An Alternative Framework for Classroom Observations: Shifting the Focus from Teachers to Students

Un marco alternativo para la observación de clases: Desplazar la atención de los profesores a los alumnos

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Artículos

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Abstract

This paper proposes an alternative framework for classroom observations that shifts the focus from teacher actions to student actions. The framework introduces a comprehensive rubric with four perspectives to document students' observable behaviors and attitudes as evidence of engagement, alongside four qualitative indicators to assess the observable conditions of the classroom. This approach values the teacher's contribution as an additional observer and serves as a compass for fostering continuous improvement. The methodology included field testing of the rubric, teacher feedback, and structured interviews. The results indicate that teachers appreciate being part of the observation process, emphasizing the process rather than the individual, and view the descriptors as tools for ongoing professional growth. The framework is designed for student-centered learning environments where the focus of classroom observations is on teaching and learning rather than on administrative or ancillary tasks.

Keywords: student-centered learning, classroom observations, student engagement, teaching effectiveness, pedagogical practices, qualitative

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indicators, educational frameworks, continuous improvement, didactic structure, assessment for learning.

Resumen

Este artículo propone un marco alternativo para las observaciones en el aula que desplaza el enfoque de las acciones del docente a las acciones del estudiante. El marco introduce una rúbrica integral con cuatro perspectivas para documentar los comportamientos y actitudes observables de los estudiantes como evidencia de su nivel de participación, junto con cuatro indicadores cualitativos para evaluar las condiciones observables del aula. Este enfoque valora la contribución del docente como un observador adicional y sirve como una guía para fomentar la mejora continua. La metodología incluyó pruebas de campo de la rúbrica, retroalimentación de los docentes y entrevistas estructuradas. Los resultados indican que los docentes aprecian ser parte del proceso de observación, destacando el proceso sobre el individuo, y consideran que los descriptores son herramientas para el desarrollo profesional continuo. El marco está diseñado para entornos de aprendizaje centrados en el estudiante, donde el foco de las observaciones en el aula se encuentra en la enseñanza y el aprendizaje, en lugar de en tareas administrativas o auxiliares.

Palabras clave: aprendizaje centrado en el estudiante, observaciones en el aula, participación estudiantil, efectividad docente, prácticas pedagógicas, indicadores cualitativos, marcos educativos, mejora continua, estructura didáctica, evaluación para el aprendizaje.

Introducción

Teacher observations and professional feedback are essential responsibilities for school administrators. Existing frameworks aim to provide teachers with meaningful feedback that fosters professional growth and enhances the educational environment. However, observing teaching practices is a complex task that requires well-defined frameworks to interpret, analyze, and infer potential impacts. Without a theoretical foundation, clear guidance, and intentionality, classroom observations risk becoming inconsequential for decision-making and professional development. Furthermore, the wide variety of frameworks available can lead to feedback that offers only a partial or limited perspective. While no single framework is universally “right” or “wrong," their purpose and focus significantly influence the insights they generate.

Research on classroom observations reveals methodological challenges, particularly when observations are used as tools for research or evaluation. The recent political focus on the high-stakes decisions derived from classroom observations has amplified these challenges and remains a topic of debate in

schools. Effective, accurate, and fair evaluations of teaching effectiveness should rely on multiple measures, many of which extend beyond the teacher's direct control.

The proposed framework for classroom observations is a methodological contribution developed over years of observing teachers for both evaluation and professional development purposes. Its approach mirrors principles of corporate quality management, where the primary focus shifts from individuals to the processes in which they engage. At the institutional level, observation frameworks typically include guidelines or references that define what constitutes important, documentable evidence of teacher performance. These tools are often used as the basis for discussions about classroom practices. However, most of these frameworks focus heavily on the teacher's actions, despite the recognition that teaching and learning processes involve far more than the teacher alone. Additionally, many frameworks rely on intricate networks of indicators designed to provide granular feedback. While theoretically comprehensive, these indicators are often difficult to apply in practice due to the complexity and multidimensional nature of the domains being evaluated.

These considerations prompted the author to reconsider the practicality and focus of traditional teacher observation frameworks. Key questions emerged: What if classroom observations shifted their focus from the teacher to the student? How can student engagement serve as a direct indicator of teaching effectiveness? This proposal prioritizes classroom observations that concentrate on students, positioning teachers as catalysts for students' observable performance, attitudes, and engagement. The framework does not exclude teachers from the picture; rather, it proposes four observation perspectives designed to answer questions such as: How are the teacher's epistemological, pedagogical, and didactic beliefs reflected in their teaching practices? How do individual and social interactions promote and support learning?

The proposed framework focuses on four perspectives: pedagogy, student engagement, assessment for and of learning, and didactic structure. These perspectives are further developed in the theoretical framework to highlight their importance as components of effective teaching and learning. Together, they aim to provide a pragmatic diagnosis of classroom dynamics. Teachers, in turn, are encouraged to develop the expertise needed to create ecosystems where lessons are structured to stimulate social interaction and uphold rigorous academic standards. Research underscores the impact of social interaction on student learning, particularly its role in enhancing literacy, understanding, and competencies. Theories such as constructivism, in its many forms, emphasize the value of learners' experiences and engagement, positioning the teacher as a

facilitator or guide. This shift places students in a more central, active role, requiring new classroom dynamics that deserve closer attention.

As part of the research methodology, this framework was piloted with five high school teachers across different subject areas at an American international school in China. Each classroom was observed three times, followed by structured interviews to gather feedback on the instrument and the process. The results indicate that the rubric provides valuable insights into teaching practices, engages teachers actively in the observation process, and supports reflective practices that inform future lesson planning and student engagement strategies.

Theoretical Framework

The purpose of this theoretical framework is to illustrate the reasons behind the selection of the four perspectives and the importance of shifting the focus of classroom observations from the teacher to the student. It does not aim to provide an extensive review of the state of the art on teacher observations; rather, it serves as an epistemological and pedagogical foundation to consolidate the framework for Student-Centered Classroom Observations.

Shifting the focus: students at the center of the teaching and learning process

Undoubtedly, educational practitioners recognize the importance of students in the teaching and learning process. However, the extent to which students are placed at the center of this process can vary from teacher to teacher. In some extreme cases, certain educators may rely on students to teach themselves by merely providing the topic or unit title without any guidance or resources. In contrast, others may implement a well-planned lesson that includes resources, clear goals, expectations, processes, activities, and assessments, acting as coaches or guides throughout the learning journey. Certainly, this wide spectrum of possibilities adds complexity and ambiguity to the concept of placing students at the center of the process. An approach that positions students as the protagonists of their learning necessitates that teachers design and engineer teaching methodologies and assessment practices specifically with the students in mind. A classroom that prioritizes students in the learning process is expected to be constructivist in nature. From this epistemological perspective, “learning occurs as learners are actively involved in a process of meaning and knowledge construction as opposed to passively receiving information” (Gray, 1997). Through this constructivist lens, students are no longer passive recipients of information; rather, they become the protagonists of their learning process, where their involvement significantly impacts their construction of knowledge and competencies.

Student learning results from both individual and collective efforts, which, in Dewey's terms (1938), is equivalent to a social activity or something we do together, interacting with one another. Whether learning is viewed from a cognitive, social, or radical perspective, the common denominator is that there is someone who learns—an epistemic individual, referred to as the student in our educational contexts—who ultimately provides teachers with the reasons to do what they do. The term student-centered learning (SCL) suggests a method of learning or teaching that places the learner at the center of the process and implies components necessary for the design and flexibility of the curriculum, course content, and interactivity of the learning process (McHemer et al., 2007; Boyer, 1990, as cited in Attard, Di Iorio, Geven, and Santa, 2010). SCL "supports the concepts of a learner as an active participant and supports the instructor's additional competencies as a mediator and facilitator of learning through learner support techniques and practices" (Weimer, 2002). Classrooms thus become places with an established dynamic equilibrium where the flow of interests, knowledge, and competencies between teachers and students is constant and productive. In these learning ecosystems, the teacher's role consists of providing learners with opportunities to learn independently and from each other, as well as coaching them in the skills they need to do so (Hua, Harris, and Ollin, 2011). However, the focus is more on students' learning than on teachers teaching (Kalpana, 2014).

Therefore, if we consider learning as a construction process, with teachers serving as architects and engineers of the teaching process, it is fair to assume that observing what students do, finding evidence of their engagement in activities, and examining the conditions under which learning takes place may provide valuable information about teaching practices and their potential effects on learning. Of course, teaching is not directly proportional to learning and does not necessarily imply a cause-and-effect relationship; however, teacher clarity and the actions of teachers significantly impact what students learn (Hattie, 2008).

Some educators may argue that student-centered learning and student-centered classroom observations are two different approaches, which may be correct. However, for this proposed framework to be effective, it is important to consider students as vital and active protagonists in their learning process. This means they participate in and take responsibility for the construction of their learning. They are not passive recipients of information, and their classroom dynamics provide significant insights into teaching practices.

Engagement

Extensive research has been conducted on the role of engagement in the learning process, including the types of engagement and the correlation between involvement, engagement, success, performance, persistence, academic achievement, and social engagement (Astin, 1984; Berger y Milem, 1999; Chickering y Gamson, 1987; Goodsell, Maher, and Tinto, 1992; Kuh, 1995; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, and Whitt, 2005; Kuh and Vesper, 1997; Pace, 1995; Pascarella and Terenzini, 1991, 2005, cited by Trowler, 2010). In the author's doctoral thesis (Aristizabal, 2017, p. 58), there is a comprehensive section dedicated to student engagement, defined as the degree of attention, curiosity, interest, optimism, and passion that students exhibit while learning or being taught. Schlechty (1994) posits that student engagement can be influenced by three critical variables: the design of tasks and activities, the level of effort students are willing to invest in those tasks or activities, and the students' decisions regarding the consequences of completing the tasks. This model of student engagement encompasses both the quality and attractiveness of the task, prompting teachers to consider not only the effectiveness of the activity but also its capacity to motivate and engage students. Both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation can serve as potential drivers of engagement. While intrinsic motivation may lead to higher levels of self-motivation, extrinsic motivation often provides the initial impetus that engages students in the activity and can help sustain their motivation throughout the intrinsic desire to learn (Li and Lynch, 2016, cited by Souders, 2020). However, motivation does not necessarily equate to engagement. A student may be motivated but not engaged in a task, indicating that motivation, while necessary, is not sufficient to engage students (Appleton, Christenson, Kin and Reschly, 2006). Motivation and the factors that influence it are indeed significant areas of focus in education, and teachers play a crucial role in motivating their students. In classrooms with high student agency, students also bear responsibility for their own motivation.

Determining whether a student is engaged is not an easy task, as observers are limited to observable behaviors, which are not always clear indicators of engagement. But how can an observer know if a student is engaged? According to Rigo (2013), engagement is the opposite of apathy or lack of interest, while Sun and Rueda (2012) define it as the degree of cooperation in instructional exercises. Fredericks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004) distinguish three types of multifaceted engagement: behavioral, cognitive, and emotional. Pragmatically speaking, the observer can only rely on observable phenomena that demonstrate evidence of interest, enthusiasm, and a willingness to participate and complete a task. Overall, the observer can determine whether a student is engaged by noticing actions or attitudes such as focus, participation in class activities, questions asked, task completion, body language, interactions with peers and other students, facial

expressions, and verbal responses that suggest genuine interest and intrinsic motivation toward the topic or lesson.

Due to the multifaceted nature of engagement, it can be difficult to classify a specific observation as behavioral, cognitive, or emotional engagement, especially when students reach a state of flow. Flow theory is identified as a framework for studying "optimal states of cognitive and emotional engagement" (McCormick, 2019). In this state, Csikszentmihalyi (2008) indicates that people achieve an intense level of concentration and focus, leaving no attention available for irrelevant thoughts. Self-consciousness disappears, and the sense of time becomes distorted. The activities in which individuals engage are so gratifying that they pursue them for their own sake, with little concern for what they will gain from them, even when these activities are difficult or dangerous. Therefore, reaching a state of flow may represent the highest level of student engagement, despite the challenges of metrics and the need for observer determination. Nevertheless, professional judgment and other key indicators can provide evidence of student engagement during a state of flow, even if the observer notices a quiet classroom.

Pedagogy

The concept of pedagogy is inherent to the practice of teaching, as it is an essential component of a teacher's responsibilities. Its definition and scope vary from a simple dictionary explanation to more elaborate concepts that encompass social, emotional, psychological, and even political perspectives. According to Friesen and Su (2022), pedagogy is part of people's everyday experience and corresponds to particular modes of responding, reflecting, and acting. They consider it an observable phenomenon, "evident even in the way our embodied human world is structured, and in the way this world is 'presented' to children" (p. 3). Pedagogy appears to be transversal to our conscious and intentional acts and results from the way we feel we need to function in the world around us.

People often discuss various pedagogies, such as the pedagogy of driving, the pedagogy of love and care, and the pedagogy of human rights. This makes pedagogy a construct closely linked to an individual's personal theoretical and operational frameworks. From this perspective, pedagogy, as a predominant driver of teaching practice, reflects teachers' conceptions and beliefs about how learning occurs. As described by Knight, Buckingham, and Littleton (2014), epistemological assumptions fundamentally shape pedagogy and assessment. This indicates that the act of teaching is largely influenced by teachers' ontologies and their conceptions of the world. According to Villacanas de Castro (2014), epistemology addresses the conditions under which new factual knowledge is possible, while pedagogy focuses on the conditions for teaching knowledge that

has already been discovered. Therefore, it is unlikely that a framework for teacher observation would exclude pedagogy, teaching practices or methodologies, the teacher's craft, or any other similar concepts related to the act of teaching from its dimensions or domains of observation. However, the question remains: How does pedagogy manifest when classroom observations focus on the students?

The answer to the above question brings us back to student engagement and the student as the center of the teaching and learning process. The observer can only gather evidence through empirical observations of what students do, which can be subjective, not always reliable, and may lead to hasty generalizations that are not necessarily accurate. To minimize the observer's bias in the observation of teaching practices, the data collected must be as reliable and accurate as possible. This can be facilitated by using a clear and concise observation framework and an instrument that provides guidance. The framework serves as a lens through which teaching practice occurs, while the instrument is a consistent mechanism for gathering data. In the proposed framework for observing student-centered classrooms, the observer should look for evidence of indicators of student engagement, where highly effective, well-engineered, differentiated, supportive, and engaging learning ecosystems are present. The observer should also seek observable activities such as classroom discussions, questioning, and meaningful learning tasks that promote the development of higher-order thinking skills, meaningful learning, and competencies. From this perspective, teaching practices reflect an effort to position students as active protagonists in their learning process. This environment extensively incorporates active learning pedagogies that promote risk-taking, critical thinking, creativity, problem-solving, citizenship, global awareness, collaboration, and the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs).

Some educators may argue for the need for more specific indicators to gather more "objective" evidence of student engagement and participation associated with the teacher's pedagogy. However, providing an extensive list of potential observable phenomena may turn the observation into a cumbersome activity, likely resulting in high inefficiency and prescriptiveness. Additionally, there will be instances where the observer cannot find the specific indicator they are looking for due to the inherent diversity and complexity of the teaching and learning process. The proposed framework provides a comprehensive umbrella that is general, yet specific enough to guide the observation of students' actions and serves as a means to understand the reality of pedagogical operationalization in the classroom at a given moment.

Assessment

The assessment concepts are varied and complex in nature, as they result from human interpretation and the operationalization of teaching and learning theories. Assessment, as a fundamental component of education, encompasses an extensive body of knowledge that includes, among other aspects, purposes, types, methods, trends, relevance, scope, and even psychological and social implications. This area of education may cause controversy, particularly regarding its uses in judgment, placement, promotion, ranking, or any other form of classification or categorization. Assessment can serve multiple purposes in the classroom; for example, it can establish classroom equilibrium by addressing social interactions, aid in planning and instruction by facilitating decision-making before, during, and after a lesson, assist in student placement through clustering and grouping, provide feedback and incentives, and function as an emotional and learning diagnostic tool (Airasian, 2002; Aristizabal, 2017). This illustrates that assessment has multiple uses and tools, the ultimate utilization of which depends significantly on the teacher's epistemology. Therefore, the reasons, methods, and approaches teachers use to assess students depend on their understanding of how learning occurs and how they can elucidate and gather the data they need.

The foundations for this paper's proposed framework once again loop back to student engagement and how students' actions regarding assessment reflect teachers' educational intentions and motives, which ultimately correspond to a reflection of their teaching practice. From this perspective, by focusing on the student, assessments can be utilized to help students develop meaningful and deeper understandings and apply them in real-world situations, potentially leading to greater success in their future endeavors. Assessment is, therefore, an additional teaching and learning strategy that provides students with opportunities to develop agency, self-confidence, and empowerment, as well as foster the development of higher-order thinking skills and competencies.

Classroom observations of the assessment of student learning are not always evident to an external observer, as teachers may assess student engagement and understanding through their own observation mechanisms and strategies, which may differ from those employed by the external observer. In this framework, the observation of student assessment may need to extend beyond empirical evidence in the classroom and include documentary evidence from grade books, reporting platforms, and even direct questioning. Assessment is perhaps the interface between teachers and students, where learning is dialogic, and the interaction and exchange of ideas contribute to the growth and development of both parties. Students not only identify learning trends, strengths, and areas for improvement, but teachers also gain insights into their students, their teaching strategies, and potential future actions.

However, the type(s) of assessment that occur during observations are often not the only types of assessment conducted throughout a series of lessons or units. To gain a more comprehensive view of how students experience assessments, it is necessary to observe multiple points of assessment. For instance, it is important to determine whether students are allowed to demonstrate their learning in various ways or approaches, whether they can self-assess or contribute to peer assessment, and whether they receive or provide feedback for growth and improvement. However, these aspects of assessment are not necessarily observable in just one classroom visit, partly because teachers use assessments for different purposes, strategies, and instruments, either intentionally or unintentionally, which adds more variables to the complex equation (McMunn and Butler, 2006; Marzano, 2006; Fisher and Frey, 2007, cited by Aristizabal, 2017). Peer assessment, for example, is a collaborative learning technique that allows students to evaluate the work of their peers and receive feedback on their own work. This type of activity can be as effective as the feedback provided by the teacher, but it may be unnoticeable to the observer due to the nature of the students' interactions.

Assessment is a crucial part of the teaching and learning process, involving not only what teachers do to assess student learning but also how those actions engage students, energize learning, and foster the development of thinking skills. A student-centered classroom observation includes both assessments of learning and assessments for learning, along with the reflective processes that each of these approaches entails. An observer should notice evidence of an ongoing process aimed at understanding and improving student learning. This involves identifying expectations, standards, tools, systems, methods, or processes for systematically gathering, analyzing, and interpreting assessment data, as well as the mechanisms by which teachers use this data to adjust their teaching and support student learning.

Didactic structure

First, the didactic structure should not be confused with the didactic method or didactic teaching, which alludes to a teacher-centered approach to education, much like a lecture or direct instruction (Banning, 2005; Entwistle, 1997). In this paper, a didactic structure refers not only to the organization of a lesson from start to finish but also to the strategies, methods, and resources that teachers use to guide and facilitate students' construction of knowledge. After all, didactics, as an area of pedagogy, deals with the interactions between the content, methods, techniques, and organizational forms that teachers use to meet the proposed instructional objectives and the individual characteristics of students (Lopez, 2008; Riskulova and Yuldoshova, 2020).

The didactic structure, as a perspective for student-centered classroom observations, may sound more logistical or administrative; however, it plays a significant role in the way lessons are conducted and the mechanisms by which students learn. Generally, the design and engineering of lessons are in the teacher's hands, which makes the didactic structure an important variable for student engagement and, consequently, student learning. A variety of research studies indicate that teachers are among the most important factors affecting student achievement and performance (Hattie, 2008; Marzano, Marzano, and Pickering, 2003; Gassenheimer, 2019), and their epistemological conceptions greatly influence their pedagogy and didactics. Therefore, lesson planning and its corresponding didactic structure help bridge the curriculum's intent with daily teaching and learning activities.

Lesson planning is an area in education that has experienced significant changes over time, evolving from views based on pure behavioristic approaches to more recent perspectives informed by new trends and research findings in cognitive psychology and even neuroscience (Chizhik and Chizhik, 2016). This framework does not prescribe a specific format, style, or method for lesson planning or didactic structure; however, it does offer potential observable evidence of what is currently considered best practices. A particular characteristic in the development of a didactic structure is that, as teachers become more experienced, the need to fully record or describe instructional activities becomes less necessary. From the observer's point of view, this may require extrapolation, interpretation, or inference based on what students do, rather than what the teacher explicitly demonstrates.

Planning is the systematic process of deciding what and how students should learn (Cicek and Tok, 2022), as well as anticipating potential scenarios and conditions under which teaching and learning will take place. However, a didactic structure is subjective in nature and can be highly influenced by multiple internal and external factors, such as the personality of the teacher, personal interests, experience, student dynamics, and local, national, or international regulations, as well as pedagogical trends and the surrounding environment. A thorough lesson plan can help mitigate the subjective components of this exercise. As a result of the design and implementation of student-centered lesson plans, Chizhik and Chizhik (2016) state that students will achieve better success in assessments, maximize engagement, and provide opportunities for meaningful feedback.

The didactic structure, as a teacher's responsibility, has a significant impact on the teaching and learning processes. Research shows that teachers' actions in their classrooms have twice the impact on student achievement compared to school policies regarding curriculum, assessment, staff collegiality,

and community involvement (Marzano, 2003). However, in student-centered classroom observation, the didactic structure, although designed and engineered by the teacher, should focus on what each student is engaged in, developing, doing, and accomplishing. This implies that the learning objectives or targets should be written from the perspective of what each student should be doing or thinking (Mager, 1962; Gronlund, 1999; Marzano, 2000, as cited by Chizhik and Chizhik, 2016), not just what the teacher is going to do.

What does a student-centered classroom observation of the didactic structure entail? The answer to this question is influenced by the observers' conceptual frameworks and their interpretation of empirical evidence. This framework aims to gather evidence of organization and planning, ensuring that lessons include learning targets that focus on students' knowledge, meaning, and skill construction processes. It also emphasizes the importance of students understanding the purpose of the differentiated activities in which they are engaged.

The didactic structure should provide students with opportunities to freely express their ideas and learn through social interactions with their peers and teacher. Additionally, it should take place in an inviting and safe environment where students feel welcomed and cared for.

The observation framework

School administrators strive to provide effective and actionable feedback to teachers, regardless of the learning environment. However, most current teacher observation processes often center around the teacher, leaving out an important variable: the students. To ensure a comprehensive classroom observation process, administrators should consider incorporating students as a vital part of their observation focus, as they can provide meaningful insights into the underlying complexity of the multiple processes that occur during a lesson. Involving students in this process may also help them take ownership of their learning, become advocates for themselves, and improve their work. Since this framework assumes a predominant student role in classroom observations, its application in teacher-centered classrooms should involve modifications to the approach and the language of the descriptors.

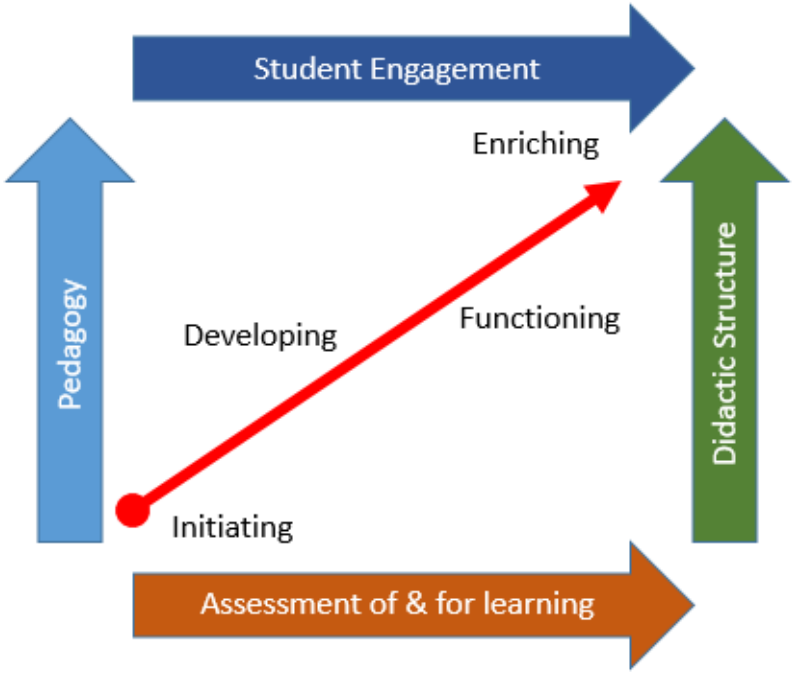
Figure 1 illustrates the proposed framework, which consists of four observation perspectives: Student Engagement, Pedagogy, Assessment for and of Learning, and Didactic Structure. Additionally, it includes four qualitative indicators: Initiating, Developing, Advancing, and Enriching. These indicators guide the level of observed performance and facilitate discussions about the next steps in the improvement process. This proposed scale has been discretionarily

chosen by the author for this framework, meaning that schools may adapt the language to meet their specific needs and operationalization. An enriching classroom represents a "highly desired scenario" where teaching practices are at their best and students are highly engaged and committed to their learning process. The descriptors for each perspective provide guidance regarding teaching and learning expectations, as well as student involvement, and serve as a compass to drive changes in the teaching practice.

It is also important to consider that this is not a continuous scale and corresponds only to a proposed classification for classroom observations. Although the final user is the teacher, who engages in self-reflection and improvement, the focus should remain on observable phenomena rather than on individuals. Therefore, observers must be careful not to concentrate on the teacher or individual students, as this could skew the observation records. Instead, they should strive to identify evidence of the actions, attitudes, and behaviors involved in the overall teaching and learning processes.

Figure 1

Observation Perspectives and qualitative indicators



Note. The qualitative scale should not be seen as a continuous spectrum since human complexity and human interactions cannot be delimited by a few descriptors.

The act of observing classroom practices has inherent limitations due to the observable behaviors and variables that intertwine in the teaching and learning

processes. Watching or examining someone or something involves numerous conditions or variables filtered through the observers' frameworks and those institutionally defined for the observation. It is important to understand and recognize that no matter how objective observers strive to be, there will always be an implicit bias based on their epistemologies, conceptual structures, interests, and even emotions. Therefore, acknowledging that the humanly constructed reality, which is modified and interacts to fit ontological reality, can never provide a 'true picture of it' (Ernest, 1994) is a way to accept that observations are only fragments of reality. The observer effect implies that the conclusions drawn by an observer are limited to specific empirical evidence at a given moment in time, which diminishes the generalizability of any definitive judgment or evaluation. To minimize the impact of this inductive approach, observers are encouraged to gather evidence from multiple sources, triangulate, and describe reality based on concrete pieces of data and information, understanding that these correspond to a particular moment in time. The saying "absence of evidence is not evidence of absence" is highly relevant to this process. In practical terms for this framework, it means that just because an observer did not see or record an event does not imply that it is not occurring at a different time or under different circumstances. This underscores the importance of not assuming that something does not exist simply because there is no evidence to support its existence. It is crucial to be cautious when interpreting the absence of evidence as evidence of absence, as the two concepts are similar yet distinct.

Table 1 compares some of the most common teacher observation frameworks, including Marzano (Learning Science Marzano Center, 2013), the TRU Framework (Schoenfeld et al., 2005), and Danielson's Framework for Teaching (Danielson, 2007). These frameworks refer to the concepts of domains or dimensions to delineate what constitutes an observation perspective in student-centered classroom observation in this paper. A perspective, in the proposed framework, is the observer's point of view, the ground, the lens, and the theoretical framework from which the observer observes, interprets data, analyzes, and understands the relationships between observable phenomena, teaching practices, and learning processes. A perspective provides the observer with an angle to characterize, classify, and formalize observations or empirical evidence that could otherwise be random, arbitrary, or disconnected.

Table 1

Teacher observation domains/dimensions

Marzano's	TRU Framework	Danielson's
Domains	Dimensions Content;	Dimensions: Planning and preparation;

Marzano's	TRU Framework	Danielson's
Classroom strategies and behaviors; **Planning and preparing;** **Reflecting on teaching and;** **Collegiality and professionalism**	Cognitive demand; Equitable access to content; Agency, ownership, identity; Formative assessment	Classroom environment; Instruction; Professional responsibilities

It is important to note that different frameworks may be useful for different purposes, and each one provides guidance for observing and gathering evidence of what is considered good practice, helping students learn, fostering reflection, and promoting continuous improvement.

Table 2 describes the observation guidelines of the proposed framework in this paper, aiming to be comprehensive yet simplified for pragmatic purposes. It also serves as a guide for self-assessment, reflection, and continuous professional improvement. These guidelines are presented in the form of a rubric, allowing the observer to indicate the corresponding descriptor for a given perspective and level of evidence for each one using qualitative indicators.

The rubric is general enough to provide the observer with some discretion in interpreting and recording empirical evidence, yet specific enough to offer guidance and feedback for teacher reflection, improvement, and enhancement. The use of a rubric is particularly advantageous because it is a common format in most modern classrooms, and teachers, students, and school administrators are likely familiar with its use and applications.

To visualize the gathered data, the observer may choose to assign a quantitative value to each qualitative descriptor. It is important to note that this is not a grade or a continuous scale, but rather a tactical measure to present information graphically. Additionally, this internal quantitative scale may be used to indicate that not all the descriptors at the intersection are being met, which can be helpful for feedback and coaching conversations. Some readers may agree that the use of quantitative indicators in assessing qualitative data can be controversial, as it may be perceived as "grading" teachers. However, this quantification can be an interesting exercise that utilizes rubrics and produces visualizations to guide conversations and inform decisions. An alternative way to quantify the data is by using frequencies for each qualitative indicator. With this approach, teachers may not feel graded as such, but they will have the opportunity to identify which areas of their teaching practice are more evident in the classroom.

Table 2

Rubric for Student-Centered Classroom Observations

Qualitative Indicator/ Perspective	Enriching 10 - 9	Advancing 9 - 7 – 6	Developing 5 – 4 – 3	Initiating 2 - 1
Student Engagement **No observable evidence yet** □	Students are highly emotionally, cognitively, and physically engaged in class as evidenced by their focus, participation in class activities, questions they ask, and completion of tasks. Students' body language, peer and student interactions, facial expressions, and verbal responses suggest a genuine interest and intrinsic motivation toward the topic/lesson. Students are fully immersed in a feeling of energized focus, full involvement, and enjoyment in the learning process.	Students look either emotionally, cognitively, or physically engaged in class as evidenced either by their focus, participation in class activities, questions they ask, or completion of tasks. Students' body language, peer and student interactions, facial expressions, and verbal responses suggest a motivation toward the topic/lesson. Most students tend to be focused, involved, and enjoying the learning process.	Some students look disengaged either emotionally, cognitively, or physically. Very limited student participation and student-student, student-teacher interactions.	Students are fully disengaged in all aspects. They do not participate, ask questions or complete the assigned tasks. They are just passive listeners and their body language, facial expressions, and verbal responses suggest a lack of interest and boredom.
Pedagogy **No observable evidence yet** □	Students are engaged in highly effective, well-engineered, differentiated, supportive, and engaging learning ecosystems where classroom discussions, questioning, hands-on activities, and other meaningful learning tasks promote the development of	Students are engaged in effective, supportive, and engaging learning ecosystems where classroom discussions, questioning, hands-on activities, and other meaningful learning tasks promote the development of higher-order thinking skills,	Students are part of a learning ecosystem with limited access to classroom discussions, questioning, and learning tasks that promote higher-order thinking skills, meaningful learning, and the development of competencies. Students are mostly passive actors in their	Students are part of a very passive learning ecosystem where they have no or minimum opportunity to discuss, ask questions, or participate in activities promoting higher-order thinking skills, meaningful learning, and competencies. Students are only passive actors with no or very limited chances to develop risk-taking skills,

Qualitative Indicator/ Perspective	Enriching 10 - 9	Advancing 9 - 7 – 6	Developing 5 – 4 – 3	Initiating 2 - 1
	higher-order thinking skills, meaningful learning, and competencies. Students are active protagonists of their learning process in an environment that extensively incorporates active pedagogies that invite challenges, risk-taking, critical thinking, creativity, problem-solving, citizenship, global awareness, collaboration, and ICTs.	meaningful learning, and competencies. Students are active protagonists of their learning process in an environment that incorporates pedagogies that invite risk-taking, critical thinking, creativity, problem-solving, citizenship, global awareness, collaboration, or ICTs.	learning process in an environment with limited possibilities to develop skills like risk-taking, critical thinking, creativity, problem-solving, citizenship, global awareness, collaboration, and/or ICTs.	critical thinking, creativity, problem-solving, citizenship, global awareness, collaboration, and/or ICTs.
Assessment of and for Learning **No observable evidence yet** □	Students' learning is continuously monitored. They participate in multisensory activities that allow them to demonstrate and show evidence of their learning and understanding in conventional and alternative ways. Students correct and learn from their mistakes both individually and cooperatively. Students receive both individual and group timely feedback through multiple communication channels. Student	Students' learning is often monitored. They participate in activities that allow them to demonstrate and show evidence of their learning and understanding in both conventional and alternative ways. Students correct and learn from their mistakes either individually or cooperatively. Students often receive both individual and group feedback. Student assessment data is often used to	Students' learning is seldom monitored. They have limited participation in activities that allow them to demonstrate and show evidence of their learning and understanding. Seldom, are students allowed to correct and learn from their mistakes. Assessment data is rarely used to recalibrate planning and teaching. Students receive limited feedback.	Students' learning is rarely or not monitored at all. They have very limited or no opportunity to participate in activities that allow them to demonstrate and show evidence of their learning and understanding in alternative ways. Seldom, are students allowed to correct and learn from their mistakes. Assessment data is rarely used to recalibrate planning and teaching. Students receive limited feedback.

Qualitative Indicator/ Perspective	Enriching 10 - 9	Advancing 9 - 7 – 6	Developing 5 – 4 – 3	Initiating 2 - 1
	assessment data is always used to recalibrate planning and teaching.	recalibrate planning and teaching.		
Didactic Structure **No observable evidence yet** □	Students are engaged in a structured, well-organized and planned lesson. They identify the lesson's learning targets, goals, objectives, standards, or essential questions. Understand and communicate the purpose of the activities they are involved in and, participate in differentiated activities. They have a voice and feel empowered to express their ideas and concerns in a safe, inviting, and warm environment	Students are engaged in a lesson where they recognize the learning targets, goals, objectives, standards, or essential questions. Participate, know, and communicate the purpose of the activities they are involved in. They have a voice and feel confident expressing their ideas and concerns in a safe, inviting, and warm environment.	Students take part in a lesson with not-so-evident learning targets, goals, objectives, standards, or essential questions. They may participate in different activities but are not able to communicate their purpose. They have limited opportunities to express their ideas and concerns.	Students attend a disarticulated lesson with no clear or explicit learning targets, goals, objectives, standards, or essential questions. It takes place in an environment and pacing inappropriate for most students, who also struggle to stay on task with the proposed/provided strategies, activities, and materials. Throughout the lesson, students do not have the opportunity to share their ideas and concerns

Methodology

The five participant teachers work in an American international school in China and come from either Canada or the USA. Three classes per teacher were visited over a period of two weeks, and the data were gathered directly on a rubric and transferred to a spreadsheet for further tabulation. Teachers were provided with the rubric ahead of time, and in some lessons, students were asked about their recognition of the lesson's learning goals. Immediately after the observation, teachers received their respective observation rubrics, which included three questions designed to explore their impressions regarding the accuracy of the presented observation, potential additions that the observer did not notice, and the

impact of this information on their subsequent lessons. After conducting the third observation, an additional structured interview with the teachers was held to gather their opinions on the focus on students and the process, rather than the teacher; the validity of the four perspectives as key variables in the teaching and learning process; the use of qualitative indicators as a measure to guide an improvement path; and the use of descriptors as a comprehensive guide for documenting observations. The researcher tabulated and categorized their responses for interpretation and analysis.

Results and Discussion

The results from the implementation of the observation framework reveal the following key findings:

Student Engagement as an Indicator of Teaching Effectiveness

Observers noted a significant correlation between well-designed lessons and high levels of student engagement. Students in these classrooms demonstrated active participation, curiosity, and focus, which were observable through their verbal and nonverbal behaviors. This supports the constructivist premise that teaching effectiveness is reflected in students' agency and engagement.

Teacher Involvement in the Observation Process

Teachers expressed appreciation for being included in the observation process, particularly in post-observation discussions. They emphasized that the focus on student engagement shifted the narrative from personal critiques to collaborative improvement. This aligns with professional development literature, which advocates for teacher agency in reflective practices (Knight, 2014).

Utility of the Rubric

The rubric was described as user-friendly and comprehensive, offering clear descriptors for each observation perspective. Teachers found the qualitative indicators—Initiating, Developing, Advancing, and Enriching—helpful in identifying areas for improvement and setting goals for their teaching strategies.

Challenges in Observer Bias

Despite the rubric's clarity, some observers reported difficulty in maintaining objectivity, particularly when interpreting student behaviors that could have multiple underlying causes. This finding underscores the importance of triangulating data and using multiple observations to minimize bias.

The framework highlights the potential of student-centered classroom observations in redefining how teaching effectiveness can be measured. By focusing on observable student behaviors, the framework aligns with

constructivist theories that position learning as an active, social process. This alignment is further supported by research on student engagement, which identifies it as a critical predictor of academic success (Fredericks et al., 2004).

The results can also be categorized into the following analytical dimensions:

A. **Behavioral** engagement is observable through students' participation in discussions, task completion, and interactions with peers. The framework identifies these behaviors as direct evidence of engagement and teaching effectiveness.

B. **Cognitive Engagement:** Reflected in students' ability to ask thought-provoking questions, apply critical thinking, and demonstrate higher-order cognitive skills during classroom activities.

C. **Emotional** engagement is evident in students' enthusiasm, curiosity, and willingness to embrace challenges. Observers noted that classrooms with well-engineered didactic structures foster positive emotional engagement.

D. **Teacher-Student Interaction:** The framework emphasizes the reciprocal nature of teaching and learning. Effective teaching practices, such as providing timely feedback and facilitating collaborative activities, have been shown to enhance student engagement.

Overall, this pilot implementation provided significant empirical evidence supporting its efficacy. Teachers involved in the study reported that the rubric allowed them to focus more on student engagement and participation rather than solely on their teaching methods and curriculum. The inclusion of qualitative indicators offered a clearer understanding of classroom dynamics and the effectiveness of teaching strategies.

Teachers appreciated the opportunity to be part of the observation process, emphasizing that the focus on student actions rather than teacher performance reduced the pressure typically associated with evaluations. The structured interviews revealed that the framework facilitated reflective practice, enabling teachers to identify areas for improvement and plan future lessons more effectively.

The results suggest that this approach can foster a more collaborative and supportive environment for professional growth for both the teacher and the observer. The rubric was improved after the observation and feedback from teachers, as it became evident that some student behaviors were not easily classifiable and that some observations were not included. The observer did not

encounter any lesson in which all four perspectives were rated as enriching; however, these findings facilitated dialogue between the observer and the teacher to identify potential areas for improvement. Additionally, all teachers self-reported the didactic structure as their highest-rated perspective, while there was a general trend of assessment being the lowest-rated perspective. This feedback highlights areas for further refinement and development within the framework.

Conclusions

This study contributes to the field of classroom observations by proposing an innovative framework that prioritizes students' observable behaviors and engagement as indicators of teaching effectiveness. The findings support the theoretical underpinnings of constructivist and student-centered learning models, which view the teacher as a facilitator and students as active participants in their learning journey. By shifting the focus from teacher-centered to student-centered observations, this framework addresses gaps in traditional observation methodologies and provides actionable insights for professional development.

The use of the rubric and qualitative indicators demonstrates that classroom observations can move beyond evaluative practices to become tools for reflective inquiry and continuous improvement. The framework also underscores the importance of involving teachers in the observational process, fostering a culture of collaboration and shared accountability.

This framework also represents a significant shift from traditional teacher-focused lesson observations. By emphasizing student engagement and behaviors, the framework provides a more holistic view of the teaching and learning process. The pilot study demonstrated that teachers find value in this approach, as it promotes continuous improvement and professional development.

Key findings include:

- The framework rubric and qualitative indicators effectively capture classroom dynamics.
- Teachers benefit from being involved in the observation process.
- Focusing on students' actions and engagement can lead to more meaningful feedback and improved teaching practices.
- Overall, this framework aligns with contemporary educational theories that prioritize student-centered learning and active participation.

Recommendations

Based on the results of this study, the following recommendations are made:

- Provide comprehensive training for observers to ensure consistency and accuracy in using the framework. This training should include an understanding of the qualitative indicators and effective methods for capturing student engagement. Additionally, incorporate moderation sessions with other observers to identify potential deviations and missed observations. These sessions will help align observer interpretations and improve the reliability of the observations.
- Incorporate additional data sources. Complement classroom observations with other data sources, such as student surveys, focus groups, and interviews, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the teaching and learning environment.
- Longitudinal Studies: Conduct longitudinal studies to assess the long-term impact of the framework on teaching practices and student outcomes. These studies will provide insights into the sustainability and effectiveness of the approach over time.
- Administrative and Professional Responsibilities. Consider integrating elements related to administrative and professional responsibilities into the framework to provide a more comprehensive evaluation of teacher performance.
- Continuous Improvement. Encourage schools to use the framework as part of a continuous improvement process, which involves regular feedback sessions and professional development workshops focused on student-centered learning strategies.
- Adopt a triangulated approach to classroom observations. Observers should gather evidence from multiple sources, including classroom observations, teacher interviews, and student feedback. This triangulation minimizes bias and provides a holistic view of the teaching and learning process.
- Embed the Framework in Professional Development Programs. Schools should incorporate this student-centered framework into their teacher training and professional development programs. Workshops and peer observation sessions can help teachers become familiar with the rubric and use it as a tool for self-assessment and growth.
- Foster Collaborative Reflection. Post-observation discussions should focus on collaborative reflection, where teachers and observers analyze evidence together and identify actionable improvement steps. This approach

promotes a growth mindset and reduces the stigma often associated with classroom observations.

- Expand the Scope of Observations. Future studies should test the framework in diverse educational contexts, including primary schools, higher education, and vocational training institutions. This approach will validate its adaptability and effectiveness across various learning environments.
- Incorporate Technology for Enhanced Observations. The use of video recordings and digital tools can provide additional layers of data for analysis. Teachers can review recorded lessons to identify areas for improvement and gather evidence of student engagement over time.
- Refine the qualitative indicators. While the current qualitative indicators provide a solid foundation, future iterations of the framework should refine these descriptors to address the nuances of student engagement and learning behaviors.

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