

Targeted School Self-Evaluation Improvement Team (TSSEIT) Evaluation Tools Support Materials

Support materials for the targeted school self-evaluation improvement team on conducting document analysis and lesson observations



Classroom Observation: A Data Collection Strategy

Introduction

Classroom observation is a critical component of the targeted school self-evaluation improvement team (TSSEIT) process. Although its philosophical base derives from qualitative research methodology, its organisational framework derives from the clinical supervision model.

Observation itself cannot be relied upon to provide a comprehensive perspective on a focus area but must be corroborated by evidence from interviews and document analysis. Best and Kahn (1993) have identified the following characteristics of successful observers and good observation:

- Observation is carefully planned, systematic and perceptive. Observers know what they are looking for and what is relevant in any given situation.
- Observers are aware of the wholeness of what is observed.
- Observers separate the facts from interpretation of the facts.
- Observations are checked and verified.
- Observations are carefully and expertly recorded.
- Observations are collected in such a way as to make sure that they are valid and reliable.

Training the Observer

Patton (1990) emphasises the importance of 'disciplined training and rigorous preparation' in order to undertake successful observation. Anderson and Burns (1989) also suggest that the selection of observers simply on the basis they are available is likely to cause problems in the long run. They say that availability must never become a substitute for efficient training and development. Wragg (1994) and Borg and Gall (1989) also stress that because of the potential for subjectivity in observation, training and experience is required if the research is to be both effective and credible.

Anderson and Burns (1989) and Patton (1990) suggest the following are essential ingredients in the training of observers:

- Understanding the role of the observer.
- Negotiating the focus of the observations.
- Knowing how to separate detail from trivia.
- Procedures for the writing up of data.
- Knowing how to validate observations.

Observers benefit from the analysis and discussion of transcripts, observation of videos and visits to classrooms during training. Anderson and Burns (1989) suggest observers must guard against 'observer drift'.

The three phase observation cycle which consists of pre-observation planning, the observation and post-observation discussion, provides a suitable organisational framework to discuss the observation process.

Pre-Observation Planning

There is a consensus among qualitative researchers that it is essential to establish a good rapport with the teachers being observed. In the review process, this building of rapport is initiated in the pre-TSSEIT visit phase by the team leader who clarifies with school personnel the need for observation. The role of the observer is also explained.

TSSEIT members can expect to conduct observations in most TSSEIT visits. It is important that they work to develop a collegial rapport with teachers in order to maximise the quality of information gathered through observations. In the pre-TSSEIT phase the team leader should be sensitive to the needs and feelings of cooperating teachers in order to minimise the sense of intrusion in their classrooms.

To ensure the quality of the observational data gathered, it is imperative that the purpose of the observation is known and understood by the observer and the observed (Croll 1986). To achieve this mutual understanding, it is important that time is set aside for a pre-observation conference before each classroom visit. It is during this conference that the role of the observer and the focus of the observation are clarified between the teacher and the team member. Hopkins (1993) warns that if the negotiated focus for the observation is too broad, with little or no specific criteria, information collected may be general and subjective. The negotiation of the observations during TSSEIT visit should be specific in order to best inform the focus area.

Observer participation in TSSEIT should be unobtrusive and should not impinge on the lessons observed.

Hopkins (1993) identifies three skills essential for observers:

- A non-judgmental demeanour.
- A high level of interpersonal skills.
- Knowledge of how to gather and record data.

The Observation Process

Effective observation does much to enhance and enrich the review process. Wragg (1994) affirms this in the following terms.

- If lessons are worth observing then they are also worth analysing properly, for little purpose is served if, after a lesson, observers simply exude goodwill, mumble vaguely, or appear uncertain why they are there, or what they should talk about.
- Skillfully handled, classroom observation can benefit both the observer and the person observed, serving to enhance the professional skill of both people. Badly handled, however, it becomes counter-productive, at its worst arousing hostility, resistance and suspicion.

Classroom observations of approximately 20 minutes are integral to the TSSEIT process. They should be planned, negotiated and conducted in a climate of mutual trust.

Samph (cited in Wragg 1994) suggests that teachers alter their behaviour when there is someone in the room. They ask more questions, praise students more and tend to be more accepting of student ideas.

Smyth (1984) suggests that there is a reluctance among many teachers to be observed, because of past experiences with a systemic inspectorial model that was often perceived by teachers as threatening and unhelpful. An awareness of this ethos

has resulted in heightened sensitivity to the conduct of observations during the review process.

To maintain the distance between the inspectorial model and the review observation, the review observer is not permitted to take any notes during the observation. It is essential that any data are written up as soon as possible after the observation so that information is not lost and time is not wasted through trying to recall details. Patton (1990) states that notes should be descriptive as opposed to interpretive. However, observers need to ensure that they are able to maintain the richness and integrity of the data by including direct quotations.

Good notes allow an observer to review, reflect and analyse events. In making notes after lesson observations, it is suggested that the observers adhere to the following principles (Sandford and Emmer 1988):

- Focus on the chosen evaluation area.
- Note details and concrete examples, avoiding vague or judgmental statements.
- Focus on targeted behaviours for each observation.
- Capture the general flow of events with a balance of information about teacher and student activities

Observers are required to ensure that they limit their activities to those negotiated with the teacher during the pre-observation phase. Team members should be aware of possible preconceptions which may prejudice their observation. They must ensure that these do not bias the data collected.

Information from observations accurately recorded and debriefed, provides useful data supporting, validating and enriching those collected from other sources, including interviews and document analysis.

Post-Observation Feedback

Providing feedback to the teacher is an important part of the observation and is best done as soon as practicable after the observation. In terms of the TSSEIT process, this feedback is important for promoting a sense of partnership and ownership of the process.

Poor feedback is characterised by being 'rushed, judgmental, one-way and impressionistic' (Hopkins1993, p.80). Hopkins suggests that feedback works best if:

- it is given within 24 hours of the observation
- it is based on careful and systematic recording
- it is based on factual data
- it is given as part of a two-way discussion.

During a TSSEIT visit, it is crucial that feedback be provided to the teacher in a positive way. This feedback should be based on observations related mainly to the focus area of the school self-evaluation.

References

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LESSON VISIT CHECKLIST

This review team member's lesson visit guide is based on a three-phase cycle.

PHASE 1: Pre-Visit Planning and Negotiation

Consider the focus area for the program review and consider what you will be looking for prior to the lesson visit.

Meet with the teacher to clarify and agree upon:

- the purpose of the visit
- the expected length of time that you will visit the class or engage in the activity
- the role that the teacher would like you to play while visiting (ranging from passive observer to active participant)
- the focus of the visit, which will be within the chosen area for the school self-evaluation and will be specific rather than general.

Where possible, the pre-visit negotiation should occur well before the lesson visit takes place.

PHASE 2: The Lesson Visit

The visitor should:

- adopt a non-judgemental approach
- be aware of the sensitivity associated with having a visitor in someone's classroom
- build trust and respect
- remain within the negotiated guidelines for the observation
- be unobtrusive
- not take any form of notes during the visit
- consider what is being observed in comparison to what was planned to be observed in the pre-visit phase
- look for a balance of information about teacher and student activities.

PHASE 3: Following the Visit

The visitor should:

- record information about the visit on the Data Synthesis Sheets provided
- record quotes if possible
- record what was seen and heard, *not* what the observer thinks should have happened.

The visitor should meet with the teacher as soon as practical after the visit to provide feedback.

The feedback should be:

- provided as part of a two-way discussion
- constructive
- based on factual data
- within the agreed guidelines for the visit.

Classroom Observation Worksheet

In relation to the terms of reference for the review, what would you look for in a classroom observation? The headings are a guide.

Curriculum What is taught? (content)	Curriculum How is it taught? (Teaching strategies / resources)	Physical Aspect of the classroom
Teacher behaviour	Student engagement and behaviour	Rapport between teacher and student
Other personnel: support staff /parent helpers	Other	Other

Document Analysis: A Data Collection Strategy

Introduction

The school self-evaluation process focuses on key areas that will most enhance school development for the improvement of student learning outcomes. Within this context, the school principal and the school-based team members are responsible for providing the targeted school self-evaluation improvement team (TSSEIT) with working documents relevant to the chosen area of the school self-evaluation.

Types of Document Evaluation

It is important to differentiate between the three forms of document evaluation. Document perusal is the reading of the document to gain an appreciation of the school's context. Document analysis gathers specific information about documents for a particular purpose, for example, focus areas.

Content analysis is the systematic and rigorous analysis of the content of documents.

Schools generate large numbers of working documents including administrative reports, student records and work samples, teaching and learning documents, and communications to parents. It is crucial that time be set aside during the TSSEIT visit for an in-depth analysis of documents and that the information held in documents is incorporated into the data gathered in the targeted school self-evaluation improvement report.

Document Analysis

'Document analysis is a technique for analysing written communication to gather information for a specific purpose' (Cooney 1993). The aim of document analysis is to gather facts which identify the presence or absence of patterns, tendencies or recurring themes. In the TSSEIT visit, document analysis may provide evidence to be followed up in interviews or by observation. It may also provide corroborating evidence to substantiate evidence from other sources.

During the document analysis process the facts are gathered with specific questions of hypotheses in mind. The TSSEIT members examine documents to gain information related to the focus areas. In doing so, they ask "Can the documents substantiate other evidence?" The corollary of this question is also addressed during the TSSEIT visit; "Can the tendencies, patterns and evidence generated by the examination of documents during the TSSEIT visit be corroborated by the data from other sources?"

Cooney (1993) states that document analysis is a superior way of finding retrospective information about a program and may be the only way certain information may be obtainable. Although document analysis may be done at any time, it is particularly useful towards the beginning of the TSSEIT process to understand why things are done in a particular way. Further analysis can take place during the middle of the TSSEIT when more evidence has been gathered by interview and observation, and when the TSSEIT has begun to explore the present and possible future directions of the school.

Schools may be asked to provide a number of working documents for consideration by the TSSEIT. Some of these are used in pre-TSSEIT activities while others may be used during the TSSEIT.

These could include:

- the school planning and policy documents
- results of surveys conducted by the school
- results of evaluations of school programs
- school newsletters
- school report proformas
- samples of student progress reports across grades
- information gained from the analysis of external results
- trends in diagnostic test results
- the previous year's Annual School Report
- samples of student work
- teaching and learning programs relevant to the focus areas.

During the initial analysis of such documents, there are several questions to be considered:

- What kind of document is it?
- When was the document produced and is it still current?
- Who produced it and for what purpose?
- Is this document typical of its type or is it exceptional?
- Is the document complete, and has it been altered in any way?
- What are the themes, how many are there and what importance is attached to each?
- In what circumstances did this document come into existence?

Steps in the Analysis Process

Deeper consideration of documents requires moving through a number of steps of document analysis.

The reader:

- becomes familiar with the chosen document
- identifies themes in the document and considers these within the context of the school and the focus area of the review
- decides to either accept information in the document as a sufficient source, or to move into more rigorous content analysis of the document.

Advantages and Disadvantages

Garman (1982) summarised the advantages and disadvantages of using documents in educational evaluation. Document use:

- provides a stable, rich, rewarding source of evidence
- presents unchallengeable facts as the documents are part of a public record
- puts information into context
- is cost effective, convenient and efficient
- can indicate questions to be asked during discussions
- provides detail and does not rely on memory
- provides a record over time

- provides information about things that may not be directly observed.

However, Garman (1982) and Caulley (1983) indicate that some of the disadvantages of using document analysis during a TSSEIT may be that:

- some documents are not typical of all documents in the school
- they may reflect only the views of a single author
- the validity of some documents is questionable
- they may be out of date and inaccurate
- documents may not be an accurate reflection of the real situation
- the selection of documents available is inappropriate for the needs of the evaluator.

Caulley (1983) maintains that, after the analysis of documents, if the reviewer is satisfied that the document was written truthfully, with detail, and can be independently corroborated or cross-referenced, then that document can be accepted as credible evidence. Within the context of the review, reliability is established by corroboration achieved through interviews and observation.

Conclusion

The information, which is recorded, is used to verify and substantiate, in written form, data gathered from other sources.

It is important that:

- document analysis provides evidence that informs the focus area of the TSSEIT visit
- the team negotiates the availability of key documents related to the focus area
- adequate time is set aside during the TSSEIT visit to allow for document and content analysis, where appropriate
- findings from such analysis are considered along with the data gathered from other sources.

References

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