***Rating Checklist***

A rating checklist specifies traits you are looking for in a product or performance and

allows the observer to assign levels of performance to each trait. This is similar to a rubric (below); however, whereas a rubric uses a sentence or more to provide a description of each level, a rating checklist uses one-word indicators (see Figure 6.6). I find rating checklists to be a more pragmatic method to use for collecting data for action research and for use in classroom assessment. The rating checklist in Figure 6.6 was used at the end of a science unit. Students evaluated their own level of performance on one side, and the teacher evaluated their performance on the other.

***Rubrics***

A rubric describes specific traits you are looking for in a student product or

performance (like the checklists above). It also describes the various levels of performance for each trait (see Figure 6.7). That is, instead of just assigning a number to each level (4 = outstanding, 3 = very good, etc.), it contains a description of each level. The purpose of a rubric is to provide consistency and accuracy of scoring. However, they are very time- intensive in their construction and use.

***Conferences and Interviews***

There is an important difference between conferences and interviews. In a conference

one or more students talk about their work or some aspect of classroom functioning. Prompts may be used to get students talking about a particular topic; however, lists of planned questions are not used. Conferences can be conducted individually or in small groups (focus groups). In an interview students respond to planned questions, which are best conducted on an individual basis.

**Individual Student Conferences**. Students should always do the majority of talking and lead the conversation in a conference. The exchange is open ended, and teacher questions are used simply as prompts to get students talking. Conferences can last anywhere from 2 to

15 minutes. Figure 6.8 contains a list of possible conference questions that can be used as prompts.

**Small-Group Conferences/Focus Groups**. In a small-group conference (sometimes known as focus groups) you meet with three to eight students at one time. This is an effective data-collecting method that allows you to see a number of students fairly quickly and watch

them interacting with each other. It is also a valuable teaching tool because students are able to hear and respond to the thoughts of other students. As in the individual conference, the teacher should talk as little as possible.

Small-group conferences can be adapted for use in a variety of situations. For example, it may be used to discuss subjects such as good books, current or historical events, research projects, writing projects, moral dilemmas, math skills, problem- solving skills, textbook reading assignments, homework problems, and personal issues. You cannot, however, assume that students instinctively know how to function in small groups. Thus, structure must be provided so that they know how to speak and respond to each other (see Figure 6.10). It is common to spend a few class sessions teaching students how to interact in small groups and to use students to help model the process. Each group can use a checklist to report its progress. This helps the group focus on the key elements of successful group behavior and provides you with another form of data (see Figure 6.11).

**In-Person Interviews.** An interview differs from a conference in that an interview consists of a specific set of questions prepared in advance and is teacher directed. The questions should be asked in the same order each time to maintain consistency. Figure 6.12 demonstrates a hierarchy of questions, going from lower-order closed-response questions to higher-order open-ended questions. Make sure to include both types in your interview.

***Video and Audio Recordings***

Video recordings (videotape and digital) provide you with information related to

students’ nonverbal behaviors, their location or movement throughout a lesson, and a general overview of your performance or pedagogical techniques. However, a video camera is an obtrusive instrument, and thus it creates a non-real teaching environment. One way to diminish this effect is by videotaping a great deal so that students get used to the camera. Another way is to use audio recordings (audiotape and digital). Audio recordings are

quicker, easier, less intrusive, more natural, and easy to listen to in a car or with a small handheld unit. Although you might miss nonverbal behaviors and movement, you will find that you get just as much important information with an audiotape. Chapter 15 describes a variety of strategies for using video- and audio recordings to examine your own teaching practice for professional development.

***Data Retrieval Charts***

Data retrieval charts (DRCs) are visual organizers that are used to help you (or your

students) collect and organize information. These come in a variety of forms. Bob Larson was teaching his sixth grade students the positive discussion elements (PDEs) as part of his social studies class (**Johnson, 2009**). He gave students a question related to an important current event topic and then put them in groups of five to discuss this topic. Each day he chose one group to observe during that day’s discussion. The DRC in Figure 6.14 was used to record the number and types of PDEs that occurred. This DRC provided data that could then be quantified and compared across grade level or over time. Gender differences can easily be compared by including an extra column (Figure 6.15).

Maps are a form of DRC that can be used to record where things occur in physical

space or students’ path as they move about the classroom, school, or playground. To do this create a simple map of that physical space. Record where behaviors occur by putting an ‘X’ in those observed spots. Record the paths students use by creating lines on that map. **Artifacts: Students’ Products or Performances**

Samples of students’ work (artifcats) can be used as data sources. Remember that you

do not need to collect every bit of students’ work; rather, take only representative samples at different time periods to give you a feel for students’ performances and their changes over time. It is often helpful to create a flexible schedule to determine when you will collect students’ work before you begin.

**Product and Performance**. Figure 6.16 shows a product and performance assessment form (PPAF). This rating checklist can be used to analyze and evaluate any type of product or performance, such as science projects, inventions, dramas, dances, or experiments. Incidentally, all forms described in this chapter can be used by both students and teachers. Just like teachers (Watts & Johnson, 1995), students who analyze and assess their own work become more critical and skillful practitioners.

***Attitude and Rating Scales***

Attitude and rating scales provide respondents with a question or statement for which

they are asked to select one of several answers that determine the strength of their response.

**Attitude Scales**. Students’ attitudes are assessed by asking them to respond to a series of statements in a way that indicates their level of agreement or disagreement. Attitude scales like this can quickly provide you with information about students’ attitudes and yield quantitative data that can be used to make comparisons. A 5-point rating scale is usually most effective for students in grades 3 and above.

***Online Surveys and Rating Scales***

There are a variety of web-based surveys, polls, questionnaires, forms, or ratings tools

that can be used for your action research projects. Below are some sites that are free or offer free basic packages:

Zoomerang at [www.zommeran.com](http://www.zommeran.com/) SurveyMonkey at [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com/) FreeOnlineSurveys at [www.freeonlinesurveys.com](http://www.freeonlinesurveys.com/) Bzoink at [www.bzoink.com](http://www.bzoink.com/)

Polldaddy at [www.polldaddy.com](http://www.polldaddy.com/) Questionform at [www.questionform.com](http://www.questionform.com/) Questionpro at [www.questionpro.com](http://www.questionpro.com/)

You can find additional web-based survey tools by using the search terms: *online- surveys-free*. These are the questions you should ask when selecting a web-based survey tool: Is it easy to use? Can I use and apply this tool with minimum of time and effort? Is it easy for respondents to access and use? Is it flexible? Does it fit my particular needs and research question? Does it give me the results in a way that is easy to understand and use?

If your district does not have an online platform, free chat rooms, blogs, and discussion groups can be found on the Internet using the search terms: *free-chat-rooms- online, free-discussion groups-online,* or *free-blogs.* Again, use extreme caution here. Make sure you get approval from a building principal or administrator before proceeding with one of these.

In using a chat room all participants must be on at the same time. I have found it most effective to create chat rooms consisting of three or four students. It is easier to communicate and find a common time with small groups, and you tend to get more and better information from all participants. It is hard to hide in a chat room of three or four.

Discussion groups or blogs are asynchronous. Students do not have to be on at the same time in order for them to be used. You tend to get a different type of information here as the responses do not have to be immediate. Students are able to think about and discuss topics over time. You can use both whole class and small group discussion groups. I have found that both are effective in action research projects. Blogs are best used for whole class discussions.

**Class Journals**. The class journal is a nontechnical version of the online platforms above. Simply provide a blank notebook that is passed around the class or put in a learning center for several weeks. Students then enter their thoughts, ideas, impressions, or any other forms of response such as pictures or diagrams.