Low-Inference Data Collection

Background

Low inference data is observable data expressed in a non-judgmental way. A focus on low inference data – what one sees and hears – disciplines participants in the examination of facts that are rooted in what is actually going on in the school and not in their assumptions or inferences. Low-inference descriptions should also clearly indicate who does the actions; it should employ the active voice as opposed to the passive.

High-inference data, in contrast, is data to which one has added judgments or assumptions. High-inference data is described with subjective adjectives or qualifying language. Often, one may describe data with a non-judgmental tone, but use a seemingly innocuous or positive-sounding word to judge what they have seen (e.g., "The teacher is organized"). This is not low-inference because the observer has *drawn a conclusion* that the teacher's files are organized without detailing what s/he has seen that indicates this.

As observers, we eventually want to draw conclusions and decide on strategies to address areas for improvement, but not before we can be sure we have accurate and reliable data that is as objective and measurable as possible.

Low Inference	High Inference
Teacher used SmartBoard to work through the word problem, highlighting content terms (sum), bracketing numbers (17, 23), and crossing out certain words ("on their way to the movies")	Good use of technology
19 of 22 students were slanting toward the teacher while she explained the Assign Yourself	Students were engaged
Students grouped in triads, with 7 out of 10 triads having a mixture of boys and girls, 2 having just boys, and 1 having only girls; no clear roles assigned or visual instructions on behavior expectations for group interactions	Cooperative grouping
Teacher said, "I see Robert, Victor, and Israel all on task. Miguel, sit up and continue with the problem." Student sat up immediately	Teacher's tone was positive and respectful
Teacher asked students "Of the two choices, which will be the most likely to produce the outcome we want?" (evaluation)	Teacher asked higher-order thinking skills
Teacher called on 5 separate students in 3 minutes, 2 of which were boys, four of which were all in the front row	Teacher seemed to be strategically calling on students