

# Observation in teaching assignment

[Education](#)



Introduction Classroom observation is one of a repertoire of strategies which help staff gather information about the core work of Learning and Teaching. It should be carried out sensitively and professionally, and should involve teachers in consultation about the purposes and format of the exercise so that everyone involved is clear about their role in the activity

### The Nature of Observation

Observation is a systematic eye on what happens in the classroom. It can be recorded by narrative writing, videoing, sound recording or full written transcripts.

It is not so much a part of our tradition in teaching, as it has been in the medical field, for example. Observation is the foundation of reflection.

Purposes of classroom observation

1. To improve learning and teaching as part of individual staff member, subject department, whole school and authority self-evaluation procedures.
2. To give teachers the opportunity to reflect on and discuss their practice with each other and with school or authority management
3. To share success and good practice.
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5. To promote a collegiate approach to developing learning and teaching
6. To allow everyone to have a better understanding of the work and professional practice of teachers.
7. To contribute to standards and quality reporting, including reports to HMIE.
8. To contribute to the process of professional review and development, as appropriate.
9. To contribute to the process of professional development.
10. To be used for curriculum development and evaluation.

Principles of classroom observation

1. It will be strictly within the context of learning and teaching. . The purpose, method and timing of the visit will be subject to prior consultation, and may be linked to the school or department improvement plan, to issues raised in an HMIE report, to

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exploring alternative ways to deliver a topic, to supporting a colleague, to diagnosing or working out a solution to a problem. 3. It will take place only after consultation/discussion between the observer and the class teacher, and other senior managers as appropriate, with the expectations being clearly agreed. 4.

It will be followed soon after by a meeting between the observer and the class teacher in order to discuss the observation process. An agreement will be reached beforehand regarding when the feedback will be provided and both parties should endeavor to meet this deadline. When the observation is used as part of the monitoring process of Learning and Teaching a written record, as appropriate, should be produced by the observer within 5 working days of the observation and, when agreed, should be signed by both parties, giving the class teacher the opportunity to record his/her comments on the process.

Where there is disagreement, this should be recorded. 5. It may be undertaken by promoted staff members in the school, the Education Department or peers depending on the purpose of the observation. 6. It will be on a strictly professional basis, reinforcing the mutually respectful relationship with professional colleagues and with pupils. 7. It will involve a general process of classroom interaction involving the observer, the class teacher and any other staff present. 8. It should not be carried out as a ‘critic lesson’ or based on a checklist.

Brief notes may be kept, but should be done unobtrusively, and should not impede the observer’s engagement with the learning and teaching process.

Observation is a practical research tool which provides valuable sources of information in terms of others people's development, interactions and behaviors. Within child research, effective observational skills include being able to record data using a variety of observation methods such as event-sampling, time-sampling and narrative reports. Benefits of Child Observation

The main benefit of undertaking child observations is that in doing so one is able to learn more about developmental issues such as language, communication and social skills. Observation is also recognized by childcare and health professionals as an important means of being able to access children. Through observing children powerful insight may be gained into children's progress, learning, abilities and weaknesses. There are five key child observation methods including: •Narrative reports •Time sampling •Event sampling •Checklists •Verbatim reporting

Child Observation Methods – Narrative Reports Narrative or written reports basically involve simply watching an individual child or group of children and writing down in note-form what has been seen. This form of child observation typically lasts for a short period of time and requires the observer to try to remain as unnoticed as possible as any interaction with those being observed is likely to have an impact upon the child's behavior. Narrative reports must be written in the present tense without the use of jargon and extra information may be beneficial in regards to setting the scene.

The observer must try to record in as much detail as possible verbal utterances, facial expressions, head and eye movements and how the child uses objects such as toys or play materials. Time Sampling When Observing

a Child Time sampling is a economical and efficient approach to child observation involving recording at regular intervals what a child is doing and this approach also focuses on pre-selected behaviors taking place within certain time periods. Different intervals of time are selected in order to best suit the purpose of the observation and provide as much information as possible.

A key benefit of the time sampling method is that it offers no restrictions on the types of behavior to be observed whilst allowing for multiple recording techniques. • Examples of time sampling observations include recording a child's concentration whilst being read to in the home environment or observing a child's level of social interaction at playtime in the pre-school or nursery setting. As highlighted above, there are several benefits of child observations which include providing essential information for assessment of areas such as language or social development.

Key observation methods including time sampling, event sampling, narrative reports, checklists and verbatim reporting. Although there are several types of observational procedures or techniques that have been used to examine effective teaching (e. g. , charts, rating scales, checklists, and narrative descriptions), the most widely used procedure or research method has been systematic classroom observation based on interactive coding systems. These interactive coding systems allow the observer to record nearly everything that students and teachers do during a given time interval.

These interaction systems are very objective and typically do not require the observer to make any high inferences or judgments about the behaviors they

observe in the classroom. In other words, these low-inference observational systems provide specific and easy identifiable behaviors that observers can easily code. Some of the more commonly used observation instruments are the Brophy-Good Dyadic Interaction System, Stallings Observation System, and the Classroom Observation Schedule.

They all have been widely used in research studies and in teacher development projects designed to improve classroom instruction. Some of the major strengths of using classroom observation allow educators to do the following: (1) permit researchers to study the processes of education in naturalistic settings; (2) provide more detailed and precise evidence than other data sources; and (3) stimulate change and verify that the change occurred.

The descriptions of instructional events that are provided by this method have also been found to lead to improved understanding and better models for improving teaching. A final strength of this research method is that the findings from these observational studies have provided a coherent, well-substantiated knowledge base about effective instruction. Many of the reviews and summaries of the classroom observation research, such as that of Herb Walberg (1991, 1995), have consistently found that a number of classroom behaviors significantly relate to students' academic achievement.

Several aspects of classroom instruction such as conducting daily reviews, presenting new material, conducting guided practice, providing feedback and correctives, conducting independent practice, and conducting weekly and monthly reviews have been found to be significantly related to students'

academic achievement. In other words, research using systematic classroom observation has provided us with a substantial knowledge base that has helped us understand effective teaching. Purposes of Classroom Observation  
Classroom observation has many valid and important educational purposes.

This section summarizes three important purposes or areas where systematic classroom observation has been widely used: (1) description of instructional practices; (2) investigation of instructional inequities for different groups of students; and (3) improvement of teachers' classroom instruction based on feedback from individual classroom or school profiles. Description of instructional processes. One of the fundamental purposes of classroom observation research is describing the current status of instructional practices and identifying instructional problems.

As Tom Good puts it, “ one role of observational research is to describe what takes place in classrooms in order to delineate the complex practical issues that confront practitioners” (p. 337). There have been many observational studies that have been specifically designed to describe specific educational phenomena. Large-scale observational studies such as Ken Sirotnik and Hersh Waxman, Shwu-Yong Huang, and Yolanda Padron, for example, have examined instructional practices in elementary and secondary schools.

Sirotnik examined 1, 000 elementary and secondary classrooms and found that there was very little variety in teaching practices across subjects and grades. He found that the majority of class time was spent either with the teacher lecturing to the class or students working on written assignments. Waxman, Huang, and Padron observed ninety sixth-grade and eighth-grade

classrooms from sixteen inner-city middle level schools and found similar results to those of Sirotnik. Students were typically involved in whole-class instruction and not interacting with either their teacher or other students.

Students rarely selected their own instructional activities, and they were generally very passive in the classroom, often just watching or listening to the teacher, even though they were found to be on task about 94 percent of the time. The teacher observation results revealed that teachers typically focused on the content of the task or assignment, responded to students' signals, communicated the task's procedures, and checked students' work. Teachers were observed spending very little time interacting with students regarding personal issues, encouraging students to succeed, showing personal regard for students, and showing interest in students' work.

Another example of descriptive, observational studies involves the extent to which technology is used in the classroom. Although there have been a large number of studies that have examined technology use in schools, most of these studies have relied on self-report data from administrators, teachers, or students. These types of data, however, are often unreliable and tend to be upwardly biased in the direction of over-reporting the actual amount of technology use.

Therefore, it is important to observe the actual extent to which technology is used in classrooms and to look specifically at the technology used in classroom and used by individual students. In one such study, Waxman and Huang (1995) used systematic classroom observation to examine the extent to which computer technology was integrated into the curriculum of 200 elementary and secondary school inner-city classrooms. They found that <https://assignbuster.com/observation-in-teaching-assignment/>



there was no integration (i. e. use) of computer technology in the elementary school classrooms, and that students were observed working with computers only 2 percent of class time in middle school classrooms. Huang and Waxman (1996) also conducted systematic observations of 1315 middle school students from 220 mathematics classrooms in order to examine the amount of technology used. The descriptive results revealed that students were observed using calculators about 25 percent of class time, but they used computers less than 1 percent of class time in their mathematics classes.

Some other uses of descriptive observational studies have been to evaluate programs and more specifically, to evaluate the fidelity or degree of implementation of programs; to examine the extent to which higher-level thought processes are emphasized in schools; and to investigate the extent to which multicultural education is emphasized in urban classrooms. A final important use involves school effectiveness studies, such as Waxman and colleagues 1997 study, where classroom observation data have been used to investigate observable differences between effective and ineffective schools.

Waxman and Huang (1997), for example, observed more than 700 students from four effective and four ineffective urban elementary schools that served predominantly African-American students and found that significantly more students from the effective schools were observed working in an individualized setting, interacting with their teacher, and working on written assignments. On the other hand, students from the ineffective schools observed in whole-class settings were found interacting with their teacher,

interacting with others, reading, and working with manipulative materials significantly less than students from the effective schools.

Investigation of instructional inequities. Several studies, such as that of Elizabeth Fennema and Penelope Peterson, have found that some groups or types of students are treated differently by teachers in classrooms, and that these inequitable patterns of teacher-student interaction in classrooms result in differential learning outcomes for students. There have been many studies, for example, that have found gender imbalances in teachers' interaction patterns in the classroom.

Jere Brophy and Tom Good's 1974 review of the research found that consistent sex-related differences exist in the classroom in teachers' interaction patterns. Boys, for example, typically have been found to receive more praise and criticism in the classroom than girls. They also found that teachers have more behavioral, procedural, and academic interactions with boys than girls. Boys have also been found to ask more questions in the classroom, and teachers have been found to ask boys more questions.

Good and his colleagues (1987, 1988) have also conducted several observational studies that examined why low-achieving students in secondary schools ask fewer questions than high-achieving students. They also found that students from an upper-middle-class elementary school asked more questions than students from lower-middle-class schools. Other studies have looked at both sex-and ethnic-related differences in the classroom. Hart examined the relationship between teacher-students interaction and mathematics achievement by race and sex.

She found the following differences: (1) white and black male students had more classroom interactions than students from other groups; (2) a disparity in the type of interaction between white and black students; and (3) boys were involved in more public interactions with teachers than girls. In other words, it appears that patterns of teacher–student interaction may not only be influenced by the sex of the student, but also by the ethnicity of the student. Padron, Waxman, and Huang observed student behavior differences between resilient (i. . , successful) and non- resilient (i. e. , less successful) elementary school students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. They found resilient students spent significantly more time interacting with teachers for instructional purposes, whereas non-resilient students spent more time interacting with other students for social or personal purposes. Resilient students were also observed watching or listening significantly more often than non-resilient students, whereas the latter were observed more often not attending to task.

The percentage of time that resilient students were observed on task (85%) was much higher than that of non-resilient students (61%). The magnitude of these differences was both statistically and educationally significant and illustrates the instructional inequities that exist within classrooms.

Limitations of Classroom Observation There have also been several criticisms and cautions related to the use of structured observation techniques, according to Sara Delamont and David Hamilton.

The criticisms and limitations of using structured observation techniques are categorized into three subsections: (1) theoretical and epistemological criticisms; (2) methodological concerns; and (3) pragmatic concerns.

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Theoretical and epistemological criticisms. Although observational research has produced a substantial body of important findings that can lead to improved teaching practices, there is still a lack of consensus or lack of confidence regarding the research. There have been many theoretical and epistemological criticisms of classroom observational, process-product research such as that of Maurice Galton in 1988.

Several critics, for example, have argued that this research is devoid of theory and consequently cannot explain why some instructional behaviors impact student outcomes. There are also related concerns about why some variables are selected to be observed at the exclusion of other variables. Because there is no model or theory behind the research, the critics argue that there is no justification for the selection of variables or meaningfulness associated with the interpretation of results. They further argue that the selection of events or behaviors may not be clear to anyone except the observer or instrument developer.

In other words, classroom observation research has not dealt with the theoretical assumptions of why a particular style of teaching or set of instructional variables influences student learning. Tom Popkewitz, Robert Tabachnick, and Kenneth Zeichner (1979) state that this research approach has a behaviorist orientation that maintains “ it is possible to identify, control, and manipulate specific outcomes of teaching by altering selected aspects of a teacher’s overt behavior” (p. 52). They further contend that teaching is viewed, “ as the sum of discrete behaviors and a change in one or several of these behaviors is assumed to affect the quality of teaching as a whole” (p. 52). Their most strenuous argument, however, concerns the

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notion that these teaching behaviors “ are often viewed independent of the curricular context with which the techniques are associated” (p. 52). They are concerned that observers generally focus on isolated behaviors, without concern for the preceding and subsequent behaviors that they feel provide the context and meaning of the behavior.

Another concern is that most observational systems are generally limited- they can be used only to observe covert behavior that can be quantitatively measured. Furthermore, these observational systems make it difficult to record complex instructional behaviors. Methodological concerns. Most observational techniques have limitations. Some of these concerns or limitations are related to methodological issues that can interfere with the drawing of valid conclusions.

One of the primary methodological concerns or source of invalidity that needs to be addressed regarding the use of systematic observational techniques relates to the obtrusiveness of the technique. Observer effects may occur because teachers and students are aware that their behaviors are being observed. The presence of an observer may change teacher or student behaviors, perhaps resulting in reactive effects. Teacher anxiety or teachers performing less well than usual can interfere with the drawing of valid inferences about what normally occurs in the classroom.

On the other hand, there is also some evidence that indicates that teachers' instruction may be slightly better than usual when they are being observed. Although some researchers like Donald Medley, Homer Coker, and Robert Soar maintain that observer effects are not serious concerns, the possibility

that this threatens the validity and reliability of data collected exists. There are a number of methodological concerns that similarly need to be addressed. The reliability and validity of observational systems is a primary concern.

Although many systems report inter-rater agreement or observer accuracy, they do not specify the reliability as it pertains to stability of teacher behavior or on the internal consistency of the scale. Validity is another important concern that needs to be addressed. Construct validity, for example, which focuses on the “theoretical integrity” of the behaviors, is particularly important. Criterion-related validity, or the extent to which the observational measures relate to a criterion measure, is rarely reported, and concurrent validity or the extent to which a particular instrument is related to other instruments is generally missing too.

There are other methodological concerns that are related to the actual amount of time that is necessary to obtain a valid observation period, as well as the appropriate number of observations that are required in order to obtain reliable and valid measures of instruction. Similarly, there are a number of methodological concerns related to the analyses of data. Most of these concerns address the issue of what the appropriate level of analysis (e.g., student, the class, or students within class) should be used when analyzing the observation data.

Students are nested within classrooms, while classrooms are nested within schools. Prior teacher effectiveness research has often aggregated data to classroom-level analyses that may underestimate the importance of

processes within classes because all the within-class variation is lost. Recent analytic developments, such as hierarchical linear modeling (HLM), allow researchers to disentangle these nested effects and investigate hypotheses about the effects of within-and between-school or class factors on classroom instruction or students' perceptions of their learning environments.

Advanced statistical models, such as HLM, allow researchers to identify and separate individual effects from group effects, after statistically controlling for other explanatory variables. Such multilevel models can estimate how group-level variables (e. g. , characteristics of the classroom or school) influence the way in which individual-level variables (e. g. , students' classroom behavior) affect students' achievement.