

THE LESSON OBSERVATION-FEEDBACK CYCLE

The supervisory process during practicum is concerned with facilitating the learning and development of student teachers so that they may more effectively aid the learning and development of their students. The process comprises a three-stage cycle:

1. Pre-observation conference
2. Lesson Observation
3. Feedback conference

1. Pre-Observation Conference

Its main purpose is to help the student teacher prepare and plan the lesson that is to be taught. The CT will discuss with the student teacher his/her lesson plan and, if necessary, suggest modifications and/or supplementary materials that can be included. This discussion is best held a day or two before the lesson observation so that there will be time for the student teacher to make the changes suggested.

What to do during the Pre-observation Conference?

- a) Check to see that the lesson plan
 - has definite, meaningful goals/objectives,
 - is relevant to the topic/subject,
 - is appropriate for the class/level,
 - is workable in terms of methods/time given.
- b) Suggest modifications, **only if it is really necessary** (e.g., it is against the school rules), and advise the student teacher on problems that might be encountered and how these could be handled. Otherwise, it is better for the student teacher to have **ownership** of his/her plan.
- c) Discuss with the student teacher to agree on **points of focus** for the lesson to be observed. These could be the student teacher's classroom management, explaining, or questioning skills, etc. It is good to agree on some teaching aspects to focus on for observation so that the student teacher will pay special attention to them and the CT, in turn, will be able to provide specific feedback on these particular aspects.
- d) Agree with the student teacher on how the observation will be recorded (e.g., using a checklist, tape-recorder or video-recorder, etc.), and the time for the Feedback Conference.

2. Lesson Observation

Observing student teachers in action in the classroom is an important aspect of supervision during practicum. Observation includes both the **focused and systematic viewing and recording** of the student teacher's classroom behaviour. The CT and the student teacher are partners in a shared inquiry, examining together three related questions: *What is going on in this classroom? What changes might be made to improve learning? What type of observation seems most useful at this point?*

The CT's role during lesson observation sessions is primarily that of an **unobtrusive data-gatherer** while the student teacher teaches. He/She should refrain from intervening or participating in the student teacher's teaching. Data collected during lesson observations, when analysed, will show the student teacher's strengths as well as the areas that need improvement. Repeated observations provide a sound, cumulative description of the student teacher's teaching development over time.

What can observations focus on?

The APT observation form diagnoses the strengths and weaknesses of the student teacher's teaching competencies in two main areas – Teaching Processes and Professional Attributes and Attitudes. They are :

Part A: Teaching Processes

- i. Lesson preparation
- ii. Lesson implementation
- iii. Feedback and evaluation
- iv. Classroom management

Part B: Professional Attributes and Attitudes

- i. Learner-Centred Values
- ii. Teacher Identity
- iii. Service to School

If you identify weaknesses early, you can focus on these for subsequent observations and pre- and post-observation discussions.

If this is not done, then both the student teacher and CT will experience frustration because each will be doing and expecting different things.

The APT form need only be filled up for the formal lesson observations. For the informal observation of the student teacher's lessons, the APT form need not be filled up but it could be used to guide the observation process.

Do take some time to :

- **read the explanatory notes of the APT form**, the glossary of terms and the "grade" descriptors found in the CT's Handbook,
- clarify any doubts (if any) you may have over the terms used with the NIES,
- discuss these terms with the student teacher in order to establish basic terms of reference as well as to clarify the objectives of practicum.

3. Feedback Conference

During the feedback conference, the CT provides information to the student teacher about his/her performance and progress in teaching. The data (on events, student teacher and student behaviour, and interactions etc.) systematically collected during the lesson observation will now be analysed and used to indicate strengths and diagnose weaknesses.

The **focus of your analysis** should be on student learning – and the ways in which the teaching facilitated or impeded that learning.

When to hold the feedback conference?

It should be held **within the same day**, as soon as possible after the observation, being sure to allot enough time for the analysis. The discussion should probably last about 30 minutes. Shorter discussions will seem rushed, and longer ones tend to produce fatigue and anxiety.

What to remember during feedback conferencing?

- The feedback conference should examine those aspects of teaching that has been **jointly agreed** upon as observational **focus** during the pre-observation conference.
- Any feedback session calls for **counselling** skills. It is only in the context of a supportive CT/student teacher relationship that feedback can be given and accepted positively.
- The CT may take the lead in analysis and interpretation, and the CT may also play the more direct role of **instructor**, providing specific suggestions. It is also important that the student teacher be provided ample opportunities to explain and reflect upon his/her actions. Most student teachers tend to be defensive or overly self-critical about their teaching. They should be encouraged to see both their strengths and weaknesses.

What conference style to adopt?

It is suggested that a **problem-solving** style be adopted. In such an approach the CT plays a collaborative role in helping the student teacher solve teaching problems. The **problem-solving** style is recommended because it respects the student teacher as a competent person able to direct his/her own learning. It involves the student teacher in making decisions about future behaviour based on an analysis of previous performance. It helps the student teacher become responsible for his/her own choices. Yet it also gives the CT an active, collaborative role in probing the problems, recalling data, reflecting about causes, diagnosing conditions, posing options, finding solutions, and reflecting about likely consequences.

How to conduct the feedback conference?

The problem-solving conference moves through five sequential stages:

- a) **Discerning feelings.** Begin at the feeling level (e.g., “How do you feel about the lesson?”), since feelings about the lesson will yield some important insights about the student teacher’s perceptions. These feelings will often be of a general sort: “I am quite happy with the way the lesson went,” or “I feel it was messy.”
- b) **Recalling interactions.** Next, move to the specific level by helping the student teacher to recall a specific part of the class session that gave rise to the positive or negative feelings discerned (e.g., “Think back to the lesson beginning. How was student interest aroused?”).

- c) **Analysing causes.** Now you review the data, and help the student teacher analyse the causes of those desirable or undesirable interactions. Encourage the student teacher to analyse his/her own performance (e.g., “What do you think made the lesson beginning too abrupt?”).
- d) **Identifying strategies.** On the basis of that analysis, help the student teacher to identify successful strategies that should be repeated, or to think of alternative strategies that might be used in future (e.g., “How can it be modified to make it more effective?”).
- e) **Generalising learning.** Help the student teacher reflect about the general principles learned from the foregoing analyses: “What do you think you’ve learnt about?”

Remember: The basic goal is to help the student teacher solve a problem and learn from the problem-solving activity.