M8.1

Who are the Students in the Classroom?

Arrange to visit a school in your community and take field notes based on your observations of students. Use the following to guide your observations and analysis. Observe as unobtrusively as possible in the classroom before any students arrive. Jot down notes as they begin to arrive. Some suggestions for your notes are as follows:

1. Notices who arrives first and last.
2. How many and what age and gender are the students in this class?
3. Do students remain in the same groups in the classroom as those in which they arrived?
4. Look at the overall spacing between groups. Is it uniform? Does it reflect furniture or resource location or friendship groups? Are there any cliques?
5. Who are the isolates?
6. How much movement between groups occurs? Do changes in groupings occur during the period.
7. What roles do particular students play? For example, who is the joker, the cynic, the teacher’s pet, the introvert, etc.?
8. Which students raise their hands most often and least often (or never) when the teacher asks a question? On which students does the teacher never call?
9. Is the behavior of the students who sit in the back corner of the room different from that of the rest of the class? What about the corners, the middle, and the front?
10. Which students seem to be paying most and least attention and what is the range of attention spans?
11. Which students ask for most help and whom do they ask (the teacher, nearby students)?
12. Which students receive the most praise and which receive the most criticism? Are students ignored?
13. Determine the extent of any division of labor in the class or within groups. Note different roles. Do all carry out the same tasks? Are roles and tasks fixed, or do they shift among students? Who seems to assign these roles or tasks? How smooth-running and cohesive is the class and is each group?
14. If there are groups, how much communication and sharing exists among them?
15. On which student does the teacher rely to help decide when to move on? When teachers decide to move on to another activity or topic, they commonly base this decision on their judgment that certain students have “gotten” the material. These students have been termed the “steering group.” Where do they stand in relation to the rest of the class in terms of ability?

Summarize your observations of the students in the classroom. Answer the following:

1. What are the prominent groups and how do the groups interact?
2. Who play key roles in relations among students and in terms of the lesson flow?
3. Are students that belong to a minority group treated differently than others?
4. Do any appear to participate in the class to a greater or lesser degree?
5. Are there certain kinds of activities in which minority students are more or less engaged?