

Classroom Observation “Look For’s”

Each subject should be taught in such a way that students are required to pose and solve problems, formulate assumptions and hypotheses, justify their arguments, construct explanations, and test their own understanding. In the sections that follow, we list some “look for’s” that may help you to identify engaging activities based on the content area that you have been assigned.

1. In English Classes:

- Do students have folders of work in progress?
- Are students using technology to draft and revise their writing?
- Are students working in peer groups to revise writing?
- Are rubrics and exemplary writing pieces clearly displayed?
- Do students read or does the teacher read aloud to them?
- Are students discussing what they have read?

2. In Mathematics Classes:

- Are students engaged in solving real-world problems? Look for examples of such problems in text-books and find out if these problems are assigned.
- Who is working the problems — the teacher or the students? Does the teacher work the problem first, then give students similar problems to work, or does the teacher ask the students to “figure out” the answers first? What is the approach to teaching students to solve unfamiliar problems?
- Describe group/team work. Is everyone working on the same problem?
- If students are in a block period (60-90 minutes), how many topics or activities are covered during a particular period? Are topics connected?
- Are students reading and writing in mathematics class? (example: portfolio - problem solving notebook)
- Do students make oral presentations?

3. In Science Classes:

- How do teachers relate science to the world outside the classroom?
- Are science classes lab- and inquiry-based or teacher-centered and lecture-based?
- Are students using mathematics in science classes? If so, how?
- Are students reading and writing in science class? (examples: class journal or a lab notebook)
- Do students make oral presentations?

4. In Social Studies Classes:

- Are students provided opportunities to gather, evaluate, organize and synthesize information; analyze conflicts, primary sources and current events; make predictions and inferences; view events from different perspectives; and draw conclusions?
- What evidence is there of group/team work?
- Do students make oral presentations?
- Are students reading and writing in social studies class? (examples: portfolio or class journal)

5. In Career/Technical Classes:

- Find out to what extent teachers create assignments that require students to read and use skills and concepts from core classes. Look at the level of reading and mathematics being used. Do teachers integrate content from other academic or career/technical areas?
- Do class activities highlight state and national career/technical standards? Are these standards presented at a level that would be similar to what students would encounter on a certification exam?
- Are all students fully engaged in the classroom activity?
- Do classroom activities reflect scenarios that students will encounter in their career field? Does the teacher emphasize skills and knowledge needed for high-wage, high-demand careers?

6. In All Classes:

- What evidence indicates students are being held to high standards?
- Are there examples of student-centered learning such as authentic projects, cooperative learning, Socratic seminar and integrated learning activities?
- Are students guided toward more independent learning by making choices and understanding the consequences for their learning?
- Note any efforts of teachers to link content to what students are learning in other classes.

- Can students explain what they are doing and why it is important?
- How are grading criteria for assignments communicated to students?
- Does the teacher require revision of work to meet high standards?
- Is there evidence of cooperative learning, integration of technology, integration of academic and exploratory studies, interdisciplinary activities, student presentations, project-based learning, portfolio assessment, and authentic problem solving?
- Is there evidence that students are engaged in higher-order thinking, or is class discussion strictly based upon recalling information?
- Are examples of exemplary student work displayed in classrooms?
- If the school uses a block schedule, are there at least three activities during the 90-minute block?

Additional Indicators of an Effective Classroom

NOTE: The following is a list of characteristics of an effective classroom in addition to the ones listed previously by department. Not all of these indicators would or should be observed in one classroom visit.

Conditions for Learning

- Classroom is neat and organized.
- Student work is aligned with standards.
- No instructional time is wasted; transitions are smooth.
- Psychological climate is positive.
- Teacher has a personal interest in all students.
- Teacher is caring, confident, and consistent.
- Teacher and students practice active listening.
- Teacher handles misbehavior calmly and courteously.
- Teacher is physically close to students as they work.
- Students and teacher follow procedures and agendas.
- Students share responsibility for learning.
- Current samples of student work are displayed.
- Teacher begins class with bell work or warm-up activities.

Curriculum

- Content reflects student interest.
- Opportunities for real-life connections are made.
- Interdisciplinary connections are made whenever possible.
- Curriculum is personalized for every child.
- Materials, resources, and technologies support the learning.
- The pace is appropriate for the content.
- Lesson plans are appropriate, standards driven, and available for review.

Instruction

- Students are actively engaged, individually and/or collaboratively.
- Teacher accommodates differences in rates, learning styles, and prior learning.
- Teacher asks challenging questions with appropriate response time (for reflection).
- Individual help is given to each student.
- Teacher varies instructional strategies for groups and/or individuals.
- Demonstrations and explanations inform, clarify, and engage.
- The pace of the instruction is appropriate for the content and class.
- Instruction is differentiated when appropriate.
- The instructional standard is clearly communicated in the lesson plan.

Technology

- Teacher uses varied technology to demonstrate the learning and/or instruction.

Assessment

- Teacher continually monitors student work and provides feedback.
- Teacher employs a variety of assessment tools.
- Teacher provides opportunities for re-teaching.
- Students assess their own work according to rubrics.