

## **Focused Observation Guide: Managing Learning Tasks**

*[Links to IV. Learning Environment B. of the TN Framework for Evaluation and Professional Development]*

**Observe:** *What are the conditions of the learning tasks?* Visit briefly with the teacher prior to the observation. Ask the teacher to describe the learners and the learning objectives (both content and process). It is important to know what learning tasks will occur during the lesson. The focus of the observation is on the structure of one or more learning activities. As you observe, briefly describe the type of activity (e.g., seatwork, group work, whole class instruction). Be sure to record the beginning and ending times for each learning task. Identify the number of students involved and how they are organized to do the work (i.e., independently or with others). Describe what the students are required to do as they participate (i.e., respond verbally, write answers, group decision, peer teaching). It might be helpful to categorize the demand as lower level if the task required memorization or procedural application or higher level demand if the task required comprehension, making higher-order inferences or applications, forming an opinion, making a prediction, etc. Describe the product or outcome the students are required to produce (individually or collectively) and what is known about evaluation procedures (how the product is to be evaluated).

**Analyze/Apply:** Task conditions should engage students actively, allow students to be successful, and at the same time, challenge students' thinking. Identify the conditions of the task as to: the level of cognitive demand, the organization, and the outcome/product required by each learning task, the learning/behavioral goals and level of experience, student needs (individual and collective), the timing/sequence of the lesson, the range in demand level, how the students are organized to do the work, and how much time is available to accomplish the task. Identify task conditions that appear to bring about productive student learning and that were appropriate in terms of meeting student needs, instructional objectives, etc.

Adapted From Bellon, J.J., Bellon, E.C., & Blank, M.A. (1992). *Teaching from a Research Knowledge Base*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company.

## **Focused Observation Guide: Use of Time**

*[Links to IV. Learning Environment B. of the TN Framework for Evaluation and Professional Development]*

**Observe:** *What amount of classtime is allocated for instructional and non-instructional activities?* First, decide if it would be possible and/or productive to observe in the same classroom for an extended time of several hours or to observe the same class period or specific subject lesson for several days. Keep a time log with a short description of the activity that is taking place. Be sure to record beginning and ending times for all events. After the observation record the total amount of time spent in non-instructional activities and the amount of time spent in instructional activities. Determine if the available time was allocated adequately to instructional activities and if the amount on instructional time vs. procedural/housekeeping/transition time was appropriate.

**Analyze/Apply:** Effective teachers develop strategies to protect available instructional time and to manage it to promote student learning. Review your observation notes and identify both effective use of time and areas that could be strengthened to maximize instructional time. For your own teaching devise ways to stay alert to how much time is allocated to particular instructional and non-instructional tasks. Planning and incorporating systematic self-monitoring procedures is a way to do that. It is important to look at the number of minutes allocated to a topic or subject over an extended period of time as well as in a specific day. It is also necessary to find efficient ways to protect available time by minimizing transition time and time lost to distractions or behavioral disturbances, finding ways for the teacher and the students to be better organized and prepared, and incorporating additional cues, routines, and monitoring/feedback procedures.

**Adapted From** Bellon, J.J., Bellon, E.C., & Blank, M.A. (1992). *Teaching from a Research Knowledge Base*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company.

## **Focused Observation Guide: Student Engagement**

*[Links to IV. Learning Environment B. of the TN Framework for Evaluation and Professional Development]*

### ***Observe: What is the level and type of student engagement during instructional activities?***

Obtain a seating chart (or construct one of your own) for the students you plan to observe. It may be helpful to confine your observation to a group of students close to you or to one particular group of students such as a lab group, small/cooperative group, or a specific work station. Visually scan the students at regular intervals (i.e., depending on the number of students, 1, 2, or 5 minute periods) and note if the students appear to be on-task, engaged (+) or off-task, unengaged (-). It may be possible to note if particular students are able to succeed or progress smoothly at the task or if misunderstanding or frustration occurs.

***Analyze/Apply:*** After the observation, determine the ratio of time spent on-task to the time spent off-task. If students remained engaged and progressed smoothly, identify those conditions that promoted engagement and success. If students were off-task and frustrated or confused, pose possible reasons for the behavior and ways to improve engagement and success. Identify strategies that you will use to promote a high level of student success and engagement. Be sure to address strategies for preassessment, monitoring, giving feedback, and motivational conditions.

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## **Focused Observation Guide: Routines**

*[Links to IV. Learning Environment B. of the TN Framework for Evaluation and Professional Development]*

**Observe: What instructional and management routines are evident?** Although an infrequent observer in a classroom may have some difficulty identifying routines, it is possible to detect routines by keying in on those actions (or action sequences) that appear to occur almost automatically. For your observation, describe those actions that seem to promote appropriate behavior, keep the instruction moving, and facilitate verbal interaction between the teacher and students and students with students. Focus your observation on teacher and student actions that occur as the students enter and leave the class, as they settle down to work and finish up, and during the lesson itself. These events occur in all classrooms, in all grade levels, and in all subject areas.

It is important to record the ways “housekeeping” activities are handled (e.g., roll taking, lunch count, money collection, make-up work, announcements, etc.); ways student movement, misbehavior, or inattention is dealt with; ways materials are distributed and collected; ways monitoring occurs; ways student participation is managed; and the ways student understanding is monitored and how feedback is given. Other routines may be evident that are particular to the subject area and/or grade level.

**Analyze/Apply:** Effective teachers have well established classroom routines and many novice teachers do not. From your observation notes, identify existing routines that are consistent with productive classrooms. If routines are limited or lacking, identify possible routines that you could use to provide the necessary structure for the class(es). Be sure to address each of the following critical areas:

- Housekeeping--opening activities, attendance check, lunch count, announcements, make-up work, closing activities, clean-up, reminders (homework)
- Student Movement--in and out of classroom, to and from areas within classroom
- Student Behavior--ways to prevent misbehavior, ways to attend to misbehavior
- Instructional Materials--storage, distribution, collection, student materials, teacher “off-limits” materials
- Monitoring--teacher records, student records, conferences, contacts
- Interacting--student responses (voluntary, nonvoluntary, choral), think time, student/student interaction

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## **Focused Observation Guide: Instructional Cues**

*[Links to IV. Learning Environment B. of the TN Framework for Evaluation and Professional Development]*

### ***Observe: What cues are used to signal important learning and behavioral expectations?***

Focus your observations on verbal, nonverbal, and visual cues that let students know what is important to learn and what they are expected to do. Briefly describe what the teacher says (when communicating learning objectives, using questions or verbal cues) or does (signals, using information on board or study guides, underlining information on transparency, highlighting information in book or in other media, using cognitive organizers). Additional cues such as physical moves (touches, gestures, proximity) or cues that are sensory (smells, sounds, sights-imaginary or real) may be used. It is also important to focus on the delivery of the cues (clarity, timing, intensity) and how well students received and interpreted the cues.

***Analyze/Apply:*** From the notes, identify the cues used to elicit appropriate learning responses in the students. Decide what additional cues would be appropriate with these students (verbal, nonverbal, visual, other) and how they should be delivered (How will cues be delivered with clarity? How will they be delivered with appropriate intensity? When is the right time for delivery?). Instructional cues that are timely, clearly communicated, and delivered in a variety of modes have a powerful effect on student learning. Identify ways that you will stay alert to cues to see if they are understood by the students and, if not, to make needed revisions.

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### **Focused Observation Guide: Instructional Pace**

*[Links to IV. Learning Environment B. of the TN Framework for Evaluation and Professional Development]*

**Observe:** *At what pace are topics covered during the lesson?* The observation should occur during a teacher paced lesson where new information is being presented or known information is reviewed. Develop a log by recording times (by minutes) and topics. After the observation, calculate the amount of time (minutes or seconds) allocated to each topic. Determine the appropriateness of the pace when the amount of time given to the important concepts or topics is compared with the amount of time spent with less significant material.

Also during the observation, record teacher questions and the correctness of the student response (Teacher question = **T?**; correct response = +; incorrect response = --; partial response= +/-). Then, determine the level of student success. Analyze student success rate by first determining the total number of questions delivered and then the percentage that were correct (total number of questions divided into the number of correct responses). Choral responses may be considered in the total responses. Low success rate = less than 20%; medium = 20-80%; high = greater than 80%. If possible, identify individual students with low success rates.

**Analyze/Apply:** Optimal student success rates can be achieved when the pace of instruction is consistent with student characteristics and desired levels of learning. When teachers understand the effect of their pacing decisions on student learning, they can make appropriate adjustments in content coverage. Review your observation notes to identify the indicators the teacher appeared to use in pacing instruction during the lesson. For your own teaching, decide what information is critical in pacing, how to determine if the students are staying with you, if the level of success is appropriate for this group at this point in the instructional sequence, how to meet the needs of the slower students while challenging the faster students.

Adapted From Bellon, J.J., Bellon, E.C., & Blank, M.A. (1992). *Teaching from a Research Knowledge Base*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company.

### **Focused Observation Guide: Monitoring Student Progress**

*[Links to IV. Learning Environment B. of the TN Framework for Evaluation and Professional Development]*

**Observe: *How is student learning progress and participation monitored?*** As students work on assignments, concentrate on ways students are held accountable (individually and collectively) for both learning and behavior. Focus, in particular, on the teacher's physical movement around the classroom as student work is monitored (or not monitored). Draw a rough classroom map. Use lines to indicate teacher movement (----). Contacts with students (verbal and/or visual) can be indicated by an X and the length of time can be shown by additional hash marks (XXX) or actual times. It may also be helpful to note any impediments that may be interfering with effective monitoring and suggest possible remedies (e.g., room arrangement, teacher doing other things, teacher getting involved too long with a few students, teacher only responding to students who request help).

**Analyze/Apply:** Careful monitoring of student progress enhances the learning of individual students as well as the entire class. Effective teachers actively monitor the learning process and student participation. They know what's happening with their students at all points in the instructional process. Effective teachers also know that the quality and quantity of substantive contacts have a major impact on student learning. They also vary the contacts depending on student ability, grade level, and content area.

From your notes, identify any monitoring practices that were effective in promoting student engagement such as when students were working on assignments (independently, in pairs, or in groups). Use this information to devise strategies for gathering feedback about the appropriateness of the instruction and how the students are progressing. Also identify ways and times to monitor student progress when it may be necessary for the teacher to be working with another group of students.

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### **Focused Observation Guide: Managing Transitions**

*[Links to IV. Learning Environment B. of the TN Framework for Evaluation and Professional Development]*

**Observe: *How are transitions managed?*** This observation should occur for an extended period of time. Concentrate on the transition periods that occur between instructional activities. Tally each transition that occurs and record the beginning and ending times to get information on how long the transitions take. Briefly describe how the teacher closes out current activities (using signals or warnings, setting time limits) or record verbatim what the teacher says. Also describe what the teacher does and what students do as the transition occurs and how the students are re-engaged in the next instructional activity.

**Analyze/Apply:** After the observation, if transitions were smooth and efficient, identify what the teacher did to facilitate the action. If transitions were disorganized and extended, identify teacher behaviors or other factors that contributed to the situation. Effective teachers know that a substantial amount of learning time can be lost if instructional transitions are poorly managed. Identify appropriate

strategies you will use in your teaching to help students close out one activity, to communicate directions they need to complete the transition, and to re-engage the students in the new activity.

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