BUFF Classroom Observation Framework Descriptions and Example Behaviors

The CTL's BUFF Classroom Observation Framework covers four dimensions of teaching: **B**e Prepared, **U**se Active Learning Strategies, **F**oster an Inclusive and Equitable Learning Environment, and **F**eedback & Assessments. Each dimension can be further divided into subcategories and example behaviors.

Please keep in mind that it is not expected that every course will attend equally to all dimensions, or that you could observe all dimensions within a single class period. The framework is meant to provide more structure to classroom observations and serve as a jumping off point for conversations about teaching and teaching development.

A recommended approach to using the framework

1. Study the BUFF observation framework dimensions, subcategories, and example behaviors. Periodically revisit the framework to refresh your memory, especially before you meet with someone you will observe and/or before observing a course.
2. During a pre-observation meeting, be sure to ask if there are any framework dimensions or subcategories that they are particularly interested in getting feedback on (focus areas).
3. Keeping in mind the framework generally, or if relevant, instructor-specified focus areas, observe the class and take notes on what you see happening in the class.
4. Immediately after the observation, compare your notes to the framework and make note of specific example behaviors you observed and any other relevant notes/feedback for the instructor. What feedback and questions arose that you'd like to discuss with the instructor during the post-observation consultation?

Please note that this framework is in development (last updated 11/18/24). Please feel free to contact sarah.andrews-1@colorado.edu with any questions or suggestions.

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Be Prepared

Observable behaviors that demonstrate instructor preparedness, readiness, and classroom management techniques for the purpose of providing a structure for learning to occur. Covers Agenda & Objectives, Clarity, Organization, and Classroom Management.

Agenda & Objectives

Follows an agenda or plan for the day and shares learning objectives with learners.

Example behaviors
- Introduces learning objectives for the class period at the beginning of the session
- Shares agenda for the class session
- Additional observed behaviors:

Observation notes:

Clarity

Clearly communicates context, concepts, and instructions to learners.

Example behaviors
- Provides context for session and relevance of the information
- Clearly summarizes key points/concepts of the lesson
- Provides clear instructions for activities
- Invites learners to ask questions prior to starting (and during) learning activities
- Emphasizes important ideas as necessary
- Explains complex concepts in multiple ways
- Additional observed behaviors:

Observation notes:

Organization

Structures the class session and clearly communicates structure to learners.

Example behaviors
- Structures content and activities in an organized and coherent manner
- Uses transitions to guide learners through class session
- Provides a brief overview of the next session
- Additional observed behaviors:

Observation notes:

Classroom Management

Manages classroom pacing to allow adequate time for content, activities, and questions.

Example behaviors
- Class begins at its scheduled time
- Paces lesson appropriately
- Provides timing cues for activities (before and during activity, e.g., 2-minute warning)
- Allows adequate time for learners to complete and debrief activities
- Additional observed behaviors:

Observation notes:

Use Active Learning Strategies

The use of learner-centered strategies that engage learners in doing activities/problems, thinking and writing about what they are learning, and/or idea-sharing with their peers and instructors (Andrews & Frey, 2015). Covers Challenge & Support, Discussion, Collaboration, Reflection, and Innovation/Technology/Educational Tools.

Challenge & Support

Academic challenge that supports learner learning and growth (Artze-Vega et al., 2023).

Example behaviors
- Creates opportunities to develop a growth mindset (e.g., raise confidence, self-efficacy, skills and challenging oneself, normalizes mistakes as part of the learning process, and provides feedback and guidance on how to improve)
- Encourages learners to contribute ideas
- Solicits alternative explanations
- Encourages learners to consider multiple or conflicting perspectives/ideas
- Asks learners to build/expand on ideas
- Uses verbal affirmations to encourage, praise, and validate learner contributions
- Provides scaffolding and clarifies concepts for better understanding
- Additional observed behaviors:

Observation notes:

Discussion

Encourages thought-provoking discussions; posits critical, open-ended, and follow-up questions leading to higher-order thinking skills.

Example behaviors
- Presents open-ended questions and stretches thinking
- Provides critical thinking opportunities for learners (e.g., related to interdisciplinary approach, political, social, or environmental discourse)
- Uses a variety of discussion techniques (e.g., debate, case study, think-pair-share, Socratic questioning)
- Asks higher level (e.g., goes beyond the literal, such as asking learners for inferences, etc.) questions
- Encourages learners to support their positions
- Encourages learners to provide constructive responses to their peers' comments
- Pauses to allow learners adequate time to think and respond
- Additional observed behaviors:

Observation notes:

Collaboration

Interactions reflect collaborative working relationships and productive discourse among learners and between instructor(s) and learners**.**

Example behaviors
- Provides opportunities for learners to engage with each other in small groups
- Provides clear guidance/instructions for group work
- Provides clear outcomes for the groups
- Interacts with individual groups
- Allows opportunities for groups to problem-solve and make decisions.
- Additional observed behaviors:

Observation notes:

Reflection

Gives learners opportunities to gather their thoughts/reflections on the learning that is occurring (e.g., examines underlying beliefs, perspectives, attitudes, experiences and/or actions/interactions during the learning process).

Example behaviors
- Provides opportunities for writing/recording their reflections (e.g., minute papers, journal prompts)
- Encourages learners to explain their understanding of concepts
- Encourages learners to discuss how they solved a problem/share processes
- Encourages learners to think about what approaches are helping them learn
- Encourages metacognitive processes (think about what they are learning/doing) and evaluate their own progress
- Additional observed behaviors:

Observation notes:

Innovation/Technology/Educational Tools

Utilizes innovative instructional techniques, technology, and/or other educational tools to promote active learning. Use of innovative techniques should consider context, e.g., discipline, course size/type/level, needs of students, and instructor experience.

Example behaviors
- Utilizes advanced active learning techniques such as experiential learning, self-directed learning, and other research-based instructional strategies such as role playing, simulations, games, storytelling, gallery walks, etc.
- Uses technology in a way that promotes active learning for the task, such as Poll Everywhere, iClickers, Playosit, class wikis, Padlet, etc.
- Additional observed behaviors:

Observation notes:

Foster an Inclusive and Equitable Learning Environment

McNair et al. (2020) define inclusion as intentional and ongoing engagement with diversity across the co/curriculum and communities to increase awareness and empathic understanding of an individual's needs. Therefore, inclusive and equitable learning environments promote learning through strategies that identify and are responsive to the respective needs of students, while fostering belonging among all students. Covers Belonging, Universal Design for Learning, Relevance, and Diverse/Global Examples.

Belonging

Nunn (2021) categorizes belonging in three arenas: academic (i.e., competence and comfort in courses), social (i.e., acceptance by peers in ways that value authenticity), campus (i.e., comfort in different settings on campus).

Example behaviors
- Addresses learners by their preferred name and pronouns
- Engages in actions/statements that empower all learners (i.e., affirmations, encouragement, etc.)
- Challenges or disrupts (potentially) harmful interactions or incidents
- Creates a caring environment by listening to learners
- Engages in actions that are responsive to the needs of learners
- Additional observed behaviors:

Observation notes:

Relevance

Instructor makes meaningful connections between course content and the discipline's big ideas, as well as to other curricular areas and/or real-world applications and/or gives learners an opportunity to make their own connections.

Example behaviors:
- Explains the relevance of the subject/content to learners
- Attempts to connect learner interests and learning content
- Creates opportunities for learners to interpret the importance of the learning materials
- Gauges learner interests in the materials
- Additional observed behaviors:

Observation notes:

Diverse/Global Examples

Instructor employs diverse materials and examples. This also includes presenting competing ideas and perspectives.

Example behaviors
- Balanced representation of multicultural names and social identity groups
- Examples challenge stereotypes/assumptions
- Use of opposing perspectives OR perspectives from marginalized groups
- Additional observed behaviors:

Observation notes:

Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

Instructor employs methods and practices to honor multiple means 1) of engagement, 2) of representation of content, and 3) for students to communicate what they know through action and expression.

Example behaviors:
Engagement
- Utilizes modeling and provides opportunities to practice skills while learning is in progress.
- All learners are engaged: actively listening to the teacher or a peer, writing, using a computer or other technology or are engaged in a project or activity alone or with a peer.
- Provides opportunities for varied levels of instructor support to sustain student effort and optimize challenging content knowledge
- Presentations provide a method for learners to reflect and/or plan for effective choices in learning and demonstrating knowledge.
- Additional observed behaviors:

Representation
- Uses multiple media to present the content of the lesson (e.g., video clips, online resources, audio/visual files, manipulatives/models, and/or interactive white board).
- Makes available a variety of materials related to the content (e.g., text books, magazines, articles, literature, and/or online content).
- Uses graphics (drawing or images) in paper handouts, digital materials, and presentations to complement text and whole group instruction.
- Provides all learners with choices of materials and/or technology to learn concepts/skills.
- Additional observed behaviors:

Action & Expression
- Provides options for physical action and response as a way to communicate learners' learning.
- Provides equitable access to various learning tools.
- Provides learners opportunity to extend their knowledge beyond the scope of the initial lesson.
- Additional observed behaviors:

Observation notes:

Feedback & Assessments

Assesses learning and the learning environment through frequent and varied low-stakes means, provides equitable and timely feedback to learners, and uses feedback and assessments to improve learning and the learning environment. Covers Formative Assessment, Equitable Feedback, In-time Feedback, and Collects Learner Feedback.

Formative Assessment

Frequently conducts low-stakes check-ins with learners to assess comprehension and progress in the course

Example behaviors
- Routinely asks for learner input and questions
- Embeds regular opportunities for learners to reflect and share about their learning (e.g., minute papers, muddiest point)
- Embeds regular opportunities for learners to participate in ungraded formative quizzes to help them retain content (e.g., retrieval time)
- Circulates during activities to monitor learner progress
- Asks questions to learners as a means of monitoring their understanding
- Encourages learners to explain their understanding of concepts
- Encourages learners to discuss how they solved a problem
- Additional observed behaviors:

Observation notes:

Equitable Feedback

Treats each individual learner with equal respect when providing constructive feedback and encouragement

Example behaviors
- Conveys the same level of confidence in the abilities of all learners (e.g., isn't overly protective or unduly strict toward any group of or individual learners; conveys that all learners are capable of growth)
- Is even-handed in acknowledging learners' areas for growth (e.g., doesn't restrict feedback on areas of improvement to only certain learners / certain groups of learners)
- Is even-handed in commending learners for excellent engagement / performance (e.g., doesn't restrict praise to only certain learners / certain groups of learners)
- Emphasizes high standards with verbal assurances that they will help learners succeed
- Takes care not to perpetuate stereotypes
- Shares rubrics or other clear, pre-established grading criteria with learners
- Additional observed behaviors:

Observation notes:

In-time Feedback

Regularly provides in-time, actionable feedback to learners

Example behaviors:
- Regularly uses clickers, other learner response systems, or online polls to provide immediate feedback on in-class quizzes, think-pair-share, etc.
- Circulates during activities to ask / answer questions
- Follows up during class discussions to acknowledge, clarify, and/or affirm learner answers
- Helps learners to extend their responses during class discussions or in response to a learner answer to an instructor question
- Reviews assignments/activities from previous session/week as a class (e.g., reviewing common mistakes/misunderstandings)
- Ensures learners can accurately gauge their progress and grade standing at any time (e.g., reminds learners during class that Canvas grades are visible, explains to learners how to check/understand what their grade is)
- Details when learners should expect instructor feedback (for questions, emails, projects, tests, etc.)
- Utilizes class time for peers to review and provide feedback to each other (using a rubric or clear grading criteria)
- Utilizes class time for structured self-assessment
- Additional observed behaviors:

Observation notes:

Collects Learner Feedback

Gathers informal and formal feedback on the course learning environment learning experience and acknowledges feedback provided by learners

Example behaviors
- Clarifies how and when learners can provide feedback on their experiences in the course
- Explains to learners specific ways their feedback will be used to improve the current and/or future learning environment
- Facilitates discussions on the utility of and/or interest in course materials from the learners' perspective
- Solicits learner feedback via anonymous surveys or short writing prompts
- Invites a colleague in to facilitate a classroom interview about learning experiences
- Shares feedback so all learners see the diverse responses, experiences, and perspectives and to validate learners' input and perspectives
- Additional observed behaviors:

Observation notes:

Supplementary Materials

Pre-Observation Meeting Guide

Plan for a 30-minute conversation (or one hour if you will observe each other and are scheduling a single meeting to discuss both observations).

Purpose of the pre-observation meeting
- Establish comfort and trust in the process
- Understand the instructor's goals for the observation and/or their course
- Discuss particularly relevant BUFF framework dimensions
- Identify a date to observe their course

Discuss instructor teaching & observation goals
- Get an understanding of their goals for the course and specific class session to be observed, e.g., you might ask:
    - How's class going this semester?
    - How is a "typical" class session structured?
    - How do you get students to engage with one another and with you as the instructor?
    - How do you know if students are engaged in class and with the content?
    - Are there any new things you're considering trying out (e.g., an active learning technique, an inclusive practice, a new module, etc.)?
    - What are you aiming to improve, and why?
    - What advice would you like for improving?
    - What are they hoping to learn and/or do with what they learn from this process?

Select focus areas from the BUFF Classroom Observation Framework
- Collaborate to identify dimension(s) or specific subcategories from the BUFF classroom observation framework to focus on during the observation
    - What dimension(s) best fit the needs/goals of the observation?
    - Which areas are they trying something new and want feedback?

Identify an observation date
- When selecting a class session (or sessions) to observe, it should be a typical class session. In other words, avoid test days, days with guest speakers, or days with back-to-back student presentations.
- The observation will need to be completed in time to have a post-observation meeting before the end of the semester.
- Ideally also identify a date for the post-observation meeting at this time.

Ask instructor: Is there anything else about the course/class you would like to discuss prior to the observations?

Course Information

Observer:	
Observation date & time:	
Semester and Year:	
Instructor:	
Number of TAs and/or LAs who assisted with the class:	
Course Name:	
Course Number / Section:	
Course Building & Room:	
# Learners enrolled* / # Learners who attended**: *if you didn't get the enrollment from the instructor you can find that info at https://classes.colorado.edu/ **for very large classes where it may be difficult to count, you may approximate, or if ask the instructor for attendance if they collect it.	

Contextual Background and Activities

Use this space to briefly describe the classroom setting in which the lesson took place (space, seating arrangements, etc.). Use diagrams if they seem appropriate.

Look for evidence of student engagement

Note that student engagement also appears in several of the BUFF dimensions (e.g., under Use Active Learning Strategies) - it can also be helpful to periodically scan the room and note the nature of way(s) students are engaged or disengaged.

Who's participating? How many? In what ways?

Example engaged behaviors
- Listening
- Taking notes (by hand or on a device)
- Asking questions
- Answering questions
- Participating in discussions, group work, or other class activities
- Using devices as instructed for course work

Example disengaged behaviors
- Using their phone not for course work
- Using computer or other device for non-class work
- Talking to peers about non-course work
- Asleep or otherwise tuned out (e.g., listening to music)

Additional observed behaviors and/or other observation notes related to student engagement:

Live observation notes

Record events (e.g., topic transitions, start/stop times for group work) and other notes about what you are observing that may help in connecting observations to the BUFF framework and/or your feedback to the instructor's lesson plan.

Summary Notes

Immediately after the observation, review your notes and summarize some takeaways for the instructor. What feedback and questions arose that you'd like to discuss during the post-observation meeting?

Strengths

Describe strengths of the course and/or the instructor's teaching practices.

Curiosities

Describe moments that sparked your interest and/or list questions you have for the instructor.

Actionable suggestions

Describe opportunities for the instructor to strengthen the course and/or their teaching.

Post-Observation Meeting Guide

Plan for a 30-minute conversation (or one hour if you observed each other and are scheduling a single meeting to discuss both observations).

Purpose of the post-observation meeting
- Share and discuss insights from the observation
- Engage in reflection on teaching practices in light of the observation
- Set goals for short- and/or long-term changes

Share observer insights from the observation, e.g.,
- Focus on dimensions from the BUFF classroom observation framework (above)
- Highlights (what you observed or didn't observe)
- Refer to your summary notes
  - Strengths
  - Curiosities and/or questions you have based on your observations
  - Actionable Suggestions

Reflection questions (for the observer to pose to the instructor)
- How do you feel the class(es) went?
- What worked (or didn't work) in the class?
- What questions came to mind we discussed observation feedback?
- What are important / interesting things you learned about your teaching practices from this process? What makes this important / interesting to you?
- What, if anything, surprised you?

Next steps / actions
- What is a small / easy to implement change you would like to make?
- What is a larger / longer-term goal you'd like to work towards?

Is there anything else you would like to discuss?