

10 Principles and Practices of Effective Observation



1. Effective inquiry supports professional learning by engaging educators in reflection and dialogue based on purposeful and useful observation, not based on judgment.
2. Inquiry can enhance professional reflection, learning, and commitment to improvement when it relies on evidence from observation methods that provides educators with information about their settings, their learners, and their work.
3. Observation is a two-step process: first, to describe what occurred; second, to analyze and interpret to construct meaning.
4. Effective inquiry avoids the interpretation trap, in which we draw conclusions about behavior or events before describing them. When interpretation precedes description, at least two results occur: (a) the description is lost, and (b) the educator who was observed is deprived of the opportunity to develop his or her own interpretation. A third result is also likely: the cognitive downshifting of the observed educator, as the brain shifts from open and creative toward closed and defensive.
5. Observation methods and protocols should be chosen collaboratively between the observing educator and the educator to be observed.

6. Classroom observation is not necessarily an objective process. Personal bias should be acknowledged and talked about. While two or more people may agree on events that occurred – as they are described, they may interpret the events differently. Personal experience, assumptions, beliefs, and mental models influence interpretations. Consciousness of these and how they might bias an observation is the first step toward the objective interpretation of behavior and events that are observed.
7. Observation skill develops with practice and reflection. For observation protocols to be effective, they must support objective description of behavior and events.
8. Observations must be focused. No observer can see or hear all behavior in a learning situation. Define the intention and the focus of an observation specifically and collaboratively.
9. Transparency is essential to successful observation in the context of inquiry. Prior to entering a learning setting, an observer should converse with the educator about focus, recording method, location in the room, introduction to learners, etc.
10. Sound conclusions require multiple observations. Single “snap shot” observations may reflect a “good” day or a “bad” one. Conclusions based upon them are biased accordingly.



Adapted from: Sullivan, S. & Glanz, J. (2005). *Supervision that Improves Teaching: Strategies and Techniques*