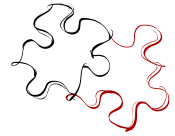


Observation Notes and Information



Observation is a frequently used term in education programs. Teacher candidates observe and are observed multiple times over the course of their program. For our purposes, **observation** means careful, thoughtful noticing of work of the classroom—both what the teacher does and says and what the students do and say. Additionally, there is a layer of thinking and making sense of what you notice. You have to apply what you know about the content, context, students, learning, and teaching to what you observe. What you notice and consider significant will vary depending on your level of experience in classrooms. Often, novice teachers with little or no classroom experience at not sure what they are supposed to attend to or what is important to pay attention to as they observe. There is a great deal of “stuff” going on in classrooms. How do you determine what is relevant? How do you, as a beginner, focus your attention in such a way as to develop insight into the complex work of teaching?

You can apply specific lenses—the lens of classroom management, the lens of questioning, the lens of student learning, the lens of engagement, etc.—in your observations; this is often how novice teachers are instructed to look at the classroom. For your initial observations, you will be given specific topics/tasks/content on which to focus. Eventually, you will need to see how these lenses work together so that you can get a clearer picture of classroom practice and student learning.

Observation is not just reporting what you notice about the teacher and the students. It is also connecting what you observe with questions you have about teaching, teaching practices, content, and students.

You are looking not just for the *what* that the teacher says and does but also the possible *whens* and *whys*. For the most part, teachers don’t randomly string together instructional activities; they choose, structure, and order the activities toward a goal. As you observe, you should also be thinking about the choices the teacher made. You are looking for the *because*. Remember when you were a child and you asked “because why” after nearly everything someone said? You are returning to that as you begin your development as a teacher.

An observation write up is not just descriptive; it is also analytic. You are both reporting what you see, likely not all of what you see, and commenting on the significance of what you see. Learning to pay attention to the facets of classroom instruction and interactions is important to developing your own teacher judgment; being thoughtful about the sense you make of the experiences is key to your ongoing development as a thoughtful practitioner.

A useful structure for your classroom observation is:

What?

Describe your focus for this observation. What were your strategic choices about what you would pay attention to during the class? This may be a pre-determined choice or it may be a choice that happens because of something that happens in the classroom. What happened? What did you focus on? What did you notice? For whatever you chose to focus on, pay attention to the academic language embedded in it. Note this in your description of the class.

So, What?

This is the section where you work to make sense of what you observed. Think about the reasoning behind the instructional choices or interactions. Why did it happen? What structures were in place to support it? What were the key interactions? What did the teacher/student contribute to the

interactions/learning? What made what happened in class possible? What were the challenges? What was the intent? Were there misunderstandings? For whom did the lesson “work” and for whom did it not? How was the language of the discipline used in the lesson? For what purpose?

Analytical reflection that leads to deeper, more complex understanding of a situation or issue goes beyond making an observation (**What**) and sharing your thoughts on the example. **So,What** thinking pushes beyond summary to focus on making sense of the instructional practices and teacher behaviors, on identifying problems, concerns, or misunderstandings, and on considering multiple perspective.

Now, What?

As classroom teacher, your **Now, What** section will be more focused on the **Next Steps** that need to happen for your instruction. As a teacher candidate, your **Now, What?** section should include what you are learning about the teaching of your content area, about interacting with students, about pedagogy and instruction, as well as questions you have. This is where you connect with your developing repertoire, the theory you have learned/are learning, and your developing sense of yourself as a teacher.

Some questions you might ask (remember this is not an exhaustive list):

- What theories about students and their learning do you see being enacted?
- What will “travel with you” from this experience to your future classroom? What has a particular moment or event taught you about learners, planning, instruction, or assessment?
- Under what conditions/contexts might you modify the practice you observed? How? Why?
- What questions would you like to ask your mentors or instructors about what you observed?
- What additional information might help you understand better? What does it seem like the teachers and/or students know that you don't?

Observation Evaluative Criteria

These criteria are the same as the criteria for Field Journals.

- Dated field notes for every site visit/observation
- Use of appropriate format
- Evidence of thinking beyond summary and description
- Evidence of your consideration of “teacher options” and decision-making
- Thoughtfulness and questioning over judgment and criticism
- Make your notebooks available to teacher and university mentors upon request

Academic Language Supports for Observations/Field Journals

Because observation is a term that is used in unique and special ways in teacher preparation programs, it is important that you recognize and use the term appropriately and that you use the supporting language for the concept as you prepare your assignments.

The chart below provides examples of questions that you can ask as you observe as well as words, phrases, and sentence frames that you can use as you observe in your placement classrooms. These lists

and examples are by no means exhaustive so we will develop additional supports for you as you prepare to focus your observations.

Teaching Task	Questions You Might Ask (depending on your focus)	Words and Phrases that We Can Use	Sentence Frame
Observe to pay thoughtful attention to the actions in a classroom, to apply “teacher” judgment to the choices made, to think about the <i>because</i> s	How does the teacher introduce the topic? How does the teacher begin class? How does the teacher transition between topics? How does the teacher engage the students in the learning tasks? How do the teacher and students move in the classroom? What kind of questions does he/she ask? Etc.	As evidence by... Because of... In reaction to... In order to... Due to... First, second (terms to sequence) To facilitate... The teacher introduced... The teacher explained... The student explained... When...then...	The teacher transitioned between _____ and _____ by _____ in order to _____. The instructional move, _____, facilitated _____ Both _____ and _____ are/have _____ so the teacher _____. The next steps were _____ and this makes sense because of _____. I wonder why the teacher chose _____ as the next step. I think it is because _____. He/she could also have chosen _____ because _____.

My examples:
