

THE HOST TEACHER IN THE OBSERVATION-PARTICIPATION PROGRAM

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The Observation-Participation Program exposes students to the practical and real elements of the teaching-learning environment and allows them to participate actively in the classroom. This exploratory teaching experience reacquaints students with the classroom environment from a different perspective—the teacher's point of view.

Students participate in the Observation-Participation Program when they enroll in their methods courses. They are assigned to host teachers in the schools.

The purpose of this article is to acquaint the reader with my role as a host teacher for secondary speech-communication majors.

As a host teacher, I am a counselor, advisor, facilitator, teacher, and resource person. My responsibility is to give the students an opportunity to observe, then practice some of the skills of classroom management and instructional procedure. I believe in active observation and active participation.

Active Observation

Students observe how the teacher and pupils interact, i.e., how each affects the other's behavior. More than this, they learn how to record instances of behavior that correspond to particular instructional variables. To successfully apply *theory to practice*, students must know the difference between observation and interpretation. They must learn to distinguish when they are seeing and hearing pupil responses, and when they are making inferences about these responses; that is, attaching meaning or values to the observed behavior. For example, a pupil may be observed sitting at his desk, his head supported on one arm and his eyes shaded by one hand. One student may infer that the pupil is sleepy, another that he is inattentive, and a third that he is thinking about the problem which he has been assigned. All three students should be aware that these are inferences and not observations.

Active objective observation, then, is the students' first step toward analyzing what occurs in the classroom. I begin the observation-participation experience by introducing them to the basic principles of the IOTA (Instrument for the Observation of Teaching Activities) Program.¹ IOTA identifies fourteen items under which objective data may be collected. The program assists students in collecting and categorizing data. The IOTA items are: (1) Development and Implementation of Classroom Goals, (2) Variety in Activities, (3) Use of Materials for Instruction, (4) Learning/Interest Centers, (5) Classroom Control, (6) Individualization of Instruction, (7) Learning Difficulties, (8) Opportunity for Participation, (9) Teacher Reaction to Student Response, (10) Creative Expression, (11) Development of Student Initiative, (12) Social Climate, (13) Preparation for the Class, (14) Current Application of Subject Matter.

Active Participation

Students should become actively involved as early and as often as possible in working with pupils. Each student should have a chance to plan, teach and evaluate an entire class, thus demonstrating his or her personality and teaching style to the pupils in order to observe their responses.

This practical experience should provide a bridge from theory to practice. Of necessity, preparation for teaching prior to practical experience is academic in nature—in general education courses, in subject fields or area of specialization, and in professional courses. Good academic scholarship, however, is no guarantee that instructional competence will result. It remains for the program of practical experience to help the scholar become a teacher. Many scholars have never crossed the bridge to successful teaching.

Most people who have pursued a teacher education program probably believe that they will enjoy teaching and be successful in the classroom.

However, they cannot be certain of their interest and success in teaching until they have spent time in the classroom with pupils.

The following is a brief description of the structure of the observation-participation experience for secondary speech-communication majors who are assigned to me.

Students spend approximately five to six hours observing classes or conferring with me. The early morning hours are more conducive to active observation and participation, thus most of the students observe between 8:00 and 10:00 a.m. Students usually spend two or three mornings in the classroom with me. I regularly discuss their observations immediately following the class sessions. All conference sessions begin with a discussion on the objective data collected during the class period.

Due to the nature of the subject matter—speech communication—one would assume that these education majors would have little difficulty with communication skills. However, the degree to which students are able to communicate with pupils differs. I discuss their interpersonal communicative interactions with pupils as situations present themselves.

Session 1: The Orientation Session. We usually arrange to meet at a time when I am not teaching. This gives us a chance to get to know each other. Furthermore, I can give the students my full attention. During this session, we discuss:

(1) school policies and procedures, (2) the speech-communication curriculum in relation to the overall language arts curriculum, (3) student grouping, (4) course overviews and objectives for classes they will be observing, and (5) my expectations of observation-participation students.

Session 2: Students observe the class by recording objective data on what they observe—in other words, what they hear and see. Immediately following the

observation, we discuss objective and subjective data. Students begin to realize that they infer or interpret quite a bit, rather than observe, then assess.

Session 3: In preparation for this observation session, we select two of the IOTA items and discuss them in order to arrive at a general consensus in interpretation. During the class period, students record objective data for these particular items. For example, I may ask students to collect data for items which read “variety of activities” and “classroom control.”

During our conference, we discuss the data. If more than one student has observed the class, they will usually record similar data. At this point, we try to arrive at an “assessment” of the class with reference to the particular items.

Sessions 4 & 5: In preparation for these sessions, students select IOTA items of their own and interpret them. In class, they record objective data.

After discussing the items and the data during our conferences, we analyze and assess the class in terms of the lesson and behavior. Then, students are asked to develop lesson plans for short activities of their choice, usually 10-15 minutes in length. The IOTA items serve as a basis for planning.

Sessions 6 & 7: Students observe the class during a portion of the time and assist me the rest of the time. Duties of assistants range from taking roll and distributing papers to evaluating student presentations.

During the conference sessions, we begin to discuss the characteristics of adolescents—their behavior, needs, and feelings—and their concerns with the learning process. We also discuss the lesson plans the students have prepared, revising and modifying them until the originators feel comfortable and confident that the plans are teachable and practical. Soon, they will have an opportunity to try them out.

Sessions 8 to 10: Students begin to take a more

active role within the classroom. They “get their feet wet” by presenting their “mini-lessons” to the entire class. During our conferences, we continue to discuss observations, assessments, and the adolescent; and, to follow up on initial experiences in the teacher role, we begin to discuss the significance of planning. In addition to our discussions, students write an evaluation of their “experiences” within the classroom.

Sessions 11 to 14: By this time, students take an active role in the classroom. Some may tutor individual pupils, others may work with small groups, and still others may present a part of the lesson—or a whole lesson—to the entire class.

During our conferences, discussion focuses on the evaluation process. Each student then begins to develop another lesson plan. This time, the students will use the entire class period, about 40 minutes. I usually give them the general content area and they must prepare their lessons accordingly.

Sessions 15 to 20: Students teach the class for the entire period. I become their assistant, and I observe, collect data, and participate when asked to do so.

During the conferences, students assess their own teaching, using the IOTA items.

Prior to incorporating portions of the IOTA program into the observation-participation experience, I felt the relationship between observation and participation was lacking. Students spent more time observing rather than participating. Although I provided them with general observation guidelines, there was a need for a more directed, systematic observation experience. Without the necessary skills in observation, some students found it difficult to plan, present and critique a lesson prior to the end of the O-P experience.

I have the personal and professional satisfaction of giving substance to the observation and participation experiences for the students in the O-P program.

Equipped with the basic skills in objective observation, students are ready to enter into a meaningful, worthwhile participatory experience. The integration of observation and participation is a necessary first step for the neophyte student into the complexities of teaching.

As a host teacher, my primary goal is to contribute to the professional and personal growth and development of secondary speech-communication majors.

Footnote

¹Deever, Merwin R., Howard H. Demeke, and Raymond E. Wochner. *The Assessment of Teaching Competence*, 1977, Arizona State University, Tempe, Arizona.

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