

1.5 Teacher Tool Box- Field notes



Field notes and observations are an important part of any project which is aligned to the principles of Human-Centered Design. It is essential for the designer to understand the environment and context that the project is to be implemented and there is nothing like getting a first-hand perspective. In the following paragraphs, you will find tips that will help solidify the understanding of the observation process and gathering field notes to be used with the Service-Learning project.



Descriptive Field Notes Tips

Subjects- Describe the way people are dressed, their mannerisms, their demeanor, way of speaking and way of acting. Start with an in-depth description initially in the field. Focus on things that set people apart with others or identify them.

Describe the Setting- take a picture or draw the setting so you can give a more complete description later. This might help you determine a service-project later when you reexamine the potential needs within the setting.

Activities- What is happening in the setting, who is interacting with who? What are the roles of the various subjects?

Observer behavior- What is your behavior and what are you thinking while you are taking the field notes. Be sure to note any biases while observing. This might taint your judgment and might effect the information that you are presenting.

Analyze your notes- These are personal accounts in the field. You will need to speculate on what you are learning about your community and about the subjects and their needs. Be sure to note patterns of behaviors and connections that you can see between the environment and the subjects that might be important when determining community needs and needs of stakeholders. Include thoughts that come to you while you are observing in the field.

Clarification- Note when you need additional clarification in the field that you may find confusing. This will give you questions that may need to be answered by a professional in the field.

Additional Questions: Be sure to write down additional questions. If you wonder about a situation, part of the environment, some behavior, this can be great information that will lead to quality reflection toward a well-defined project.

Resource:

Bogdan, R. C. Biklen., SK (2003). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theories and methods*.