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# Introduction to the Third Edition

Several opportunities and challenges presented themselves when I began planning the third edition of *The Instructional Leader's Guide to Informal Classroom Observations*. I recognized that there was a need to purposefully acknowledge the shift in who conducts classroom observations. Like other administrative tasks that in the past were conducted almost exclusively by principals, informal classroom observations are an essential work function and are now being conducted by a host of other educators, such as Teacher Specialists, Learning Support Specialists, Reading and Math Coaches, School Improvement Coaches, Content Coordinators, Teacher Leaders, High School Department Chairs, etc. One of the most significant revisions of this book is that it has been expanded to recognize the influential roles of other educators who spend time working in classrooms with teachers and their students. I also felt a need to change the title of the third edition to reflect that the book can be used by those individuals who do not necessarily see themselves as “instructional leaders.”

In addition to the reproducible tools available in the back of the book, this edition also includes a Tool Index (page 183) to assist with planning and organizing classroom observations.

Another significant change in the new edition is the acknowledgement of the expanding presence of technology in today's schools. The tools<sup>1</sup> in this book have been created for the busy, on-the-go observer who needs thorough and efficient tools to record classroom observations and aid meaningful feedback in postobservation conferences. It is difficult to imagine how technologically unsophisticated our schools were when the first edition of this book was released back in 2005. As in previous editions, observers can still conduct their observations using pencil and paper tools. In the new edition, you can use the observation tools on your laptop computer, iPad, or other electronic device. For more information, visit this book's product page at [www.eyoneducation.com](http://www.eyoneducation.com).

Since the publication of the first edition, schools have become more systematic about the way they look at teacher performance and have adopted standards and benchmarks, one of the most popular being Charlotte Danielson's *Enhancing Professional Practice: A Framework for Teaching* (1996, 2007). Like the *Framework*, this book is designed to support professional development and improve teacher skills. Organized into four domains (Planning and Preparation, Classroom Environment, Instruction, and Professional Responsibilities), the *Framework* components can be used along with the observation

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this book, credit is given to the practitioners who created some of the tools presented here. For the purposes of this third edition, I kept the titles and affiliations held by these practitioners at the time the tools were created.

tools in this book. This is important because the ability to make meaningful classroom observations is necessary to promote effective teaching. In addition, the tools in this book can be used in tandem with any system that promotes teacher growth and development.

I invite you to examine the tools in detail as they encompass the many elements of what we expect for effective teaching, an orderly classroom, the differentiation of instruction, the use of cooperative learning, the start and/or end of the class period, the use of questioning skills, and the assessment of learning, to name a few. The classroom observation tools are designed to enable the classroom observer to develop a focus within the first minute or so of entering the room. With a focus set at the onset of the observation, the classroom observer can use the tools to start recording the events of the classroom. The tools can guide the observer in efficiently and thoroughly recording information about what he or she sees as teachers and students interact, how they work through content, how the standards of instruction unfold, what he or she hears students and teachers talk about during the lesson, and how students and teachers actively assess learning. These tools also promote valuable discussion in feedback conferences.

*For teachers,* informal classroom observations support continuous professional growth. Appropriate tools that capture the events of the classroom are needed to conduct meaningful informal classroom observations. By monitoring instruction through the use of the tools in this book, both the observer and the teacher can have more focused feedback conferences and identify areas for improvement.

*For administrators,* it is important to use teacher evaluation systems that include both formal and informal classroom observations. This book can assist in conducting informal classroom observations that complement the more formal observations associated with annual review processes. The tools found in this book are designed to help administrators give effective feedback to improve instruction and student learning.

The tools are powerful because, when adapted to fit the context of a school and its classrooms, a more comprehensive examination and analysis of instructional practices and student learning can occur between the teacher and the observer.

# Top 10 Tools

Although the 51 informal classroom observation tools in this book have been designed uniquely with different methods and approaches to suit individual needs, I recognize that today's educators are busy people and may not have the time to read this book cover to cover. Therefore, I offer my selection of the top 10 tools that educators in the field of practice have found helpful.

1. <b>Tool 23:</b> Using Bloom's Taxonomy to Examine Levels of Questions . . . . .	61
2. <b>Tool 25:</b> Tracking Calling Patterns . . . . .	64
3. <b>Tool 34:</b> Beginning of Class Routines . . . . .	82
4. <b>Tool 35:</b> Tracking End of Class Routines . . . . .	84
5. <b>Tool 37:</b> Cooperative Learning—Student Interactions and Teacher Monitoring . . . . .	89
6. <b>Tool 39:</b> Classroom Observation Guide to Track Technology Integration . . . . .	93
7. <b>Tool 42:</b> Evidence of Interdisciplinary Teaching with a Focus on Teacher's Comments and Questions and Student Responses . . . . .	100
8. <b>Tool 27:</b> Cause and Effect . . . . .	67
9. <b>Tool 15:</b> Foreign Language Observation Checklist . . . . .	43
10. <b>Tool 13:</b> Literacy Classroom Observation Checklist . . . . .	40

I invite you to share your own top 10 picks with me as you use the tools to help conduct informal classroom observations.

*Sally J. Zepeda*

# 1

## Readying for Informal Classroom Observations

### In This Chapter ...

- ◆ Informal classroom observations are important.
- ◆ Supervisors and coaches make the commitment to get out and about.
- ◆ Supervisors and coaches know their people.
- ◆ Leaders assess the context of supervision and their own beliefs.
- ◆ Principals develop the leadership skills of the administrative team.
- ◆ Supervisors and coaches develop practices to track observation efforts.

This chapter includes tools designed to help supervisors and coaches emerge as leaders while conducting informal classroom observations. The following tools are offered:

Tool #	Tool Name	Page #
1	Assessing the Broad Characteristics of a Faculty	6
2	Assessing Individual Teachers	9
3	Tracking Informal Observations	13

A resounding finding in the literature of the accountability movement is that teacher quality improves student learning. Additionally, supervision of instruction is integral to district-wide plans for reform (Palandra, 2010). If this premise is true, then the assessment of teaching in classrooms needs to become the first step toward improving instruction and assisting teachers to examine their practices. Assisting teachers begins at the place where instruction occurs: the classroom. Principals are no longer the only school personnel who are concerned with teacher quality. One way to support teacher learning and growth is to engage teachers in examining their own practices through informal classroom observations. There are many people whose titles range from principal to

assistant principal, from high school department chair to grade level leader, and from teacher leader to central office leader who conduct informal classroom observations. Often, anyone who conducts classroom observations is referred to as a leader, regardless of title or position within the school system. This book supports anyone who engages in informal classroom observations. Remember, like students, teachers need opportunities to grow, develop, and learn. One of the ways to promote teacher learning and improvement is an informal classroom observation. People who conduct classroom observations are commonly referred to as supervisors or coaches. In this book, we use the terms *supervisor* and *coach* to denote any school personnel conducting informal classroom observations with teachers.

## What Is This Book About?

This book focuses on assisting supervisors and coaches as they work with teachers in formative ways, primarily through informal classroom observations. To make informal classroom observations a priority, supervisors and coaches must frame their work habits and daily routines around dropping by classrooms and then following up by providing teachers with feedback and opportunities for reflection and inquiry. This book was written for supervisors and coaches who want to be viewed by teachers as a support for instructional programs. Assistant principals, department chairs, lead teachers, teacher leaders, and others can enhance the instructional program by developing a better understanding of informal classroom observations that support teacher development and growth.

This book provides a series of classroom observation tools to help frame informal classroom observation and follow-up discussions with teachers. This third edition includes additional classroom observation tools that have been field-tested by school personnel. There is also an updated chapter with tips and cues on how to incorporate examining student work and other artifacts in postobservation conversations.

Supervisors and coaches are encouraged to use and adapt the tools in this book. The value of the tools and techniques offered is that they are easily adaptable. Principals, assistant principals, supervisors, coaches, and teacher leaders do not need to use every tool to be effective instructional leaders. Pick the tools that make sense and use existing tools to develop even more tools to meet the needs of teachers in your school. These tools are available to you in three different ways. In each chapter, you'll see how the tools can be implemented by an instructional leader during classroom observations, as well as in postobservation conferences. In the "Reproducible Classroom Observation Tools" section (page 127), you will find blank versions of the same tools that appear throughout the book. Permission is granted to those who have purchased this book to photocopy blank forms and use them while working with teachers. Blank versions of the tools can also be downloaded from Eye On Education's Web site: [www.eyoneducation.com](http://www.eyoneducation.com). (See page v for details.)

## Why Informal Classroom Observations Are Important

The informal classroom observation is a way to get instructional supervision and teacher evaluation out of the main office. Teachers need feedback more than once or twice a school year. Teachers need formative feedback, not just summative. Informal classroom

## Tool 1 Assessing the Broad Characteristics of a Faculty

**Purpose:** Broadly assess the characteristics of a faculty

1. Number of teachers =                      Male =                      Female =
2. For each teacher, tally the number of years in teaching.  
Total number of years of experience =  
Average years of faculty experience =
3. Number of teachers whose experience falls within the following service ranges:
  - a. 1 – 3 years =
  - b. 4 – 7 years =
  - c. 8 – 11 years =
  - d. 12 – 15 years =
  - e. 16 – 19 years =
  - f. 20+ years =
4. Number of first-year teachers =
5. Number of teachers who retire at the end of the current school year =
6. Wildcards:  
First-year teachers with experience =  
Alternatively certified teachers =  
Teachers returning to work after an extended leave =  
Other =
7. What overall patterns do you notice?



## Tool 2 Assessing Individual Teachers

**Purpose:** Broadly assess individual teachers

1. Teacher's name:
2. Years in education:
3. Years in the current position:
4. Years in the current school:
5. Teacher's career stage (circle one):
  - a. Preservice
  - b. Induction
  - c. Competency
  - d. Enthusiasm
  - e. Career frustration
  - f. Stability
  - g. Career wind-down
  - h. Career exit
6. Alternatively certified? If yes, in what area?
7. Other notes:

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This tool was developed by Oksana Parylo, a doctoral student at the University of Georgia, Athens. Used with permission.

### Tool 3 Tracking Informal Observations

**Purpose:** Keep a record of the conducted informal classroom observations

Teacher	Observer	Informal Observations	Date of Follow-Up	Formal Observations	Period(s)/ Time(s)	Follow-Up Topics