

Focused Observation Guide: Classroom Conditions To Enhance Student Motivation to Learn
[Links to II. Teaching Strategies C. of the TN Framework for Evaluation and Professional Development]

Observe: What classroom conditions and reward structures are related to student motivation?

Focus the observations on indicators within the classroom that show the emphasis on student effort, improvement, achievement, and involvement. Note the ways the teacher recognizes and rewards individual student efforts and accomplishments. Describe bulletin boards; any displays of student work; student leadership roles; use of stickers, tokens, symbols, etc.

Focus on how the students are organized as they do their learning tasks and how they are rewarded for their effort. Describe any conditions that are individualistic, competitive, or cooperative. Note the degree of independence, opposition, or interdependence that appears to exist in the classroom.

Analyze/Apply: Even though student characteristics and background are important influences on motivation to learn, a classroom's climate can be one of the most important factors in developing positive attitudes about learning. Identify any classroom conditions that seemed to support and enhance student motivation. Determine if any additional actions could be taken to further promote positive attitudes toward learning. Plan ways to incorporate these strategies. For example: how to find out what student interests are and what is rewarding to your students, how to recognize the efforts and improvements of your students, how to enhance the self-esteem of your students, how peer support can be encouraged, and how to set goals with students. In planning future lessons, think specifically about the type of reward structure to use. Regularly monitoring the effects of reward structure on student motivation can help ensure optimal benefits.

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: Communicating Expectations

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Observe: *What teacher behaviors communicate expectations to the students?* Teacher expectations that are translated into specific classroom behaviors have an important influence on student achievement. Teachers who expect success usually get success. They take the responsibility for student success and monitor their own behavior to ensure that they use instructional strategies that will be most effective in unlocking the learning motives of their students. This observation task is to record the teacher messages that express what is expected in the class. Listen and record statements such as

- “You can do this. Do the first three, then we’ll talk.”
- “Let’s do our RAH cheer-everybody did better today than yesterday!”
- “The reason we are learning about lab techniques now is so we can use these techniques with our experiments later this week.”
- “It doesn’t matter if you’re not sure of the answer-try-take an educated guess.”
- “Studying our state’s geography is a topic I find particularly interesting, and I know you will too.”
- “It’s OK to make mistakes--mistakes means learning!”
- “We’ll be working in our teams as we learn how to do these problems. Teach each other well! I’ll be available to help you if your team can’t work it out.”
- “Although this may seem contradictory at first, we’ll think through this together and figure it out.”

These examples communicate a positive message, but record any statements that might communicate a different message. Examples might be:

- “Now be quiet and get busy. You need to do this work on your own.”
- “Let’s all make 100s. You should be ashamed if you don’t.”
- “We’ve only got 10 minutes left--you may talk quietly with your neighbor as long as you don’t disturb anyone else.”
- “Let’s skip this one--it’s too difficult.”
- “I never really liked insects, but this is our next chapter.”

Analyze/Apply: Identify patterns that are evident in the recorded statements. For example, several statements about interest or enjoyment might indicate the expectation for those outcomes. Determine if there is more emphasis on improvement, perfection, or excellence. Consider the expectation that learning is a continuing process and that mistakes are accepted and seen as a sign of growth. Messages that say it’s okay to learn from others communicate the expectation that students can learn together rather than only learning from the teacher. Determine if there is emphasis on helping students attribute success to effort--or if luck, ability or task difficulty are emphasized. It might be that an important expectation is to “finish” and assignment with secondary importance being placed on learning.

In order to determine if the teacher’s expressed expectations are congruent with the intended expectations, talk with the teacher about what learning or behavioral goals are perceived to be important. You might ask what the teacher’s goals are for the students during the year, or at this time, with this unit of study. Try to focus on the broader aims the teacher attempts to accomplish with the students.

Apply what you’ve learned by planning direct and indirect methods to communicate and reinforce your expectations. One suggestion as a follow-up is to periodically tape record and engage in self-analysis or have a peer in to observe. This may help to monitor teacher expectations communicated to the 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: Task Conditions that Encourage Motivation to Learn

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Observe: How are learning tasks planned and implemented to promote student motivation?

Observations could be over a period of time or of a single lesson. The focus of the observations would be on the conditions of the learning task that are related to student motivation. Record the way the task is introduced. For example, listen for a connection between this lesson and previous or future lessons or the use of cognitive organizers, curiosity or cognitive dissonance, or using the unique or unexpected. Describe the ways tasks are introduced that seem to more readily engage the students. The observer might also note the general tone of the delivery.

Describe the ways students are mentally and/or physically involved such as watching, listening, writing, or verbally or physically responding. Note if the tasks involve lower level (repetitive, drill and practice) or higher level (discovery or problem solving) skills.

Note the elements of appeal incorporated in the task such as actual hands-on, gamelike elements, working with others, and/or addressing intrinsically interesting topics. Also describe the attempts to minimize the students' anxiety level. Note the use of flexible time limits, adequacy of assistance and feedback available, grading structure, and opportunities to re-do.

Analyze/Apply: Although motivation is a complex concept, research provides important insights about conditions that affect motivation to learn. From observations, identify the learning task conditions that appear to be most productive in promoting student motivation and active engagement. Identify the elements that should be included in task introductions and plan how to incorporate those elements in future lessons. Look for ways to design tasks for more active student involvement and for more intrinsic appeal. Specify task conditions that are necessary and those that could be adjusted to reduce student anxiety. Remember that it is difficult and possibly undesirable to incorporate these conditions for all learning objectives and tasks.

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: Classroom Climate for Thinking

[Links to VI. Communication A. of the TN Framework for Evaluation and Professional Development]

Observe: *What conditions contribute to a thinking climate within the classroom?* There are specific indicators which suggest that the classroom atmosphere promotes student thinking. In your observation, identify specific teacher statements and/or actions which relate to: the academic focus of the lesson, the emphasis on cooperation, the acceptance of errors as a sign of growth, the stress on thinking and confronting misconceptions, reminders for students to evaluate their own work, use of rubrics, encouragement to take risks, and the use of students as models and coaches or tutors. When teachers model a sense of efficacy (feeling able and capable), they greatly improve their students' feelings of efficacy.

The teacher may also specifically alert students to the thinking processes required to complete the instructional tasks such as focusing, gathering information, organizing, analyzing, and evaluating. The general warmth, supportiveness, predictability, and orderliness of the classroom climate also influences student thinking. Higher level thinking requires uninterrupted, focused time.

Analyze/Apply: Identify any conditions and actions observed that seemed to promote higher level thinking. Plan to incorporate those appropriate behaviors and identify any additional conditions and actions. Also, decide on ways to monitor the effectiveness of the actions by identifying the desired student outcomes. Because it is critical to provide ample opportunities for students to practice using higher level learning skills, it is necessary to plan instructional tasks which require a higher level of cognitive processing (e.g., defining problems, setting goals, observing, formalizing questions, comparing, classifying, ordering, identifying main ideas, inferring, predicting, establishing criteria, and verifying). Identify at least five strategies to use in fostering a climate for thinking.

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 Praise, Reward, and Criticism

[Links to II. Teaching Strategies C. of the TN Framework for Evaluation and Professional Development]

Observe: *What praise, criticism, and rewards occur in the classroom?* Record all instances of praise, encouragement, use of rewards, criticism, or public embarrassment that occur during the observation period. It would be important to write down the specific statements or rewards used and the circumstances (why given, which group or individual received it, the student's reaction, and how given). Notice and describe if students other than the target student react in a positive or negative manner.

Analyze/Apply: When used properly, praise and criticism can have a positive effect on student attitudes toward learning. Based on your observations, identify the teacher's use of praise, encouragement, criticism, and rewards. Use the research findings to determine when praise, criticism, and rewards may be appropriate and when their use may be counterproductive. Develop guidelines for effective use of praise in working with your students.

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