

Protocol for Classroom Observations

In this protocol, pairs of observers spend time in classrooms examining the curriculum “as enacted.” The protocol can be used at all levels of the system, from primary grades through late high school.

Overview of the Protocol

The observation protocol addresses a set of key questions about the curriculum as it is experienced by students in their classrooms:

- To what extent is the activity in classrooms focused on learning (as opposed to management, discipline, etc.)?
- To what extent are the daily experiences of students aligned to the expectations laid out in the district’s and state’s standards in specific subject-matter areas (mathematics, reading, social studies, etc.)?
- What strategies do current classroom teachers have for individualizing the curriculum, given the range of learners for whom they are responsible?

These observations provide indications of current practice or reliable samples of district practice. In either case, the purpose of the observations is to raise questions about current practice and the conditions under which it occurs.

In each classroom, observers code the activities of two students and the teacher at two-minute intervals for twenty minutes. Students are coded for *engagement*; teachers are coded for use of *instructional time*. The activity in each two-minute segment is rated on a five-point scale (0–4); the rating criteria are presented in the Coding Scheme for Student and Teacher Observations. Additional observations for *support/management* activities in each classroom are also coded on a complementary five-point scale. The definitions of these rating criteria are presented on the following pages, along with a sample coding sheet.

Coding Scheme for Student and Teacher Observations

Criteria for Coding Learning Activities

	Student Observation Observer codes student engagement at 2-minute intervals for 20 minutes	Teacher Observation Observer codes teacher's use of instructional time at 2-minute intervals for 20 minutes
4	<p><u>Student-Directed Inquiry/Academic Rigor</u></p> <p>Student infers, problem solves</p> <p>Student analyzes, synthesizes; student forges a connection to another lesson or content area</p> <p>Student makes authentic connections independently</p> <p>Student applies high levels of thinking and understanding</p> <p>Student raises questions/discusses rigorous content with teacher/peer</p>	<p><u>Teacher facilitates authentic, student-directed learning</u></p> <p>Teacher bridges content to real world</p> <p>Teacher provides subject matter in a holistic context</p> <p>Teacher gives responsibility of learning to students</p> <p>Teacher develops ideas in a systematic way</p> <p>Teacher differentiates instruction to challenge all students</p>
3	<p><u>Student Engaged in Learning</u></p> <p>Student checks understanding of assignment or expectations</p> <p>Student works actively on assigned task, follows directions as given</p> <p>Student performs manipulation of appropriate materials consistent with the assignment</p> <p>Student reads assigned text, answers questions from text/teacher; demonstrates basic level of understanding</p> <p>Student responds as part of a group or individually to teacher prompts that require basic comprehension of the assigned or taught content but little extension or innovation</p>	<p><u>Teacher engages students in the learning process</u></p> <p>There is evidence of collective sharing of ideas (ex. Teacher asks a question and student interchange takes place)</p> <p>Teacher articulates subject matter in a coherent, focused manner, though not student-directed</p> <p>Teacher makes a specific attempt to help students see the relevance of the work</p> <p>Teacher checks for collective understanding of new concept</p> <p>Teacher allows time for students to grasp and ask questions about new material</p> <p>Teacher refers to previous lessons to bridge new material</p> <p>Teacher groups students appropriately to task</p>
2	<p><u>Student On Task</u></p> <p>Student practices task or routine already modeled or highly familiar</p> <p>Student does oral summary/review work</p> <p>Student writes notes as teacher directs (copies from board, overhead, etc.)</p> <p>Student reads text as teacher directs; listens to teacher reading</p>	<p><u>Teacher keeps students on task</u> <i>(Skills addressed are lower order, rote in nature)</i></p> <p>Teacher directs small-group work or discussion on a familiar topic</p> <p>Teacher directs whole-group work or discussion on a familiar topic</p> <p>Teacher assigns individual review and practice (reviewing and correcting homework, fill-in-the blank, etc.)</p> <p>Teacher prompts students to recite/recall previously learned knowledge</p>

		<p>Teacher reads to students</p> <p>Teacher orally reviews material</p>
1	<p><u>Student obeys, not engaged in new learning</u></p> <p>Student opens book as directed, organizes materials</p> <p>Student listens as teacher gives familiar directives – how to line up, how to behave going to lunch</p> <p>Student moves desk, gets in line</p>	<p><u>Teacher manages classroom – no academic content</u></p> <p>Teacher rearranges furniture</p> <p>Teacher tells students to get books, copy homework</p>
0	<p><u>Non-compliant/disengaged</u></p> <p>Student not doing work as assigned</p> <p>Student not following teacher directives</p> <p>Student has finished work and has no other assignment to do</p>	<p><u>Noise</u></p> <p>No explicitly assigned activity; students settling down</p> <p>Announcement on PA</p> <p>Discipline (whole group) – negative episode that absorbs instructional time</p>

Criteria for Coding Support/Management

The occurrences and types of student-teacher interaction (S/M Code) during the twenty-minute observation sessions are coded.

	Academic, Social & Behavioral Support/Management	Teacher/Student Academic & Social Interactions
AS-I AS-G	<p>Teacher calls on student to answer question/go to board, etc.</p> <p>Teacher comments on student/class working or thinking</p> <p>Teacher checks student's individual work</p> <p>Teacher corrects student's individual work</p> <p>Teacher refers to specific academic expectations for student/class; e.g., "This algebra work on slopes will prepare you for high school."</p>	<p>Mutual respect is evident through student-teacher interchange</p> <p>Teacher exhibits tolerance of differing points of view</p> <p>Teacher acknowledges and appreciates diversity</p> <p>Teacher encourages students routinely</p> <p>High expectations are evidenced by teacher presentation/discussion/feedback</p>
SS-I SS-G	<p>Teacher encourages socially: e.g., "It's great to see you in class on time!"</p> <p>Teacher encourages student/class generally about school work: "You're smart!"</p>	<p>Teacher models socially acceptable interaction</p>
BS-I BS-G	<p>Teacher prompts student/class to follow rules</p> <p>Teacher prompts student/class to do assigned work, pay attention, etc.</p> <p>Teacher acknowledges student by name</p> <p>Teacher prompts student/class to work on task</p>	

Key: AS = Academic Support I = Teacher interaction with individual student
 SS = Social Support G = Teacher interaction with group/whole class
 BS = Behavioral Support

Sample Coding Sheet for Student and Teacher Observations

Classroom observers use a coding sheet to record student, teacher, and classroom activities at two-minute intervals over twenty minutes:

Class1

Student 1			Student 2			Teacher		
T	L Code	S/M Code	T	L Code	S/M Code	T	L Code	S/M Code
2			2			2		
4			4			4		
6			6			6		
8			8			8		
10			10			10		
12			12			12		
14			14			14		
16			16			16		
18			18			18		
20			20			20		

Class2

Student 1			Student 2			Teacher		
T	L Code	S/M Code	T	L Code	S/M Code	T	L Code	S/M Code
2			2			2		
4			4			4		
6			6			6		
8			8			8		
10			10			10		
12			12			12		
14			14			14		
16			16			16		
18			18			18		
20			20			20		

Key: T = Time (at two-minute intervals)
L Code = Learning Activity
S/M Code = Support/Management

Criteria for Coding Classroom Learning Environment

Whole-class (C-Code) observations for learning environment are categorized into four areas, indicated by a letter code (A–D). Each item is rated on a five-point scale.

- 0 = No evidence
- 1 = Minimal evidence
- 2 = Partial but inconclusive evidence
- 3 = Partial evidence but promising
- 4 = Consistent evidence

Area	Content	C Code
A	Rigor of curriculum	
	Teacher uses rubrics to evaluate the work	
	Teacher requires responses in accurate/complete sentences	
	Work requires high order thinking skills	
	Teacher provides acceleration/enrichment	
	Teacher discussion demonstrates deep knowledge of subject	
B	Varied/differentiated Instruction	
	Lesson connects content and real world	
	Lesson provides reading/writing across the curriculum	
	Lesson employs a variety of instructional strategies	
	Teacher provides individualized instruction	
	Teacher uses group work and responsibilities effectively	
	Lesson uses manipulatives/technology	
	Teacher uses a variety of grouping strategies	
C	Ongoing informal assessment of student work/behavior	
	Teacher checks for understanding/reteaches	
	Teacher monitors student progress frequently	
	Teacher provides closure to lesson	
	Rubrics are displayed/shared	
	Teacher activates prior student knowledge	
	Lesson provides opportunity for independent practice	

D	Positive climate for learning	
	High expectations for students are evident from teacher language, encouragement	
	Routines are established and followed	
	Teacher creates a literate learning environment	
	Classroom environment reflects/supports instruction	
	Teacher manages classroom behavior effectively	
	Teacher creates an inviting work atmosphere	