

# Guidelines for Lesson Observations and Debriefings

These guidelines intend to prepare and to focus all participants on the most important issues during their brief time together.

The major purpose of examining a live lesson is to understand students' thinking and learning processes during the lesson. To facilitate each observer's role as a researcher, the group that has prepared the lesson, the Writing Team, conscientiously prepares materials and structures the observation and the debriefing. The Writing Team may wish to send these guidelines, along with the lesson plan, to the participants before their arrival and/or use them during a Briefing immediately before the observation.

Observers function not as co-teachers but as researchers examining particular aspects of the lesson. As a researcher, the observer should try to view the lesson from an objective perspective--without judgment--suspending one's personal beliefs about teaching and learning. Far from passive, observers must see student work up close and record their findings in detail.

These data provide fodder for rich discussions during the debriefing. Their purpose is to deepen participants' understanding of the lesson content and of student thinking and learning. By observing the lesson, participating in the debriefing, and learning how other observers viewed the lesson, each individual is able to reflect on his/her own perspective and teaching.

The following observation and debriefing protocols were developed collaboratively by Global Education Resources LLC, Paterson Public School 2 (Paterson, NJ) and Research for Better Schools, based upon the lesson study experiences at School 2.

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# Lesson Study Guidelines for Observations

## Writing Team Responsibilities Before the Study Lesson

1. Invite Outside Observers
  - Invite other teachers, administrators, and at least one knowledgeable other from outside the school setting, such as a university-based educator. The number of observers will depend on how comfortable the group is with the lesson study process.
  - Ask one knowledgeable other to be the final commentator.
2. Assign Specific Tasks to Writing Team Members
  - Assign a moderator and a general recorder for discussion sessions.
  - Assign members to observe and record specific student responses during the lesson, such as one student's responses or the role of student collaboration.
  - Assign a videographer. While important for record-keeping, videotaping is not a substitute for live observation.
3. Prepare Materials for Observers, Including:
  - The lesson plan. Include the goal of the lesson, where the lesson fits in a unit, where the lesson fits across grades in the entire curriculum, how it relates to the school goal, anticipated student responses, and progression of the lesson.
  - Copies of student worksheets
  - Seating charts containing student names and space to write notes
4. Organize the Details and Logistics
  - Arrange the classroom so that observers have space to stand and to circulate through the students' workspaces.
  - Allow time in the schedule to meet with the invited observers prior to the lesson to specify the kind of feedback being sought.
  - Schedule a break after the lesson to allow observers to gather their thoughts for the Debriefing.

## Observers' Responsibilities During the Study Lesson

1. Respect Natural Atmosphere of the Classroom
  - Minimize side conversation during the lesson.
  - Remain in the classroom during the entire lesson to capture how the lesson is set up, its flow, and the conclusion.
  - Do not block the students' view of the blackboard; do not block video camera.
  - Circulate freely when students are working individually or in groups but move to the side or back of the room during whole class discussion.
  - Minimize interaction with students. Refrain from teaching or assisting the children. Occasional interaction is permissible if done discreetly and with the purpose of understanding student thinking.

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## 2. Become a Researcher

- Keep in mind the goal of the lesson.
- Use the lesson plan, seating chart, and work sheets to record your data.
- Study how students are collaborating.
- Take notes on individual student responses, using the students' names.
- Indicate how individual students constructed their understanding through activities and discussions.
- Document the variety of solutions that individual students use to solve problems, including errors.
- Examine the teacher-student interaction; e.g. is the teacher attempting to call on all students?
- Document the type of student talk and student engagement.

## 3. Consider These Questions While Observing

- Was the goal clear? Did the supporting activities contribute effectively to achieving the goal?
- Was the flow of the lesson coherent, and did it support students' learning of the concept?
- Were the problems and the materials helpful in achieving the goal of the lesson?
- Did the classroom discussions help promote student understanding?
- Was the content of the lesson appropriate for the students' level of understanding?
- Did students apply their prior knowledge to understand the content of the lesson?
- Did the teacher's questions engage and facilitate student thinking?
- Were student ideas valued and incorporated into the lesson? Did the lesson summary refer to student theories or ideas?
- Was the lesson summary consistent with the lesson goal?
- How could the teacher reinforce what the students learned during the lesson?

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