



Valuing Inclusive Teaching and Learning (VITAL) Toolkit

Learning Environment Observation and Teacher Reflection

HOW MIGHT WE OBSERVE LESSONS?





SCHOOLS2030 VITAL TOOLKIT

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How Might We Best Conduct Classroom Observations?

PEER OBSERVATION: LEARNING FROM EACH OTHER

I did not realise that I was asking and answering all my own questions until the observer showed me his narrative account of what he had seen in my class. I wanted to get on with the lesson and get them writing. Now I think my students just waited each time I asked questions because they realised that I would eventually answer these same questions for them. After this class and the discussion, I had with the observer, I realised the power of having another pair of eyes in the room to help me “see” better. I should also say that the observer was a trusted friend, and this helped me a lot too!

Richards, J. (2005:86) cited in AITSL (2014:50)

PURPOSE

This section helps you conduct a classroom observation that is helpful and not threatening for the teacher.

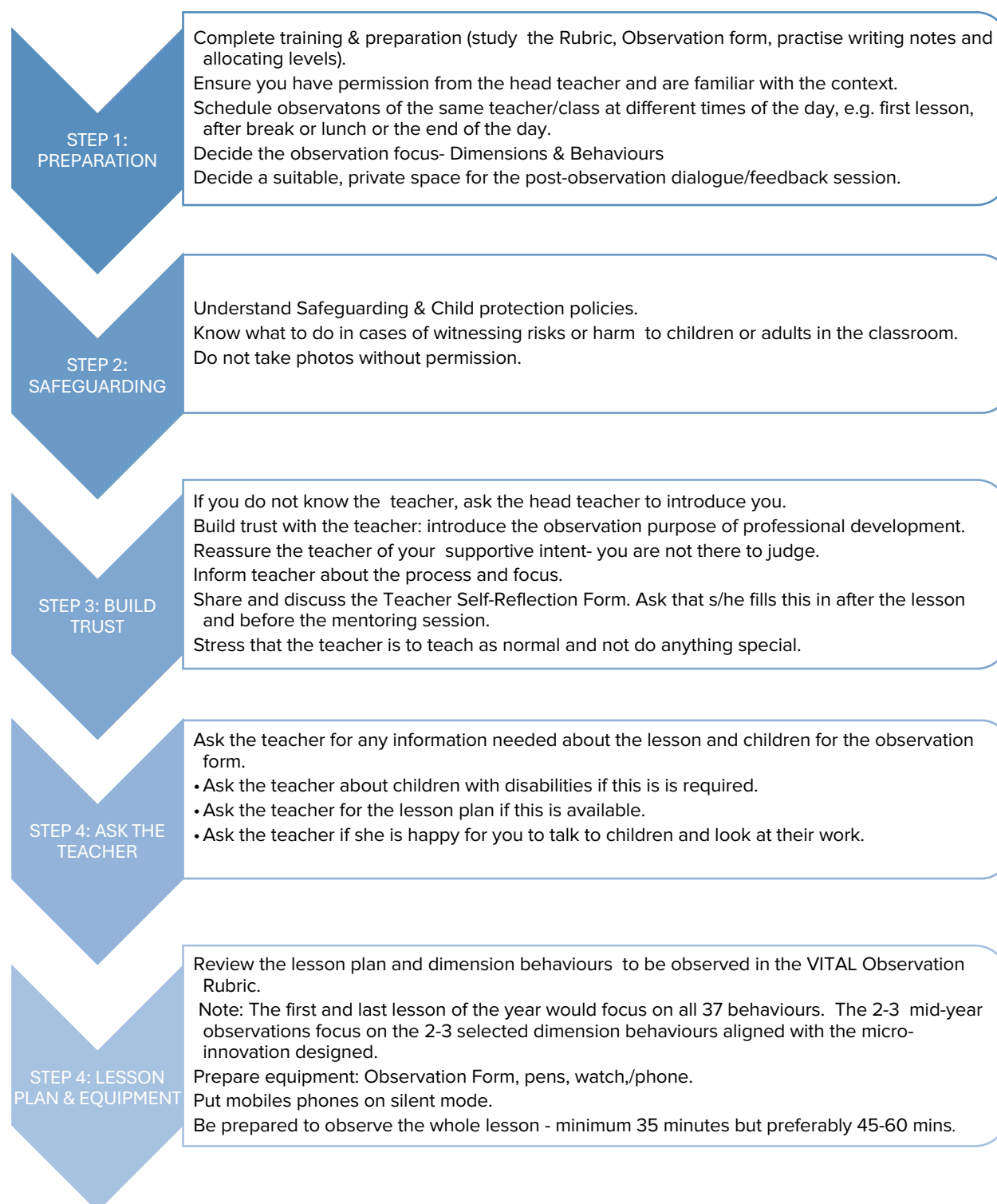
THE NATURE OF USEFUL CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS

- **Helping Teachers:** The head teacher, peer teachers, mentors or learning development partner observe lessons with the intention of helping the teacher create a supportive learning environment and improve teaching and learning practices in her/his classroom.
- **‘Non-judgmental’:** the observer is not to criticise the teacher and point out what she/he does ‘wrong’ but to observe and describe actions and behaviours they see so that they can be analysed and discussed in terms of effective teaching and learning.
- **Developing Reflective Teachers:** Observations help teachers explore how they and their students behave. This helps teachers develop self-awareness and reflect on their teaching so that they can start to critically analyse their practice and think about what improvements they can put in place. It is an opportunity for teachers to grow professionally.
- **Reduce Stress:** A way of reducing potential teachers stress is to refer to observations as a ‘visit’ to see how the teacher and the students are doing. Encourage peer observations with teachers visiting each other’s classrooms and offer to help by modelling, assisting or co-teaching.



STEPS FOR OBSERVING LESSONS

Before the Observation





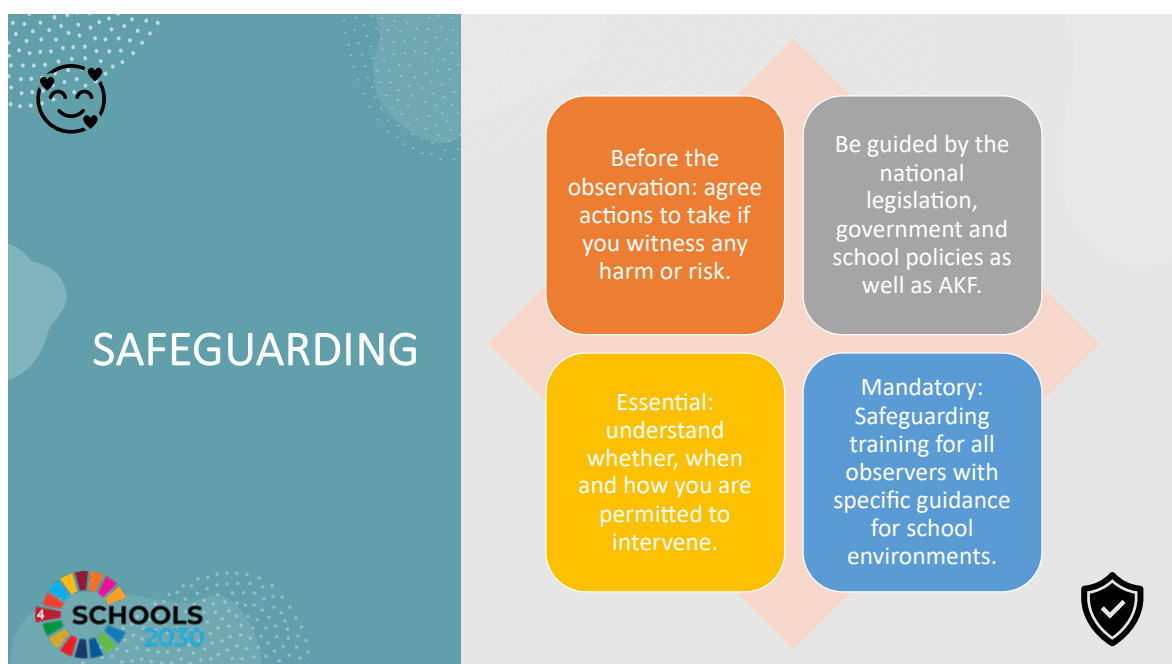
SAFEGUARDING AND CHILD PROTECTION

Before conducting observations, discuss and agree with school management on the appropriate actions to take if you witness anything that may pose a risk to children or adults in the classroom or wider learning environment. This includes health and safety concerns—such as trip hazards, unsafe furniture, or exposed wiring—as well as incidents of abuse, including corporal punishment, harassment, or the use of degrading or humiliating language.

These actions must be guided by relevant national legislation, as well as government, school safeguarding policies and child protection policies. If the programme is supported by the Aga Khan Foundation (AKF), observers must also follow the AKF Global Safeguarding Manual and Code of Conduct and related guidance. All AKF programme partners are expected to comply with AKF's Safeguarding Policies or to operate within their own safeguarding frameworks of an equivalent standard.

It is essential that you understand whether, when, and how you are permitted to intervene when harm is occurring. You must also be familiar with the appropriate reporting procedures, which typically involve school leadership and programme teams. Importantly, if you witness or suspect any form of misconduct, abuse, or safeguarding concern, you must report it immediately to the designated safeguarding focal point or via AKF's independent reporting platform, Safecall.

Safeguarding training for all observers must be mandatory and should specifically include guidance on protecting children in school environments and responding appropriately to concerns.

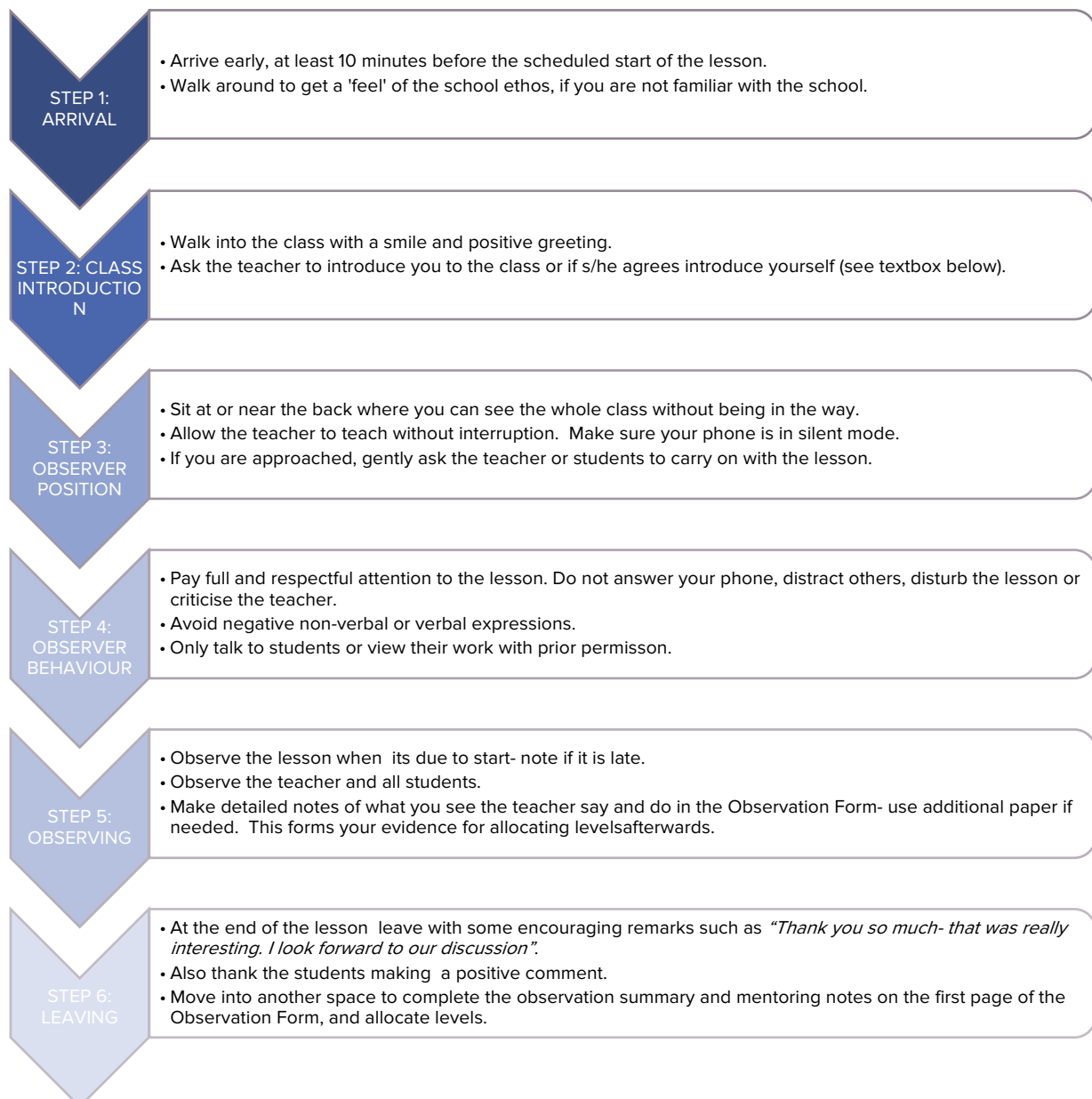




The Focus of the Observations throughout the Academic Year



During the Observation

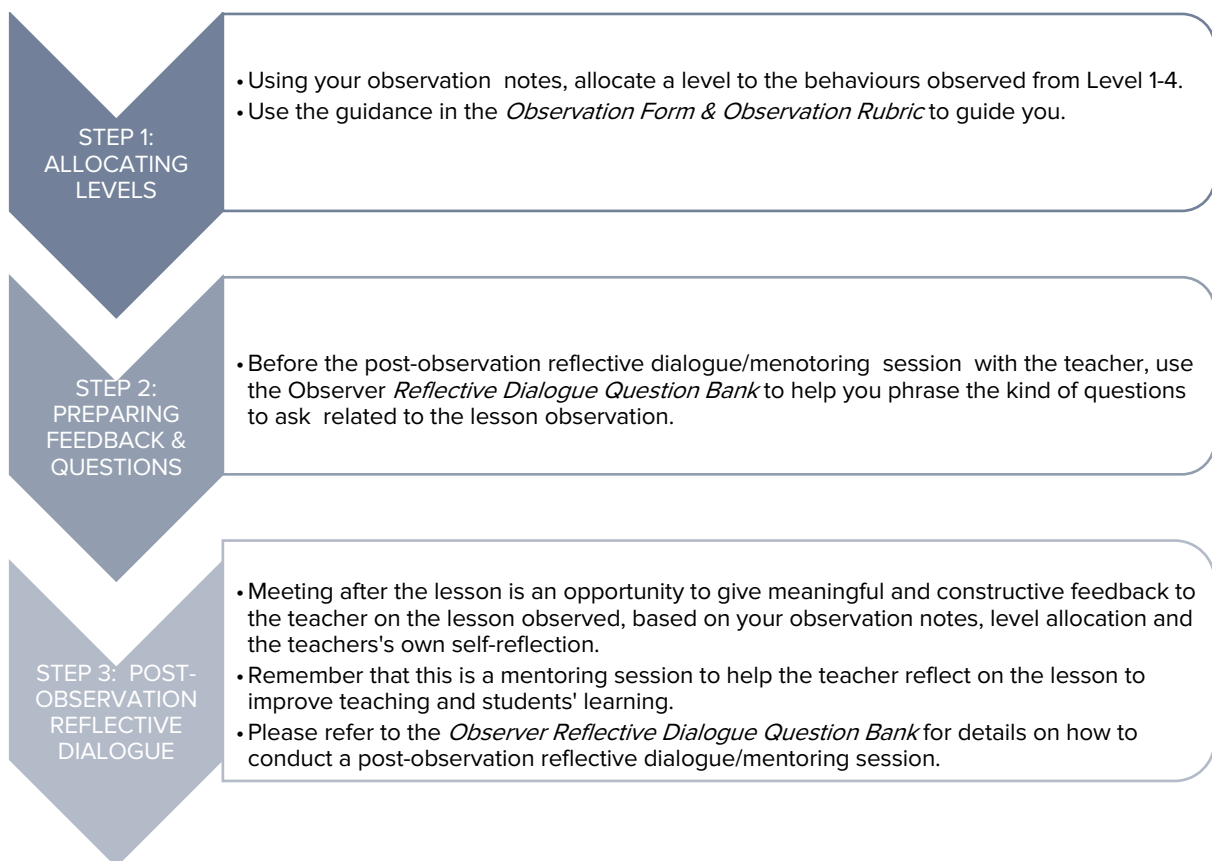




EXAMPLE OF OBSERVER INTRODUCTION

Good morning/afternoon! My name is I am gathering information on Schools2030 supported classrooms to help us learn about the teaching practices in your class and how you are learning. We are doing this to see how we can help you and your teachers get better at teaching and learning. Thank you so much for allowing me to visit your classroom and see what happens in your lesson- it is a real honour! Please remember that I am not here to test you but just to see what it's like in your lessons. I'll sit at the back and may come to speak to you and look at your work during an activity if that's ok with you. Thank you so much for this opportunity!

After the Observation: Reflective Dialogue with the Teacher





How do I best write Observer Notes?

While observing you will be taking notes of what the teacher and students are saying and doing so that you have an objective record and evidence for assigning levels. The Observation Form provides space for this. Your descriptions can include, for example, the exact words the teacher is saying or describe actions a student is doing and how the teacher responds. You could use the following techniques to help (WB TEACH 2021):

<i>Taking Observer Notes (World Bank TEACH 2021)</i>		
TECHNIQUE	WHAT IS OBSERVED	WHAT IS WRITTEN
SCRIPTING: quotes by teachers (T) or students (S)	After a lesson on forming past tense sentences, the teacher asks students to relate the current lesson to a previous one on action verbs by forming a sentence using both strategies. She asks, <i>“Who can take an action verb from yesterday and create a past tense sentence?”</i> A student raises her hand and responds, <i>“Amna jumped over the puddle.”</i>	T: Who can take an action verb from yesterday and create a past tense sentence? S: Amna jumped over the puddle.
TALLIES: shortcuts for frequently used words or phrases	Throughout the lesson, the teacher says “very good” 8 times in response to student participation and answers.	“Very good” √√√√√√√√
SHORTHAND: specific symbols or letters to represent behaviors	The teacher reviews a student’s paragraph and provides feedback by saying, <i>“Great job on the first paragraph. The way you open with a personal story is very compelling.”</i>	FB- T: opening paragraph is compelling b/c of personal story
ANECDOTES: summaries of what was seen or heard	At the start of an activity, the teacher asks if everyone has a textbook. Six students raise their hands to indicate they do not. The teacher continues teaching at the board. Meanwhile, 3 students are playing with a ball of paper and distracting others.	6 Ss no book, T cont. teaching at board, 3 Ss playing (disruptive).

Important things to remember

Conducting classroom observations can be challenging – please be mindful of the following:

1. Put aside any additional information you may have about e.g., the teacher’s circumstances, the effect of the weather etc. and do not let this influence your assessment.
2. Do not make a comparison with any other teacher or an earlier assessment but assign a level to what you see during the particular lesson you are observing.
3. Everything that happens in a lesson is, of course, interconnected – you could, for example, see evidence of feedback that encourages students to think critically; however, this does not mean the teacher automatically scores high on the critical thinking behaviour, since other behaviours in the critical thinking element may be absent. In this case, please keep both behaviours separate and score them independently.



4. Remember to take notes so that you can rely on the evidence rather than your impressions and memory. If using a data base, please take a photo of your notes and the observer form.
5. Remember to read and understand the Observation Rubric well so that you can assign the level that **fits best with what you see happening before you** in the classroom. Please put aside any personal experiences or opinions but assess what you observe.
6. After the observation, do not worry that you may need to assign a low level or feel pressurised to assign a high level. Please observe the behaviour and find the statement at the level that is **the best fit for what you see**. This will assist you in giving constructive feedback and suggestions to the teacher.
7. Please remember that you are assigning a level according to the description of the behaviour for that level. The examples, in italics, are only examples and may not relate fully to your contexts. They can help you understand the kind of actions you would see in the classroom, although you may not see any of these exactly.
8. Please remember to check organisation, government and school policies regarding Safeguarding and Child Protection so you are fully aware of what to do in the event of witnessing harmful actions to children or people in the classroom. Please refer to the Safeguarding and Child Protection box on page 4.