementation. However, there may be times when either you or your student teacher want to watch for something more specific, stemming from either curiosity or concern, such as movement in the room, gender equality in participation or questioning strategies. One of the keys to successful supervision is selecting the data-collection technique that best complements the focus of the classroom observation. Different styles of observing students follow:

- **Selective Verbatim**
 - record exactly what is said within a specific category of concern (questioning techniques, classroom control, teacher talk, student talk,)
 - observer simply acts as a recorder with analysis following
 - a difficulty related to this technique is the speed with which the supervisor must record data (it is better to record fewer verbal statements word for word than to paraphrase actual utterances)

- **Seating Chart Observation Records**
 - can be used to document non-verbal patterns of interaction
 - provide objective and easy-to-interpret data for future analysis
 - identify each student and relevant characteristics (e.g., gender) on the seating chart so classroom behaviors can be accurately charted with arrows, lines, tally marks, check marks, or other symbols:
 - verbal flow
 - student-teacher interactions, recipients of verbal communication, and/or non- verbal recognition (indicated with tally marks)
 - direction of verbal flow, who is talking to whom (indicated with arrows)
 - instances of student initiation (indicated with tally marks)
 - interaction analysis
 - instances of teacher praise and/or criticism (indicated with tally marks)
 - class traffic
 - teacher/student movement patterns (indicated with arrows)
 - at task
 - on-task behaviors: at task, stalling, out of seat, off-topic (indicated with symbols representing each type of behavior)
 - types of tasks students are engaged in-reading, writing, problem solving, collaborating (indicated with symbols representing each type of task)
 - reveal a range of classroom behaviors that are difficult to monitor on one's own:
 - "location biases," paying more attention to students on the left side of the room or in the front of the room than to students in other locations
 - favoring of certain students by, for example, calling on men more often than women, giving more feedback to boys than girls, praising smart students more often than average students, paying attention to ethnic majority students more than ethnic minority students, etc.
 - teacher biases or patterns in movement and students' movement patterns during tasks, always remaining on one side of the room or moving in a distracting way
 - indicate if students are doing what they are supposed to be doing
 - requires visual access to all students in the classroom at a regular time interval (e.g., every five minutes)
 - allows the teacher and supervisor to spotlight specific teacher behaviors and/or certain students in class while observing what the class is doing as a whole

- **Wide-Lens Techniques**
 - provide descriptive data about a large number of teacher/student behaviors in the form of written notes, video-tapes, or audiotapes
 - anecdotal records based on specific concerns or general patterns such as techniques, strategies, or learner characteristics
 - must be objective when recording notes and careful when listening to keep focus
 - make few prior assumptions about what is important or effective in teaching
 - lead to more focused observation sessions

- **Generic Observation**
 - use of a standard evaluation form where teacher competencies which can be checked or commented upon
 - anecdotal notes and comments on the class or lesson as a whole

- **Detached Open-Ended Narrative**
 - observer records every person, event or thing that attracts his or her attention
 - involves extensive writing to objectively record all significant class events, statements and exercises

- **Educational Criticism**
 - evaluation of the lesson much as a critic evaluates a work of art, movie or book
 - tries to capture the tone or mood of the class

- **Verbal or Non-verbal “tics”**
 - record the number of times the student teacher repeats certain phrases or actions

- **Response Observation**
 - record all statements a teacher makes in an effort to control or limit student behavior and the student response to the statement
 - record a problem student’s movement, behaviors and actions, the teacher’s responses to those behaviors and the effectiveness of the responses