**School/Classroom Observation Research**

In this suggested approach, observations of school and classes will occur over multiple days, but each day will be ‘structured’ by a different emphasis of observation, which links into our overarching themes. The aim here is to give a rich and increasingly nuanced picture of each school and classroom context. The days are structured as follows:

***Emphasis 1: A day in the life of a school.***

The researcher spends a whole day in the school and in the target classroom. Record in descriptive detail what you see happening in the day. Imagine you are describing the events, the school (including infrastructure and layout), the classroom, the children, teachers and interactions to somebody who can’t see/hear for themselves what is happening. This is a good day to begin to look at how mid-day meals work and play time interactions, and to see the general availability and use of learning resources and materials, etc. Rather than make judgements about whether things are good or bad, just describe exactly what is happening and what you see and hear.

With your notebook in the field you can make shorthand notes, *e.g****: 8.50-9****… children arriving, most coming in groups, two with parents/family* ***9.05*** *– assembly drills, children in age-wise and gender-wise lines, how many? lead boy reads headlines, and class 4 teacher not yet arrived, children file in themselves to classroom and take seats****. 9.20*** *– children talking in class, one girl has started copywriting, teacher comes in and immediately kids are quiet****. 9.30*** *--….*

But, that evening, and for a full two days afterwards, you will go back over your notes and type them up with *thicker* detail. Describe the interactions more fully. Did parents come into the school, did they talk to teachers during drop-off? Could you hear and capture what they actually said? What was the atmosphere during the drills? What prayers were said, what messages were given? Which teachers were present, which were not? How did they interact with the kids? How did the kids know when to go to class and where to sit? When the kids were talking, who was quiet and who was not, what were they talking about? What did the teacher say and do when she came in?

This lengthy document of thick description of a full day will be important **data** for our project which will ultimately get fed into Nvivo for analysis. To know whether you’ve captured enough detail, swap your descriptions with another researcher and ask whether they can fully picture the goings-on at the school? What questions remain and can you fill in the picture for them in your notes? If not, what will you need to look out for next time you visit the school?

***Emphasis 2: Classroom interactions and continuous evaluation***

The aim of this observation is to tune into and describe in thick detail how classroom interactions occur. We will be tracing CCE, but teachers (just like all of us in our interactions) are always making evaluations and judgements – so let’s take a broad view of CCE, not just the narrow policy view. For example, feedback can be *explicit* (like when you receive comments on your work) and *implicit* (like when a teacher doesn’t call on you again after you give a wrong answer). We need to capture both in detail. The ways in which resources are distributed in a classroom (including time – which is a kind of resource) is also a form of feedback to children. Try wherever possible to record the exact words that are spoken so we can hear for example exactly how feedback is phrased, or participation encouraged.

Spend a full day within a classroom making field notes on all the kinds of evaluations that occur in the classroom which, like before, you will type up into thick, detailed observation over the course of two days.

Things to capture:

* How does the teacher structure the learning for the children? How does s/he introduce / close the session? How do children know what to do? What opportunities are made children’s experience and thoughts to be integrated into lessons?
* How does the teacher give explicit and implicit messages about her expectations. E.g. how do children know that they are on the right track, or what they have to do in class, even in terms of non-academic activities… i.e. when to be quiet, where to sit, when to move.
* How does the teacher offer students feedback (both ‘positive’ and ‘negative’) on: (a) behaviour; and (b) academic work?
  + Verbally (what kind of language, describe what you hear, use of mother-tongue if different to medium of instruction, tone, or colloquialisms)
  + Non-verbally (movements, facial expression, corporal punishment or reward – e.g. pat on the back; describe what you see)
* How do children help each other? Work together? Give each other feedback? How? (describe verbal and non-verbal interactions)
* How does formal evaluation occur? Marking of written work, correction of verbal answers? What formal/explicit means of CCE does the teacher do?
* How are groups formed within class, e.g. by ability, gender, or other, and how does the teacher differently interact with these different groups? What different terms for children does the teacher use, and in which languages. Are different resources given to different groups or children? What spaces do the groups have access to? I.e. is there a group at the back of the class? Do they get different attention? Do students line up to get feedback and if so how is attention given to students? (What are students doing whilst waiting in the line? Who gets seen first, how is the order of attention decided?).
* Does the teacher give different amount of time to different students? If so how? What does she do?
* In all of the above, what is the response of the children? How do they react?
* Keep looking also at interactions during play and meal times, to deepen your understanding from the day before.

***Emphasis Three: Participation and differentiation***

The aim for this observation is to focus on 4 specific children within a classroom for a whole school day. Having built up a picture of the whole school/classroom atmosphere (emphasis 1), and the types of interactions within class (emphasis 2), we want to now build a closer picture of how different children experience their classes and learning.

*Narrowing down who to follow:*

After you complete ‘Emphasis 2’, can you identify a number of children (approx. 8) who have different levels of interaction with teacher? What might make these children interesting to follow? What social background do they have (caste-class, gender), and what is the perceived ‘ability’ of these children? Do you notice the teacher interacting differently to boys and girls, or to dominant and lower castes, or to different ability groupings? Write down your rationale for being interested in these 8 kids and discuss this selection with the research team.

Is it possible to select 4 children from your list of 8 so that we have 2 girls and 2 boys, and a spread of caste-class backgrounds and ability levels?

*Once the selection of kids has been made:*

Focus a whole day of classroom observations on these four children. Note, it is important that you do not make it explicit that you are watching these four students (i.e. don’t interview them, or purposefully take them aside) as that will unfairly mark them out from others. Instead, observe the class as you have been, but focus your attention on what these kids are doing.

What are they each doing across the day? How much and what kind of interaction do they have with the teacher, with other kids? Use the same techniques of generating field notes and then complete ‘thick descriptions’ to generate a narrative of each child’s participation in and experience of schooling. Link back to the focal points of the earlier observations to sharpen and deepen the information around those points.

These descriptions will be our data and once in NVivo we can start to analyse and compare how these kids might experience schooling differently or similarly – for example, the different kinds of interactions they have with the teacher, the resources given to them, the time they have to do different things. This will give us a picture of how schooling (which often seems to be the same model everywhere) can actually be experienced in different ways, even if subtly, by students.

*This school-based observational work can form the foundation of the community-level data collection. Ideally we would be following the ‘process tracing’ relational method of the project by then focusing our community interviews with the parents/family of the 4 kids.*