Possible Areas for Focused Observations

*Observation Topic #1: Classroom Management*

*Foci:*

* Posted & enforced policies – does TC follow consequences for poor behavior in an orderly manner
* Arsenal of logical consequences for inappropriate behavior – from standing close to a student to sending them to the office
* Consistent, confident voice and directions
* Clear, calm and controlled (3 C’s) – does not engage in battles/confrontation
* Consistent use of respectful tone
* Consider the language you will use; create statements that you are comfortable using
* Be prepared: know what you are talking about!
* Not the TC’s whole day/lesson focus; students should know already the TC’s expectations
* Is the environment safe, orderly and respectful?
* Be proactive, not reactive, whenever possible
* First week: set procedures, get to know (all) students by name
* Set expectations early, develop respect & rapport – reinforce your role as ‘the teacher’
* Use of control statements (verbal and non-verbal)
* Do not paint yourself into corners with ultimatums
* Show compassion (e.g. meet one to one in the hall if needed); try to find out the cause of the problem or poor behavior
* Use of sense of humour to gain rapport, diffuse tension
* How do you resolve difficult situations and how do you help students learn to resolve difficult situations?
* Directions to students should be clearly stated, and written down when complex
* Are students aware of the classroom rules and that they will be reinforced?
* Consistent policies regarding electronics in class, food/drinks, lates, etc.
* Holding students accountable for behavior and being consistent in this regard
* Allow students a say in setting class rules, but letting them know that you may have to exercise ‘veto’ powers
* Open communication about teacher expectations and student expectations
* Say what you mean, and mean what you say!
* TC is in charge and does not acquiesce to student demands
* TC is friendly but not the students’ friend; polite, firm and fair
* Have a solid lesson plan prepared with a breakdown of teacher/student activities
* Clearly state expectations of what you want to accomplish during the class before commencing the lesson – present an agenda on the board beforehand
* Expectations explained for each aspect of the lesson – are these fair? (e.g. “silence” – is this sensible?)
* Established routines: behavioral, Questions & Answers, lab work, clean up, use of equipment/machines, etc.
* Monitoring of what you ask (“did you notice x,y,z…”)
* Handling of students who don’t comply – how is this being done
* Make use of a seating plan; don’t hesitate to reassign students to different seat if needed
* Use of student names as frequently as possible (a seating plan may assist here)
* How is the classroom organized to maximize sight lines for TC and students?
* How is student participation vs. ‘disruption’ managed?
* Opportunities present for student participation vs. straight lecture
* Use of wait time to restore attention to the TC
* Not talking over students – use of wait time
* Is your timing teacher centred or student centred?
* Variety of strategies evident, including for students who finish activities early
* Activity level of students (e.g. variety of activities) – should be changing activities every 15-20 minutes
* Students kept involved/active in the lesson
* What percentage of the time are students on task?
* Assessment is clearly connected to all activities
* Lesson pacing is appropriate, timelines are evident & realistic
* Relationship of lesson plan to what actually happens in class
* Amount of teacher talk vs. student engagement (time on task)
* Are the lessons engaging, interesting and relevant?
* Opening –did students know what was going to happen? Closure – did students know what happened/what learning took place?
* How were the beginning/end of class organized to prevent issues & confusion?
* Implementation of smooth/logical transitions
* How are instructions/materials/etc. planned in order for the lesson to proceed smoothly?
* TC movement during the direct/indirect portions of the lesson
* Circulation, eye-contact and close proximity (with-it-ness) to prevent off-task behavior
* Be aware of the physical space of the room – move around and be accessible to all
* Vocal techniques of TC: inflection, volume – assertiveness, confidence
* TC calls students back to attention; sets time limits for activities
* Be aware of students ‘multi-tasking’- e.g. with heads down texting during the lesson
* Rapport with students, including “active listening” – preventative measures!
* Help your students develop listening skills
* Not permitting students to speak when others are speaking to the class
* Don’t shy away from greeting students at the door of the classroom at the start of the day – and greet them by name (if you don’t know names, ask!)
* Know your students both by name and background
* While observing your SA, take the time to specifically watch 3-4 students for 20 minutes or so – get to ‘know’ them
* “Management” may be taken in a negative light; perhaps treat it as “classroom environment”
* Work with TC regarding management: listen to their philosophies on the topic, then provide possible alternatives based on your experience and that of the SA(s)

*Observation Topic #2: Questioning Techniques*

*Foci:*

* All students involved, not just the talkative ones or the ones in close proximity
* Distribution of questions throughout the room
* How do you distribute questions? Location in classroom, ability of students, gender, etc.
* Targeted questioning techniques
* Multiple ways to engage and activate/encourage participation & answers
* How are students asked to contribute? Hands? Brainstorming? Selection by TC?
* Show sensitivity to all students (some may not be comfortable speaking)
* Make it fun! Use techniques & media in variety – games, small groups, jeopardy, smartboard
* Try a socratic seminar – how do you help your students figure it out by themselves?)
* Use of appropriate wait time for answers
* Be direct, kind, use wait time, don’t rattle off back to back questions
* Resist the urge to answer your own questions!
* Compliment all attempts by students; do not react negatively to wrong answers, but encourage reflection and debate
* Reinforcement of contributions in a positive fashion
* Repeat answers back to the class
* Know your answers!
* Be clear what you are expecting in responses – hands up, stand up, depth of response, etc.
* State questions clearly and succinctly – make sure the class as a whole is focused and listening
* How do you design the general delivery of questions in a lesson?
* Start questioning with a different student each class
* How do you design follow-up questions?
* Designing a sequence of questions in a developing, logical sequence
* What constitutes a good question?
* Are you clear on the focus of the lesson, and does this drive the content of your questions and the method of delivery?
* Are key questions designed that link to the main lesson objectives?
* Are you really listening to the responses and building on them for subsequent questions?
* Are you providing feedback to responses?
* Are students expected to record the results of these conversations?
* Avoid one-to-one conversations that ignore the rest of the class – keep all students connected
* Be aware of time spent in ‘whole class’ vs. individual activities
* Use of leading questions or others that promote thinking and demonstration of understanding and application
* Ask questions the answers to which lead to further questions
* List of all questions asked by TC – are certain types used more than others? Why?
* Understand the question hierarchy: plan your questions in advance!
* Write down your questions on your lesson plan until you develop the skill to generate them on the spot
* Are you asking too many questions, and/or are they delivered too quickly?
* Evaluate yourself: are you skilled at questioning at all levels?
* Types of questions asked: open vs. closed, factual vs. abstract, etc.
* Avoid the overuse of ‘yes/no’ questions; ask more ‘why’ questions
* Divide questions into 1] technical/factual, 2] interpretive, 3] cricital or deeper thinking
* Explore questioning techniques which maximize student engagement but retain focus
* Do you as the teacher always have to lead the discussion/initiate questioning?
* Have students work on questions in pairs; this reduces the likelihood of TC having to reteach
* Have group discussions before asking for student/group responses
* Develop a variety of techniques applicable to specific situations
* Student responses to open vs. closed questions
* Looking for open-ended questions, prompting rather than ‘feeding’, to draw out student knowledge and opinions
* Brainstorm list of additional questions that TC could have asked (more of a post-observation technique)
* Clearly articulated questions/techniques – e.g. funnel/inverse funnel
* Use of different levels of questioning (Bloom’s) – getting to “how”
* Start simple and build to complex
* Use of higher level thinking questions – responses that require explanations, opinions
* Once TC is comfortable with students, it’s ok to ask more challenging questions to stronger students and easier questions to struggling students (e.g. use of Bloom’s)
* Teach the students to be aware of the different levels of questioning – be specific in what you expect/require in a response
* What is done by the TC when there is no response provided (aware of teachable moment)
* Are you rephrasing questions when students are not responding, or answering incorrectly?
* How can technology be used to ask questions/facilitate answers?
* Breaking a question down if difficult, so students may be able to handle part of it
* Keep an eye on students’ faces – will let you know who is clearly not understanding your questions; have a plan in place for those students
* Use of voice projection/eye contact/body language
* Periodically inquire from the students if there is anyone who does not understand the concept/question being addressed
* Return to key questions at the end of class to reinforce concepts – and understand how these questions should be addressed
* Questions on assignments/tests involve all levels of difficulty, and are similar in nature to those covered in class

*Observation Topic #3: Assessment*

*Foci:*

* Criteria provided at the start of a lesson/unit – perhaps have students help to generate these criteria
* Assessment component needs to be built into the lesson/unit plan – what/when/how/why
* Communicated as part of the agenda on the board at the start of each class?
* Goals and objectives set out at the start of the class for all students
* Are these based on the sponsor school’s currently utilized techniques? What are the specific criteria the TC is using?
* Options for student performance tracking as a component of unit planning
* Appropriate assessment tools (@ level of students), various methods (not all MC or T/F), long & short answer essays
* Be fair, concise, consistent – not biased
* How do you align assessment with your PLO’s?
* Create and/or collect appropriate/fair rubrics
* Can adapt for various levels of understanding/ability/language proficiency
* Differentiated instruction (adaptations/modifications) – accommodation for different learning styles (equity)
* Define what assessment might look like in different subject areas
* Does the TC know the difference between assessment and evaluation?
* Simple with strong details – not long typed pages that students won’t want to read
* Use a blend of diagnostic, summative (of learning) and formative (for learning) assessment
* Clearly explain the weighting of various types of assessment
* Share all feedback & discuss (successes, improvements)
* Are you providing feedback to students in a constructive and supportive way?
* Informing students about the break-down of marks in advance of teaching – what constitutes an A, B, etc.
* How are assessment practices communicated to students and parents?
* Are students involved in self-assessment (reflection) and peer assessment?
* Self and peer assessment instruments being utilized
* How do you engage students in providing (valuable) assessment to each other?
* Will students play a role in the final assessment of their work and the work of their peers?
* Do students understand what is required for the assignment?
* Is there an adequate amount of in-class time being provided for this assignment?
* Break large topics/assignments into smaller packages
* How many assessment tools are used during class (e.g. individual, group, self-reflection)
* Try different formats – peer, self, group, rubrics, teacher assessment – and talk about effectiveness of each with students
* Develop variety of methods – forms, portfolios, tests, project-based, etc.
* Create assessment tools which reinforce material presented, i.e. are actually a ‘learning tool’
* Don’t be afraid to use some non-traditional methods of assessment if possible
* Utilize formal and informal assessment methods, and state the purpose of both
* How are you checking for understanding of the concepts?
* Provide opportunities for students to demonstrate understanding through application of skills
* How will you know if students are meeting the classroom/lesson objectives?
* Different strategies for checking for understanding: get it? Thumbs up/down; asking individual students
* How does the assessment strategy support the main form(s) of learning designed in the lesson?
* Your assessment should reflect your teaching, i.e. exam content should not be a guessing game for students
* In-class assessment on a day-to-day basis
* Assessment should be continuous
* Effectiveness of assessment – did students learn what you set out? Was it worthwhile?
* Objectives/goals referred back to at the end of class for students to assess their learning
* Some strategy for checking for student understanding at the end of lessons
* How will you handle cheating/plagiarism on HW/assignments/tests?
* Timing – how often will you collect/assess work?
* Timely and informed feedback to students, including during the process; remind students of time restrictions & expectations
* Be reflective of time spent on curriculum
* Is this a reasonable task?
* Analysis of test construction
* How will you manage the marking to assess quality?
* Knowledge of performance standards (e.g. skills acquisition – levels)
* Promptness of returning marked items
* Not all assessment needs to be for marks
* FA should allow TC to express their thoughts on the lesson before providing his/her own assessment; utilize sandwich technique – positive points, things to work on, finish with more positive comments
* TC should appreciate that assessment is an ongoing evaluative process, including planning/preparation, presentation, evaluation of whether students have accomplished objectives, etc.
* TC must be aware that self-evaluation/reflection is of vital importance to the whole assessment process
* Is the TC’s approach to teaching content evolving as a result of the assessment methods being used?
* How do you modify the implementation of lessons to respond to assessment results?

*Observation Topic #4: Inquiry*

*Foci:*

* TC finds ways to engage questioning, critical thinking, open debate, creative solutions to problems/projects
* Use of effective ‘big’ and ‘little’ questions that are open ended
* What questions are raised by the TC? Are you comfortable with the knowledge that you might not know how students will respond to some of these questions?
* Challenge students’ imaginations with prepared questions, stimulating visuals (YouTube, posters, etc.)
* Make sure that students have adequate prior knowledge before assigning topics, e.g. research skills/ability to access & sort out information
* make sure TC has done adequate background research on the topic
* Lessons not teacher driven – allow for choice of topics, projects, assessments
* Use questions – inductive approach – create a situation in which the learner becomes a “detective”, searching for information/clues
* Use “why” questions – have students test their hypotheses
* Involve multiple perspectives - inquiry about a certain topic could include historical background, political history, cultural viewpoints, changes over time, etc.
* Variety of options to students pertaining to any one concept
* There’s no right answer! Inquiry is about engaging in criticism, deep(er) thought, and new ways of considering issues
* Opportunity to individualize learning, engage students in deeper research
* How does the TC guide the students to develop a ‘question’?
* Presenting controversial debate topics; challenging the status quo/establishment
* How do the TC’s actions/lessons connect to the inquiry at hand? Is this related to something being done at the university?
* Fostering a reflective approach to lessons
* Implementing inquiry teaching and learning strategies; exploring and delving into a topic with relevant questions and research
* Be very clear regarding assessment criteria/objectives before engaging in assignments
* Clearly articulated evaluation criteria/rubrics
* Will students be expected to communicate new learning to the rest of the class?
* Stimulate student thinking by placing famous quotes on the board and asking the class/individuals what the author meant by his/her statement
* Motivating students to activate search for knowledge
* Engage in individual/group discussions about chosen topics before allowing students to begin
* Teaching students to develop their own questioning techniques
* Presentation of background information/data that allows students to design their own essential questions
* Have support ready for students – where to look for information/models
* The TC needs to be knowledgeable regarding the subject/topic at hand
* Are you being didactic, or are you providing tasks that promote thinking and questioning of the material?
* Presentation of an essential/guiding question by the TC (or a student), but followed by students’ structured investigations
* Developing cooperative strategies to encourage inquiry
* Opportunities to share opinion/research within a group setting, or a larger class setting (e.g. jigsaw)
* Is the activity a “fill in” or a problem solving type of assignment?
* Implementing inquiry into lab work – how do you make sure your lab is not just a ‘fill in the blanks’ exercise?
* What is the TC doing to think about his/her teaching today? What is the focus or question of the lesson?
* What specific outcomes are identified? Are the ILO’s being met?
* Lesson/unit should be developed with an inquiry-based learning component
* Inquiry strategies need to be embedded within the lesson/unit, as well as the pedagogical style
* Is the TC learning to become a reflective practitioner? Does the TC engage in critical analysis of his/her performance?
* Is the TC transforming their own practice as a result of self-reflection?
* Does the TC engage in informed discussions regarding pedagogy with advisors?
* How does the TC balance inquiry with the traditional teacher centred approach?
* What points was the TC trying to get across?
* Amount of choice given to students in class activities
* Students designing their own topic of investigation
* Questions asked by students that provide evidence of deeper/critical thinking
* Questioning techniques used by students
* Amount of student talk vs. teacher talk
* Be aware of possible issues with time management
* How do you balance an inquiry based approach with the need to cover a breadth of material
* Autonomy/independence/responsibility taken by students for their behavior & learning
* Lively & active knowledge seeking
* Use of different media & tools to access information
* Using the e-portfolio as a vehicle for TC reflection
* Analyze quality of weekly TC reflections (e-portfolio?)
* Does unit/lesson planning include a research component (e.g. articles)?
* Does the TC attempt to make links between the theoretical and the practical?
* Encourage the TC to dive into deeper exploration and investigations
* How do you incorporate inquiry into [subject area] teaching? What questions need to be asked?
* Provide TC with sample lesson plans where inquiry is the main focus
* Can TC identify the strengths and weaknesses of his/her lesson, and then either build on or address the appropriate areas?
* Based on the lesson, what else does this encourage the student to do to learn more/extend their knowledge of this topic or area of study?
* Did this inquiry based approach lead to further interest/inquiry in the topic, either by the TC or the students?
* What areas of educational practice would the TC like to look into if he/she was not constrained by the daily duties of the practicum?
* Compare lessons/skills taught with results – was the TC effective or is change needed?
* Discussions with TC on the value of an inquiry based education re: life-long learning; aspect of change and therefore the need to be continually assessing and inquiring
* How is what is being taught aid in the development of responsible citizens?
* Ask for help! Don’t be afraid to ask SA’s or FA (or others) why certain procedures, methods or activities are preferred