The Observation and Feedback Cycle: Best Practices for Low Inference Notes

Observe
The school leader visits the classroom and takes low-inference notes on teacher and student actions.

Best Practices for Observation
1. **Eliminate effects of bias.** Enter the classroom without judgment and work from evidence.
2. **Take low-inference notes.** Write down only what teacher and students say and do.
3. **Look for learning.** Seek evidence of what students know and are able to do.
4. **Remain, review, reflect.** Pause to organize your evidence before rating.

Collecting low inference evidence during an observation
Capturing high-quality notes during the observation is the first step in ensuring that ratings are accurate and feedback aligns to teachers' needed areas of improvement. **Low-inference note-taking is a skill**, not knowledge. Knowing how to do a push-up doesn't mean you can do 25 of them in 60 seconds; it comes with practice. When taking low-inference notes, the school leader describes what is taking place without drawing conclusions or making judgments about what he or she observes. When taking notes on instruction, ask:

- What do you see and hear the teacher and students saying and doing?
- What evidence can you gather of student learning?
- What will students know and be able to do at the end of the lesson?

Common mistakes/pitfalls to avoid
- Distinguish between low-inference statements and opinions. For instance, you can identify key words that give away subjectivity: e.g., *"I think,"* or *"I feel."* Be cognizant of keeping evidence separate from opinions, using this framework:

Evidence	Opinion
• Is observable	• Makes inferences
• Is not influenced by the observer's perspective	• Depends on observer's perspective
• Is free of evaluative words	• Includes evaluative words
• Does not draw conclusions	• Draws conclusions

- Replace vague quantifiers by capturing more specific evidence: e.g., *"a lot of students raised their hands"* vs. *"17 of 20 students raised their hands."*
- Swap Edu-Speak for Evidence. For example, rather than saying, *"You differentiated by scaffolding questions during the mini-lesson,"* identify the actual questions that the teacher asked, such as *"What is the name of this shape? How is it different from a square or rectangle? Where in real life have you seen this shape?"*

For electronic version, visit: https://www.weteachnyc.org/media2016/filer_public/2a/d3/2ad3839f-eeae-42ba-8249-614b33136717/best_practices_for_low_inference_notes.pdf

Tips for low inference note taking

Where to find the data for student outcomes during an observation:
- Sit with a table/group of students. Write down the questions asked and answers given by the students in that group.
- Copy down what each student has written on their paper VERBATIM into your observation notes (e.g., answer to #2 on handout, response to quick-write prompt). The observer can obtain a handout from the teacher, if available, and record the answers directly onto it.
- Write down the time and circulate in the room. Record the item that all students are working on in that moment. Then, go around a second time.
- Select a problem, determine the correct answer, and tally the number of students who have the correct response written on their papers.
- If recording observation notes using an iPad, use the iPad to take pictures of actual student work during the classroom observation.
- Move around the classroom and identify students performing at high, medium, low levels and strategically capture their work
- Monitor observation notes to ensure that the "student side" is not neglected.
- Ask students to tell you what they are learning/doing, why they are learning, and if they have learned anything new today.
- Collect the lesson plan and/or copies of student work prior to leaving the classroom.

How do I capture as much evidence as possible?
- Set up a coding system (T= teacher, S= student, HU= hands up)
- Time transitions, each section of the lesson, work time, etc.
- Copy objective or aim, or make a note if it is not posted
- Draw circles to represent groups of students or teacher interaction with students

Diagram of groups of students
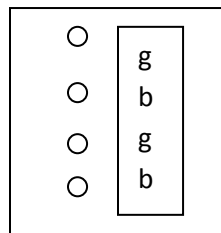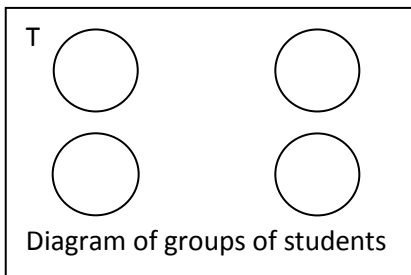
- If you notice a trend, create a tally on the side, so you can capture other evidence that may be occurring while also documenting the trend. For example, Jane is the only one responding to the teacher's questions. You may capture several instances verbatim, but you can also capture how many times it occurs if you can't capture everything Jane said.

  Use tallies or shorthand in the diagram or a chart:

Jane is called on	卌 l
Times teacher provides feedback to front table	lll

- Quality over quantity: collect a full interaction.
  - *When teacher did __, student __. When student said __, teacher said__.*