Observing for Quality Teaching and Learning

Volunteer Training Packet

What is Quality?

There are multiple places where investments can and should be made to promote and achieve educational quality.

- Hiring and investing in instructors and staff with strong skills and the desire to improve those skills.
- Supporting and monitoring instructors' delivery of material and students' ability to receive, internalize and reproduce learning.
- Ensuring that sequential learning opportunities exist for students to fully explore a discipline or field.
- Assessing and acknowledging student work that is strong and providing critical feedback when further development is warranted.

In this context the focus of our work will be exploring and investing in quality teaching and learning --- the space created when instructors and students work together to ensures everyone learns by engaging in meaningful conversation, choices and reflection.

Climate that Supports Creative Learning

This dimension refers to the many ways in which instructors and students create a respectful, organized, and effective learning environment. Instructors establish this when they require good care and use of materials, instruments and tools, and when they set routines that insure safe and thorough work (e.g., when dancers warm up or use mirrors to check posture and positions, or when a cook checks ingredients for freshness and measures quantities carefully).

Evidence in this dimension includes when educator and students facilitate learning through

- Managing the classroom in a way that is consistent with focused and productive work in the discipline
- Using physical space conducive to learning in the discipline
- Using clear rituals and routines matched to the discipline (e.g., warm-ups, focusing exercises, strategies for taking care of tools)
- Creating a climate of mutual respect among the instructor and the students
- Productive and creative use of materials, instruments, tools and technology

Engagement and Investment in Creative Learning

Engagement and investment refers to the many ways in which instructors and students work toward a learning situation in which the clear expectation is that everyone will participate and contribute at a level that brings the work to a higher quality.

Evidence in this dimension includes when educator and students build a community of engaged and invested learners by

- Consistently communicating clearly stated expectations and objectives
- Presenting and engaging in tasks, projects and experiments that are differentiated by learning styles and abilities
- Developing relevant, authentic student-driven work
- Providing students with clear entry points to demanding assignments
- Helping students to synthesize complex processes; work on sustained projects and experiments
- Motivating work to reach high standards
- Inspiring hard work, trying new things, risk-taking, student-based inquiry and/or meta-cognition

Dialogue and Sharing to Enhance Creative Learning

In this dimension, students and educators discuss and share their joint work in order to develop ideas, take stock of how things are going, formulate a direction for a project that everyone can debate and then share, or problem solve when they encounter a surprise or difficulty. In this dimension, all participants are accountable for being able to present and articulate their ideas, expectations, and insights so that others can build on them, respond to or critique them.

Evidence in this dimension includes when educator and students use verbal dialogue to

- Discuss and use key vocabulary and concepts to better communicate about and through the discipline
- Ensure that students' contributions and discussions form an integral part of the class
- Clarify and develop powerful ideas and in-depth questions that lead to wondering
- Present and articulate ideas, expectations and insights using evidence and examples
- Share, critique, and discuss ideas, findings, works and performances with the goal of improving and extending learning

Skills, Techniques, and Knowledge of the Field or Discipline

Being a creator or innovator requires more than inspiration or raw talent. Young people also need to learn about the history, traditions, materials, and works to which they are being introduced. This dimension refers to the many ways in which instructors and young people develop this knowledge.

Evidence in this dimension includes when educator and students develop disciplinary fluency by

- Modeling, scaffolding or demonstrating skills, concepts and techniques
- Actively building mastery and making meaningful connections by focusing on powerful ideas and concepts
- Extending practices and approaches to develop inquiry and problem-solving, and generate original possibilities
- Actively exploring historical, and contemporary work across cultures

Creative Processes and Choices

This dimension refers to the extent to which classes and programs provide young people with the opportunity to learn different kinds of creative work. As the next generation of innovators and creators, young people also need to learn about doing original work, whether this involves creating a wholly new work (e.g., original choreography, designing a building, product or computer program), refining an existing performance or product (e.g., deciding how to play Kate in "Taming of the Shrew," making traditional dishes with new, healthier ingredients) or in developing new interpretations of works made by others (e.g., designing a performance, writing program notes that introduce new audiences to step dancing, curating a collection of family photos for a neighborhood exhibition).

Evidence in this dimension includes when educator and students collaborate to

- Use their imaginations and express themselves and their unique interests and experiences
- Make warranted creative choices that inform or advance the product, experiment or performance
- Anchor choices in focused inquiry and exploration of the materials, the genre, and the discipline
- Create distinct and original works, or generate individual interpretations of existing works

Expectations, Assessment and Recognition for Quality

This dimension focuses on how, instructors and students set clear and high expectations, assess processes and products in the light of those expectations, and recognize and reward quality. Expectations and recognition of accomplishment can occur in small (e.g., comments, complements offered during working sessions, notes following a rehearsal) or large doses (e.g., applause at the end of a concert, review in a school newspaper, formal adjudication in a competition, preparing a portfolio).

Evidence in this dimension includes when educator works with students to think about issues of quality by

- Offering useful and timely feedback
- Using rubrics that students contribute to and understand for discussing and assessing student work
- Teaching students to assess their own work and activity and/or providing students with opportunities to self-assess
- Facilitating respectful response and reflection among students that opens up new approaches or ideas for next steps or new works
- Providing students with opportunities to revise or revisit work in light of evaluations
- Supporting students in settings where their work will be evaluated using high, external standards

Teaching and Learning Dimensions of Quality

SUPPORTS FOR LEARNING			RESOURCES FOR CREATIVITY AND INNOVATIONS		
Climate That Supports Learning	**Engagement and Investment in Learning**	**Classroom Dialogue and Sharing**	**Skills, Techniques and Knowledge of the Discipline**	**Creative Choices**	**Expectations, Assessment and Recognition**
Educator and students facilitate learning through • Managing the classroom in a way that is consistent with focused and productive work in the discipline • Using physical space conducive to learning in the discipline • Using clear rituals and routines matched to the discipline (e.g., warm-ups, focusing exercises, strategies for taking care of tools) • Creating a climate of mutual respect among the instructor and the students • Productive and creative use of materials, instruments, tools and technology	Educator and students build a community of engaged and invested learners by • Consistently communicating clearly stated expectations and objectives • Presenting and engaging in tasks, projects and experiments that are differentiated by learning styles and abilities • Developing relevant, authentic student-driven work • Providing students with clear entry points to demanding assignments • Helping students to synthesize complex processes; work on sustained projects and experiments • Motivating work to reach high standards • Inspiring: ◦ Hard work ◦ Trying new things ◦ Risk-taking ◦ Student-based inquiry ◦ Meta-cognition	Educator and students use verbal dialogue to • Discuss and use key vocabulary and concepts to better communicate about and through the discipline • Ensure that students' contributions and discussions form an integral integral part of the class • Clarify and develop powerful ideas and in-depth questions that lead to wondering • Present and articulate ideas, expectations and insights using evidence and examples • Share, critique, and discuss ideas, findings, works and performances with the goal of improving and extending learning Note: All evidence in this dimension must be verbalized.	Educator and students develop disciplinary fluency by • Modeling, scaffolding or demonstrating skills, concepts and techniques • Actively building mastery and making meaningful connections by focusing on powerful ideas and concepts • Extending practices and approaches to develop inquiry and problem-solving, and generate original possibilities • Actively exploring historical, and contemporary work across cultures	Educator and students collaborate to • Use their imaginations and express themselves and their unique interests and experiences • Make warranted creative choices that inform or advance the product, experiment or performance • Anchor choices in focused inquiry and exploration of the materials, the genre, and the discipline • Create distinct and original works, or generate individual interpretations of existing works	Educator works with students to think about issues of quality by • Offering useful and timely feedback • Using rubrics that students contribute to and understand for discussing and assessing student work • Teaching students to assess their own work and activity and/or providing students with opportunities to self-assess • Facilitating respectful response and reflection among students that opens up new approaches or ideas for next steps or new works • Providing students with opportunities to revise or revisit work in light of evaluations • Supporting students in settings where their work will be evaluated using high, external standards

Note. Bullets in each column illustrate examples of "evidence" for that dimension that one might observe. Bullets are not meant as a checklist; it is doubtful that so many types of evidence would be seen in one 45-minute session. Nor should one imply that a variety of evidence is better than one illustration that is explored in a deep, rich way.

Observe the Facts

Completing a Running Record

The most rigorous way to document instruction is to create a Running Record, or virtual transcript, noting what was observed every two minutes. While there are less intensive methods of observation, the instructions and guidelines below provide a framework that any observer can and should follow.

Why and How to Observe

Direct observation of behaviors is important for many reasons. It is a means of generating hypotheses and new ideas or a means of answering specific questions. Observations also enable us to answer questions about what happens in the real world without manipulating the environment. Various techniques can be used to observe behavior: diary descriptions, time sampling, event sampling, rating scales, etc. For the purpose of these observations, time sampling is used to record instructor-student interactions in the class or setting as they occur.

An observer should attend to all contextual details surrounding the class, including what instructors say and do, how they interact with students at various levels of accomplishment, and how students respond to and use the instruction. Observers do not make any assumptions at any time. They do not assume that any event is instructionally relevant or irrelevant. Observers should avoid biases based on personal preferences or practice. That is, when assigned to observe a particular instructional program, observers do not judge the class or specific activities on the basis of what they expect or want to see or how they would conduct the session. Note behaviors objectively.

Observing without Judging

Observers must record what they see without making ongoing judgments about the quality of teaching or the effective use of a particular technique. The observer's job is to capture what happened, not his or her opinion of what happened. If a class is judged as good, the observer will tend to focus on what is consider to be good teaching or learning. If a class is judged as poor, the observer will tend to focus on what is considered to be poor teaching and learning. Either one leaves out what may be important information. This effort to observe without making inferences helps observers with different tastes, training and beliefs to engage in an informed discussion of what occurred. On the basis of that discussion, observers will make quality judgments on the rating scales for teaching and learning.

Gauging the Level of Detail

Another difficult issue when observing is determining what to include and what to leave out of a running record. For example, should an instructor's position or tone of voice be included? Observers need to use common sense and have some knowledge of what behaviors are of interest.

Should the observer record what the instructor says to students during a particular lesson? Should the observer record what the students are saying? When trying to create a detailed picture of teaching and learning in the arts, it is extremely important that observers collect specific directions, discussions, comments and feedback (from both adults and students) when they can. They will not be able to capture it all; instead, make informed choices. An instructor's

feedback to students or students' questions to an instructor are more important than the interpersonal chat that may occur between students. The specifics captured will ultimately provide information from which observers will make rating judgments that become data in the evaluation.

Although there is no clear-cut definition of what should or should not be recorded, the rule of thumb is to record as much of the occurring behaviors observed that are needed to provide a clear picture of what is occurring. The optimal means of recording information would be to use video recorders, but many issues make that infeasible. So, the task for observers is to record what they observe so that anyone who was not in the classroom will still get a meaningful picture of what was seen.

During and observation, the observer should:

- **Enter the setting** and sit so that the instructor, the students and any materials being used can be seen.
- **Make notes** on what is seen and heard *at least every two minutes*, making sure to capture those details that give information about the students' and instructor's thinking (e.g., not just, "the student answered," but what did the student say or write or draw? Capture similar details for instructors.). Among other things, the Running Record should offer a view of the chain of events and the train of thought (both for individuals and across the groups in the setting).
- **Describe for each two-minute interval:**
    - Observable actions (who's talking, who's listening, etc.)
    - Speech/language (capture direct quotes when possible and relevant)
    - Notations, drawings, models, etc. (recording both the forms in which problems are posed and the forms in which they are worked on)
    - Interactions between instructor and students
    - Materials used
    - If/when classes break into small groups, observers should observe one small group in detail, moving as needed to hear and see well. Note the total number of students in the small group.
- **Use "short-hand" descriptions. These can be filled in later.**
- **Emphasize specifics** (directions given, questions asked, responses to student work, etc.).
- **Mark events or moments** that need to be discuss with colleagues or the observed instructor in order to get a clearer understanding of what occurred.

Instructors' behavior... what to look and listen for:

- How does the instructor set up the work of the session?
- How does the instructor establish the expectations and standards for good work?
- How does the instructor help students to explain their thinking?
- How does the instructor ensure that students are comfortable asking questions?
- How does the instructor model and encourage the use of scientific language?
- What strategies does the instructor use to support English-language learners or students with special needs?
- How does the instructor respond when a student struggles or makes a mistake?
- What strategies does the instructor use to engage students with different cultural backgrounds and approaches to learning?

Students' behavior... what to look and listen for:

- How do students respond to directions, prompts, invitations?
- What evidence is there that students understand and respond to the expectations and standards for good work?
- How well do students present and explain their thoughts, questions and choices?
- Are students using the concepts and ideas at the heart of the lesson?
- How do students respond to making mistakes or being asked to revise?
- How deeply engaged are students who appear to have different cultural backgrounds, language or approaches to learning?

The example of descriptive notes in Figure 1 contrast poor observer notes with improved observer notes. The poor observer took limited notes, missing a time point and recording only generalities rather than specific details about the warm-up session. The improved observer's notes included all time points and a much greater understanding of the sequence and depth of the activities that occurred. The instructor's verbal cues to students were recorded.

Poor Observer Notes		Improved Observer Notes	
Time	Descriptive Notes	Time	Descriptive Notes
9:29	Ss doing warm-ups.	9:29	T starts warm-up. Reminds Ss of position. Ss singing "There is no one here but you and I," then "I am here all by myself alone" going up and down scale. Speaks to individual Ss. "Open taller as we get higher." "Hands relaxed." Joins Ss on some scales. All Ss participating as one chorus.
9:31	Ss change to oo-oo-ah-ah.	9:31	Ss change to "oo-oo-ah-ah." T demonstrates a few scales. Reminds Ss to have a focus, raise eyebrows to keep from going flat. Has Ss repeat a scale three times to improve.
		9:33	Reminds Ss to raise eyebrows. Change to just "ah" as they get very high.

Figure 1. Poor and improved observer notes of warm-up session.

On the next page in Figure 2, the poor observer neglected to note that at first only the altos were singing. The observer also failed to record the teacher's directions and interactions with the students.

Poor Observer Notes		Improved Observer Notes	
Time	Descriptive Notes	Time	Descriptive Notes
9:34	Ss practicing parts. Ss read the words.	9:34	T asks just altos to practice. T snaps rhythm, sings a few bars w/ Ss. Several times, T demonstrates and Ss echo as practice. T asks Ss about measure 51. What happened? T has Ss just say the words.
9:36	Ss practice song w/o music.	9:36	T reminds Ss to "read" the music. Tells altos not to push too hard. Altos repeat their part. T demonstrates being light on a phrase, pretending w/ a baton.

Figure 2. Poor and improved observer notes of a capella session.

In Figure 3, the poor observer noted the first two minutes as simply, "teacher and students talking," while the improved observer recorded the conversation content - instruction about a singer's position for performance. The poor observer did not record the instructor's positive feedback to the altos or his reminder to students that they needed to work on the words.

Poor Observer Notes		Improved Observer Notes	
Time	Descriptive Notes	Time	Descriptive Notes
9:37	T and Ss talking.	9:37	T has Ss stand-no music. If they mess up, look at him. In performance, don't mess up—they laugh. Reminds Ss of position-feet, knees, hips, shoulders, head. What are we missing? S-nose. T-Why? S talks about nose down. T explains.
9:39	Ss stand and sing w/o music.	9:39	T-"What are we leaving out? S-"Hands." T at front of room conducting. Ss sing, T tells altos "Good job." Ss forgetting words, T says to work on words.
9:41	Still singing.	9:41	Ss continue singing.

Figure 3. Poor and improved observer notes of off-book session.

RUNNING RECORD

Observer: _____ Date: _____

Activity: _____ Location: _____

Educator: _____ Number of Students: _____ Grade (if available): _____

Setting (choose any that apply): Regular Class Honors Class Special Needs

Level (if appropriate): Beginner Intermediate Advanced

- Focus on teaching and learning: What educator does and says and how students respond.
- Record what you see and hear at *each* two-minute interval.
- Keep your level of inference modest and evidence-based.
- For useful level of detail, refer to the sample that we looked at in training session.

Time Points	Observer Notes

Time Points	Observer Notes

RUNNING RECORD

Observer: Jennifer Bransom Date: 10/5/11, 12:15 – 1:15

Activity: Sun as Energy Lab Location: Typical Elementary School

Educator: Mrs. Observed Number of Students: 17 Grade (if available): 2nd

- Focus on teaching and learning: What educator does and says and how students respond.
- Record what you see and hear at *each* two-minute interval.
- Keep your level of inference modest and evidence-based.
- For useful level of detail, refer to the sample that we looked at in training session.

T= Teacher, Ss=Students, CR=Choral response

Time Points	Observer Notes
12:18	T projects WFAA.com weather on screen, Ss watch video of the weather in
12:22	Dallas. T: "What did he say the high would be? Ss (CR) 86. T: "What has the
	weather been for October?" Ss: "same" T shows Ss how to translate 86F to 30C,
12:24	then tells them to graph values. T: kind of weather? Ss: "partly sunny" T: graph it.
	T: Get ready to do the moon phase. What kind of moon? Ss: "first quarter"
12:26	T shows Ss how to read the moon phase chart counter clockwise.
	T: Finish papers and our "meteorologist" will collect them for us.
12:28	Ss put their work away w/ little conversation; clear routine for moving into lesson
	T: Quickly b/c we have an experiment to do outside. Ss get excited.
	T: What did we talk about yesterday in science? S: Sun T: What did we learn?
	S: Sun is a star, T: a medium size star
12:30	T: Who is the center of our universe? Ss Sun, We go around the sun. S: Sun
	gives us electricity. T: what kind of energy do we get from the sun? Ss guess

Teacher is modeling skills .

Teacher is opening learning with dialogue and reflection.

Teacher is connecting learning to real-world.

Teacher is setting-up expectations and, asking students to think ahead (a.k.a., hypothesize).

Takes learning the next step by having students think about what the thermo-meter has been measuring … the temper-ature of the room it and Ss are in.

Clear rituals and respect for teacher. Ss are excited and engaged.

Time Points	Observer Notes
	S: Solar, T connects solar energy with solar panels to talk about the soaking up
12:32	the suns energy. T: Notice when you leave today, the school zone sign has a
	solar panel on it. S: Cool, I'm going to see it! S: Sun is made of gases.
	T: What would happen if we didn't have the sun? S: we'd get cold; it gives heat
	T: What do plants give us? T: When we breathe out it is carbon dioxide and when
	we breathe in we breathe in oxygen.
12:34	T helps the Ss connect. T: Let's head outside. We have buckets of water. One in
	the classroom, one outside in the shade, and one in the sun. We are going to
	take the temperature in each. What do you think the temperature will be?
	S: outside will be hot, other Ss agree
	S: shade will be cool, other Ss are mixed in their support/disagreement
12:36	S: inside will be warm, other Ss are again mixed
	One S, Cora, will take notes for the class. T: What is the temperature of the inside
	water? What do I need to tell me? Ss: Thermometer
12:38	T: what temperature is the thermometer telling us? Ss are stumped. T: Tempera-
	ture of the classroom = 70F. S dunks thermometer in the water. T: If it is 70F in
	the classroom, what temperature is the water going to be? Ss guess. T: Water is
	68F.
12:40	T: How are we going to act outside as we wait for the thermometer? CR
12:42	T: Let's take 2 thermometers outside, one for shade and one for sun. Ss all quiet-
	ly get ready. Excited to line up. Ss push chairs in and quietly go to door.
	T talks to Ss b/f going down the hall. Ss clearly like their teacher.
12:44	Outside. S sticks thermometer in shade water, another S sticks thermometer in
	sun water. All Ss bob b/t the two waters looking. T encourages Ss to touch both

	Time Points	Observer Notes
Students invested in what is happening in both tubs.	12:46	waters to feel the difference. S: shade water is colder.
	12:48	Ss are having fun. All continue to go back and forth. S: it's like the water in my
Teacher asks reflect question and directs students to note their thinking.		swimming pool. T: When you stuck your hand in the shade water, how did it feel?
	12:50	Ss: Colders All go back inside. T: Think of the temperature of the water in the sun and shade. How does this water (inside class) feel? Ss: colder
	12:52	T: We need to label our comparisons to find out. T calls Ss up a little at a time.
		S: This is the coldest one (shade). T: Is it? We're going to talk about it.
Teacher uses science vocabulary --- observations.	12:54	Ss all chatting about the experiment. Very respectful.
		T: you touched all 3 waters, what did you think? Share your observations.
		Ss all share one at a time. T draws on the board:
Teacher demos notation.	12:56	Classroom: 68F, Shade: 72F, Sun: 75F
		T: What do you notice? Is there a pattern that you see?
		S: Getting bigger. T: bigger? S: hotter
	12:58	T: What does sun do for our water? S: heats it up. T: inside we have no sun so
Teacher connects to real world.		you would expect the classroom water to be the coldest. T: Would you rather go
		swimming in the shade or the sun? T: Mr. Pier tease me that I like my pool warm
	1:00	In the sun. Ss respond to her sharing and connect that shaded pools are cooler.
Teacher outlines expectations.		T: we are making a foldable. Draw one water station per corner (¼ of page each;
		three total) Then, write about each station listing the temperature of the water and
	1:02	what you noticed. In the final corner, write what you've learned about "the warmth
		of the sun."

Big Thought Institute (BTI) offers highly-specialized consulting services to client communities. Client communities are individual or consortiums of school districts, city agencies, arts councils, foundations, and other stakeholders who have come together to build the complex networks and systems required to develop Cultural Resource Partnership models. BTI Cultural Resource Partnership strategies stem from the knowledge and practitioner expertise of its parent organization, Big Thought - a Dallas-based non-profit with unsurpassed, ground-level experience in building citywide systems that connect and integrate diverse community resources and school systems.