Learning to deepen your OBSERVATION SKILLS in groups

Participation and Membership
Participation in group discussion and projects usually requires the sense of belonging known as membership, but some may feel connected to the group without participating.

1. Do you notice early arrivals and late departures (eagerness to spend time together), or late arrivals and early departures?
2. What are the greeting and parting behaviors? Do they bond the group?
3. Does everyone seem equally welcome? If not, who's most welcome? Least?
4. Who are the high participators? Who are the low participators?
5. Do you see any shift in participation, such as high participators becoming quiet or low participators speaking up? If so, why?
6. How are silent people treated? How is their silence interpreted? Who keeps the ball rolling? Why?
7. Are there "in" and "out" groups? What qualities distinguish each?
8. Who is in each? How are "in-group" and "out-group" people treated?
9. Is there informal voluntary (not assigned) subgrouping? Who's in the subgroups?

Influence
Influence differs from participation. Some people speak little to capture the group's attention, while others talk a lot but are rarely heeded.

10. Which group members are high in influence? Which are low in influence?
11. Are there shifts in influence? What do you think caused the shift?
12. Do you see rivalry in the group? If so, what effect does it have on members?

Communication
One of the most telling, but in fact the easiest, aspect of group process to observe is its communication pattern.

13. Who talks? For how long? How often?
14. Whom do people speak to? (Potential supporters? The whole group? No one at all?)
15. Who talks after whom?
16. Who interrupts whom?
17. What types of communication are used (statements, questions, tones of voice, facial expressions, sounds, or gestures)?

Decision-Making
Groups and individuals display a range of decision-making mechanisms. Some try to impose decisions on the group, while others seek consensus

18. Does anyone make a decision (for example, pick a discussion topic) and act on it without checking with other group members?
19. What effect does this behavior have on members?
20. Who supports another group member's suggestions? Does this support result in the two members deciding for the whole group?
21. How does this affect other members?
22. When faced with making a decision, does the group drift off topic? If so, who topic-jumps? Why do the group's discussions get scattered'

23. Does a majority push a decision over a minority's objections? Does the group always call for a vote and follow the "majority rules" idea?
24. Does anyone try to get all group members to weigh in on a decision?

25. Does anyone try to force a consensus? If so why? What happens?

26. Does anyone make contributions that are totally ignored?

27. If so, why?

Work Dynamics/Maintenance Functions Judge who keeps the ball rolling.

28. Are behaviors focused on the task at hand?

29. Does anyone goad the group to stay on task?

30. Who gets others involved in discussions?

31. Who cuts others off?

32. Does anyone try to summarize what has been said in the group?

33. Is anyone asking for facts, ideas, feelings, feedback, or alternatives?

34. How well do group members express their ideas?

35. How are group members' ideas rejected?

36. Does anyone try to integrate everyone's ideas, even if contradictory?

37. Is there a peacemaker? Does that member use objective (content-based) problem-solving techniques, try to pacify emotions, or both?

Atmosphere Class members' "chemistry" sets the emotional tone of the group.

38. Does the atmosphere encourage work, play, apathy or anger?

39. How is the emotional climate of the group/subgroup friendly or cold?

40. Do you observe "body language" signs of anger, frustration, irritation, friendship, or boredom?

41. Does anyone attempt to suppress conflict or unpleasantness? Does anyone foster them?

42. Are group members overly polite to one another? Are only positive feelings ever expressed? Do some group members consistently avoid giving any negative feedback?
43. Do you see any attempts to block the expression of intense feelings?

44. How is this done? How does it affect group member?

45. Do group members feel free to ask each other about feelings, or are questions restricted to intellectual topics or events outside the classroom experience?
46. Do particular members provoke or annoy others? Does anyone in the group observe or comment on them? How does such notice affect members?

Norms Some norms are helpful, but some may be harmful.

47. Do you notice participation norms such as turn-taking or limiting the length of comments?
48. Are there norms concerning the kinds of topics allowed, such as "no personal stuff·' or "no religion or politics"?
49. Do group members restrict their own behaviors as agreed (turning off phones, not reading during discussion, or not using insulting language)?
50. Do group members consciously abide by established codes of conduct, such as confirming that they understood a previous comment before objecting to it?