

## Observational Guide for Site Visits to Centers

**Purpose.** Observations help evaluators see how the program is working for the learners in accomplishing its goals (promoting technology skills, higher-order thinking, collaborative capabilities). Observations should be focused on and help us gather information about such program issues as: (1) use of curriculum materials, (2) staff-learner interactions, (3) learner-learner interactions, and (4) learning outcomes. During their site visits observers will take free-form notes regarding these issues.

**Observation foci.** The following questions show the types of questions that can help to guide your observations and discussions with staff and learners. These questions are designed to help you focus your observations, but they are not a complete list of interesting things you might observe.

- **How are staff and learners using the curriculum?** Are learners following the guidelines in the Activity Cards closely? Are they coming up with their own ideas for the products they design? How are other curriculum resources such as the Skills Book being used? What types of resources do the learners draw on during project time? Are they sufficiently prepared for and supported in successfully completing the projects? Is there evidence for ways in which the curriculum could be improved?
- **Do learners work collaboratively and support one another as peers?** Are learners sharing ideas about their work? Are they showing each other things that they have learned how to do? Are they sharing the workload and all contributing during group projects? Do they turn to one another and ask each other questions when they have difficulties? Do they freely move around the room to learn and share with others?
- **How does learner problem solving and creativity come into the sessions?** Are the learners coming up with interesting, novel ideas for their projects? Are they researching community or work-related issues to enhance their products? Do peers and staff notice products that are original and reveal learners' distinct ideas and style?
- **How does the staff know what the learners are learning or how they are doing?** Does the staff member have the opportunity to observe the learners closely as they work? Do the learners ask the staff questions? How else does the staff come to know about the learners' capabilities and thinking in order to support their learning? Does the staff have opportunities to comment on the learner work and make suggestions? How does she or he help them go beyond their current level to develop even further?
- **Does the staff have adequate training and support?** Do staff members have the resources they need to implement the program? Do they have resources to turn to when they have difficulties? Do levels of training and support for staff help the program match the expectations of the program developers and staff? In what ways could additional training and support improve the program?
- **Other questions about the program that arise during your observations?** No list of observation foci is comprehensive, since many of the most important observations are unexpected by the program designers and evaluators.

**Note-taking.** For each site visit you make, you will fill out the Observation Notes Cover Sheet in the web tool, which will provide the necessary background information. You will attach your free-form notes to the Cover Sheet as instructed.

The free-form notes you take will include two separate types of information. First, what are the exact behaviors you are observing and conversations you are having (described as accurately and objectively as possible)? Second, what are your thoughts about what you are seeing and hearing? Most of your notes will belong to the first category, but the ideas you generate about what you actually see and hear will be very important, too. The first column can be thought of as the evidence you are producing, and the second column ends up with your hypotheses about the Intel Learn program. The following table provides an example of how you can record your notes in two columns.

<b>OBSERVATIONS</b>	<b>REFLECTIONS</b>
15:00 (45 mins. after class began). Class being held at technology center. Learners (10-12 age group) are working on an activity designing postcards that they had begun earlier. They are talking about their designs with one another, sharing interesting ideas they have and giving each other suggestions. The staff is circulating around the class, looking at what the learners are doing.	<i>How much is the staff giving learners feedback on their efforts as she walks around looking at what they are doing? Are they using her as a resource?</i>
One learner raises his hand to ask the staff a question about using WordArt. The staff spends some time with the learner at his computer.	
After a few minutes, several other learners come and listen to what the staff is saying.	<i>When do the learners ask the staff questions—in contrast to asking their peers or looking at their cards? What made this group come to the staff right now?</i>
The staff turns to address the whole class, and reminds them that the WordArt toolbar appears (to let them edit their WordArt) when they double click on the WordArt text.	
Another learner raises his hand and the staff leaves the small group to talk to this new learner.	<i>Did the learners in the small group have their questions answered? What did they say to each other afterwards?</i>

As soon as possible after your observations, it is important to expand your notes, writing down as many additional details and ideas as you can.

**Reminders.** Here are a few basic reminders:

- Knowing the learner curriculum materials well will help your observations.
- Take notes about the important learning behaviors and interactions among the staff and children. (For example, at this moment, is the staff talking to the whole class or to only one child? Is the child asking questions that the staff answers? Are learners working together on a problem? What do they say?)
- All your notes should let the reader know what people are involved, what tasks they are engaged in, and the time and place of the activities you are describing.
- Keep track of the conversations you have with staff and learners by noting who you spoke with and recording direct quotes when possible.