

WAYS TO GATHER INFORMATION DURING CLASS OBSERVATIONS*

- ▶ **Selective Verbatim:**
Word-for-word record of what individual learners and/or the teacher say about a particular issue or some other area of focus (e.g., the observer records the exact wording of how the teacher asks questions and how a particular learner responds, keeps note of the questions that learners ask, records the exact conversation between specific learners, etc.).
- ▶ **Anecdotal Record:**
Description of events or episodes that occur during the class (e.g., the observer records the story of what happens among learners when the teacher leaves the classroom, or records the behaviors and conversation between learners as they negotiate how to work in small groups).
- ▶ **Verbal Flow:**
A written or visual description of who talks with whom (e.g., the observer maps who initiates the conversation, who responds, who follows, who is silent, who is addressed, who is left out, etc.).
- ▶ **Class Traffic:**
A written record of who moves inside the room at what times (e.g., who enters and exits, movement from large group to small groups, who goes where). This description can include the rationale for the traffic (if provided) and how learners and the teacher respond to the traffic.
- ▶ **Event Count:**
A record of the number of times something in particular occurs (e.g., the number of times the teacher interrupts a learner, the number of times learners interrupt one another, the number of times learners initiate a discussion, the number of times there are periods of silence, etc.).
- ▶ **Duration:**
A record of how much time is spent on a particular event or activity (e.g., the amount of time learners talk informally versus “on task,” the amount of time the teacher speaks versus learners, the amount of time learners have to quietly reflect, the amount of time learners have to work with one another, etc.).
- ▶ **Time Sample:**
A record of what occurs at specific intervals of time (e.g., a record of what learners are doing every five minutes, or what is happening in the classroom every five minutes).
- ▶ **Physical Map:**
A drawing or map of where tables and chairs are located and the activities that happen there.

* Excerpted from *NCSALL Mentor Teacher Group on Learner Motivation, Retention, and Persistence*, NCSALL.

“RULES” FOR PEER COACHING

THE STANCE

1. We're engaging in **exploration**, not **criticism**. We're unraveling a mystery (teaching and learning) together, not monitoring each other.
2. An observed lesson is a **shared resource**; both teacher and coach should take something of value away from any discussion of it.
3. Look for, describe, and assess the **practice and its results**, not the person's competence.

THE TALK

1. **Describe first, discuss details later.** First describe what happened, using your data. The teacher can take or leave that. Only then discuss what the results were, and only if the teacher initiates the discussion.
2. Talk **specifically** and **concretely**. (“You called on Will three times,” rather than “You tend to call on boys a lot.”)
3. Talk about things which can be changed and which are **worth changing**. (e.g., Ignore personal mannerisms, unless they are interfering with student learning.)
4. Remember to comment on **strengths**. Important learning comes from building on our strengths as well as from addressing areas of weakness.
5. **Check to insure clear communication.** Paraphrase a lot: “Are you saying that...?” “Let me see if I understand you...”
6. **Interact.** The basic human interaction skills of attending, listening, responding, and acknowledging are important for both the coach and the teacher.

A Comparison of Peer Coaching and Evaluation *

PEER COACHING

EVALUATION

trial and error approach

“best foot forward”

give-and-take; sharing
both ways

one way learning

non-threatening (peers)

sometimes threatening
(supervisor)

forward-looking:
improvement-oriented

looking backward:
what has happened

coach is invested in
teacher’s success

administrator may or may not gain
if teacher is successful

targets specific areas

general review, global

ongoing

often one-shot

data: given to teacher

data: personnel file

teacher being observed
does the evaluation

administrator evaluates

focus is on “What I saw.”

focus often on
“What I didn’t see.”

FORMATIVE

SUMMATIVE

* Excerpted from *Peer Coaching*, National Staff Development Council, December 10, 1991.

Guidelines for Mentoring and Classroom Observation

Mentoring is:

- X providing guidance
- X offering advice
- X thinking and learning together with a colleague
- X problem solving

Mentoring is NOT:

- X supervision
 - X evaluation
 - X lecturing
 - X giving someone THE answer
-

Classroom observations are:

- X based on one issue in the class
- X designed to collect information about what happens related to that issue
- X focused on learning, not teaching (e.g., looks at how well students are learning, not how well the teacher is teaching)
- X confidential between mentor teacher and participant teacher
- X done with students' awareness and permission

Classroom observations are NOT:

- X peer- or co-teaching
- X observer forming opinions about all aspects of teaching and learning in the class
- X formally documented for others' review

Format for Mentoring and Classroom Observation

1. **Pre-Observation Conference (1 hour)**
Meet with the mentor teacher just prior to the classroom observation to discuss the focus of the observation, the lesson plan, concerns, etc. Make a plan for the observation (what the mentor teacher should pay attention to, how the mentor teacher will be introduced to the class, what role the mentor teacher should play).
2. **Classroom Observation: (Approximately 2 hours)**
Class happens, observed by mentor teacher.
3. **Post-Observation Conference (1 hour)**
Just after class, meet again with the mentor teacher to:
 - discuss how the class went,
 - look over any specific observations the mentor teacher made,
 - discuss what you learned from the students, and
 - discuss what next steps might be for addressing the issue.

FIRST CLASSROOM OBSERVATION

Pre-Observation Conference: Guidelines and Suggested Questions

TIME: 1 hour

Consider structuring the pre-observation conference as follows. Remember, the most important objective of your discussion with the teacher is to create a comfortable, non-judgmental working relationship.

- **Review with the teacher participant the structure of the classroom observation and agree on what to include in the pre-observation conference. (5 minutes)**

Thank the teacher for having you and check how both of you are doing. Briefly review the structure of the entire observation process: a pre-observation conference, followed by classroom observation, followed by a post-observation conference.

Explain that in this pre-observation conference, you would like to do the following:

- Better understand the teacher's context.
- Learn about what the teacher is planning to do.
- Help the teacher identify the focus of the observation.
- Figure out best ways to collect observation data.
- Prepare to be in the classroom.

Ask if there is anything else she would like to discuss before the classroom observation and adjust the pre-observation conference accordingly. Remind her that you are here as a colleague to offer a listening ear and perhaps another perspective, that you are a co-learner and not the expert.

Note to Facilitator

Bring your copy of the AMI Sourcebook to the Observation.

- **Help the participant teacher identify the focus of the classroom observation. (20 minutes)**

? What aspect of the students' learning would you like me to pay attention to? Why?

- **To assess whether what she wants feedback on meets the criteria for a good focus, ask:**

? Does the focus reflect something that you are genuinely curious about, interested in, or find perplexing? How so?

? Is there information that can be collected in this classroom observation that would help answer your question or provide some insight into your concern?

? Is the scope of the focus too narrow (i.e., the information gathered would not be enough for you to gain new insights into your practice and possible changes) or too broad (i.e., it would entail collecting information about too many things eliminating the opportunity for more depth)?

If necessary, refine the focus of the classroom observation so that it is both doable and meaningful.

Discuss a fallback plan in the event that unexpected circumstances may make the observation focus untenable for this class session.

- **Discuss with the participant teacher how you will gather information that matches the desired focus. (5 minutes)**

Discuss options for gathering information. Decide together which instrument makes the most sense to use. Refer to the handout in Appendix B: "Ways to Gather Information During Class Observations," if helpful.

Note to Facilitator

Remember that the teacher selects the focus for the observation, not you!

Post-Observation Conference: Guidelines and Suggested Questions

TIME: 1 hour

- **Begin with a general discussion of the class session. (20 minutes)**
 - ? In your mind, how did the class go? What worked and what did not work? How do you know?
 - ? How did learners' behaviors compare to what you had hoped for?
 - ? How did your own teaching strategies and behaviors compare to what you had planned/hoped for?
 - ? What did you learn about applying MI theory? Any surprises?
 - ? What did you learn from doing this activity?

- **Discuss the focus of the classroom observation and provide feedback. Share with the teacher what you observed. Discuss together your observations and possible interpretations for what you both saw and perceived. (20 minutes)**
 - ? You said that you wanted feedback on X. What did you see? What insights did you get about X?
 - ? When you did X, what were you thinking about? What were you trying to do?
 - ? How do you think it went?

"When teachers are allowed to shine, the students are allowed to shine.."

*—Participant Teacher
New Mexico*

Focus Areas and Sample Questions*

Page 1

CLASSROOM ARRANGEMENT

- What is the set-up of the desks and chairs?
- How far do students sit from each other? From the teacher? Are students clustered in some way?
- What does the classroom look like? What things are on the wall? What resources (i.e., technological, books) are available in the room?
- Is there a lot of noise in the room? Are there interruptions from outside the classroom?
- Are the chairs comfortable? Is there enough lighting and work space in the classroom?
- Where do people choose to sit? (Does it change over time?)

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT / AUTHORITY

- What is the classroom agenda? Who sets it, and how is it?
- Is the agenda flexible? When a question is asked or a topic raised which diverges from the agenda, what is the response (by teachers, by students)?
- What is the daily routine (e.g., signing in, signing out)?
- What are the classroom rules? Who decides them? How are they communicated?
- How do participants call each other (by name, by title)?
- In what configurations do students work – individually, in a large group, or in small groups?
- What evidence reflects issues of authority in this classroom?

* Excerpted from *Observation Guide*, National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy. Revised March 24, 1998.

Focus Areas and Sample Questions

Page 2

CLASSROOM TALK

- Who talks? To whom, and for how long?
- What is the interaction pattern – one person talking at a time, many people at one time, or a mix? Who regulates this pattern? How is turn-taking managed?
- How do participants talk to one another (active listening, interrupting, building on what another says)?
- What do participants talk about (lesson activities, personal experiences, etc.)?
- How often are there silences and how are they handled?
- How are multiple perspectives handled?
- How often are there disagreements? What are they about? How do instructors handle disagreement?

TEACHER TALK

- How does the teacher greet students?
- What kinds of questions does the teacher ask (e.g., yes/no questions, questions with one right answer, open-ended probing questions)?
- To whom does the teacher direct questions?
- What kind of feedback does the teacher give to questions?
- How does the teacher show s/he is listening?
- How does the teacher give directions? (What kind?)
- How does the teacher encourage discussion?

Focus Areas and Sample Questions

Page 3

LEARNER TALK

- What kinds of questions does the student ask? How often?
- What kinds of answers do the learners give? How long are their responses?
- How often do learners initiate new topics/offer opinions? What topics/opinions? How do they make connections?
- Who's talking, and how often?
- Are there differences in the amount of learner talk across these variables: male/female, native/non-native, age, etc.?
- How do learners respond to teacher feedback?

LEARNER ENGAGEMENT / SENSE OF COMMUNITY

- How do learners interact with each other?
- How much movement is there in the classroom? What kind?
- What is the affect of the students?
- How busy are students and what are they doing?
- Do learners receive equal amounts of contact with the teacher?
- How do learners elicit help? By asking another student, raising their hand, waiting for the teacher to circulate?
- Does the learner help make decisions about the class activities and lesson topics?

PRE-OBSERVATION QUESTIONS

1. How can I be of help to you?
2. What specifically do you wish me to look for?
3. What specifically do you wish me to know?
4. Is there a particular student you would like me to watch?
5. What are your objectives and expectations for the lesson?
6. How long would you like me to observe?
7. When can we get together after the lesson?

POST-OBSERVATION QUESTIONS

1. How do you think the lesson went?
2. Can you recall what the students were doing that made you feel this way?
3. What do you remember about what you did or the strategies you used?
4. How does this compare with what you expected would happen?
5. What could be some reasons it happened this way?
6. Would you like me to share what I observed?

Preparation for Classroom Observation

Take the time to consider these questions and points between now and the time of your classroom observation. You and your mentor teacher will discuss your ideas about these questions during the pre-observation conference.

- X Before the classroom observation, what do you want to tell learners about who is coming and why? How would you like the mentor teacher to be introduced during the class? What else might you need to do to prepare learners for the mentor teacher's visit? (**Note:** Because the mentor teacher will be taking notes during class, let learners know that the information being gathered is to help you to learn about your own teaching. The observation notes will NOT be used for any other purposes.)
- X How will you let your program director know that you will be being observed by the mentor teacher? Do you need to get any special permission or clearance for a visitor to come to class?
- X What questions or concerns do you have for the classroom observation?
- X What activity or activities do you plan to do during the class that will be observed? Will you be trying out an MI-Reflection activity? If so, what (if any) questions do you have about doing the activity?
- X Rather than focusing on everything related to your teaching or to the activity you will be doing, the mentor teacher will focus on (collect information about) one specific part of the class related to how the students are learning (e.g., how do students participate in the class? How well did they seem to understand the activities?) What would you like the mentor teacher to focus on during the class?
- X It is difficult to predict what will happen on any given day. For example, on the day of the observation, too few learners might come to class for you to do the planned activity. Do you have a "Plan B"?
- X How do you want the mentor teacher to be involved in the class during the observation (e.g., observe from a distance, sit with learners, participate in activities but not co-teach, etc.)?

Any questions you still have about the process can be discussed during your pre-observation conference.

