

Teaching Skills – Observations

You can read more about Observations in Chapter 5.

To be an effective teacher you need to be an effective observer. However, this involves much more than just looking. From the first visit to a new placement you need to carefully consider and plan your observations.

What will the focus of your observations be?

What will this involve?

Why are you observing? (someone is bound to ask, especially the children)

Will you record your observations?

How will you do this and have you gained prior permission, and considered ethical issues?

Once you have gained information from your observations, what will you do with it?

How will you analyse this so that it is useful for your practice?

During early visits to the placement your observations are most likely to be more general, so that you gain knowledge and understanding of the placement itself, and the general interactions between the staff and children. The better you understand the context in which you will be working, the more likelihood the placement will be a positive one.

Your university will provide guidance on the focus and types of observation that you should carry out, whether this is a general observation such as the routine used to enter and leave the room, or a specific observation of a lesson and the types of question being asked. You will probably be provided with an observation prompt sheet, template or grid, and you should use these as appropriate. Some of the main points will include:

Setting the context

- Activity/lesson being observed
- Class/year group/ability/no of children
- Room/environment/resources
- Adults and roles

Introduction

- How lesson/activity is introduced
- How prior knowledge, understanding and skills is checked
- Activities/teacher talk/child talk

Organization & management

- Organization of room and resources
- Management of the children and other adults
- Behaviour management strategies
- Rewards and sanctions

Implementation

- Instructions and explanations
- Transition to activities
- Activities - purpose, content, resources
- Role and focus of teacher and adults
- Assessing learning
- Timing and time management

Conclusion

- Drawing lesson/activity to an end
- Feedback from children and adults
- Reviewing learning
- Assessing learning
- Evaluating learning and teaching

Key points

- Based on observation notes and discussion with teacher and adults
- Actions to be taken

If you are required to develop your own system for observations, then it may be useful to keep a journal. Each visit could be recorded in the journal, to include general and focussed observation notes, which could then be highlighted and analysed as useful for your planning, teaching and learning.

Guidance

A fundamental determinant of any placement is the ability to listen and to respond accordingly. Whether this is listening to a child when they say they need to go to the toilet, or listening to a teacher when they say that unless you improve the content of your lesson/activity plans you will be unlikely to be successful in the placement. Teachers are normally very effective ‘talkers’, but may find it more difficult to ‘listen’. Sometimes this is due to time pressures, when too many other things need to be done to have time to listen properly; or it is too stressful to listen intently at the end of a long and challenging day. However, being able to listen, demonstrate you are listening and more importantly taking on board and acting on guidance you have been given, is often a key to achieving a successful placement.