



Observing Teaching

Professor Paul Blackmore

Coventry University, UK

Professor Sue Law

University of Warwick, UK



Key Questions

- What is good teaching?
- Why observe teaching?
- Who should observe teaching?
- How may teaching be recorded?
- How should the observation be conducted?
- How should feedback be given?



What is good teaching?

Good teaching is

It is characterised by



Why observe?

Development

- Tentative
- Ongoing /formative
- Private

Judgement

- Definite
- Summative
- Public outcomes

Other ways of “observing”

- Video and audio recording
- Student questionnaires and interviews
- Portfolio of evidence

Who should observe teaching?

- **Characteristics:**

- trust
- credibility
- subject expertise
- training


- **Relationship:**

- peer
- a senior member of staff
- outside “expert”



Some useful categories

- Teacher
- Learner
- Content
- Process
- Material / Physical



Teaching Quality Assessors' prompts

- a. What were the objectives of the class? Were they appropriate?
- b. Did the member(s) of staff outline the structure and purpose of the class?
- c. Could the member(s) of staff be seen and heard?
- d. Were the key points emphasised?
- e. Were the explanations clear to the students?
- f. Were the examples and analogies appropriate?
- g. Was the class stimulating for the students?
- h. Was there variation of activity?
 - i. Did the member(s) of staff ask or invite questions or other forms of student participation?
 - j. Did the member(s) of staff cite references and/or refer to relevant research or scholarship?
- k. Did the member(s) of staff summarise key points and conclusions?



Observation frameworks - some issues

- Generic / specific
- Complexity
- Accessible / usable
- Spurious objectivity
- How chosen
- How used
 - a record?
 - an aide-memoire?
 - a feedback sheet?



Conducting the observation

Pre-observation meeting

- time and place
- status and history of the group
- location of class within course/module/programme
- aims and objectives of specific session
- learning outcomes (what students should have learned)
- potential difficulties or areas of concern
- specific focus, such as session management or questioning technique
- assessment instruments
- any particular concerns the observer might have
- ground rules for confidentiality and feedback



Preparing the students

- Colleague will be attending
- He or she is there to help you with your teaching
- He or she will play no part in the class proceedings



Observing the class

- Be unobtrusive,
- Be discreet and diplomatic
- Focus upon teaching and learning processes, rather than content
- Continuously check the interaction between teachers and students
- Be mainly concerned with gathering evidence for later interpretation

Giving feedback

- Discuss session, preferably immediately
- Be informal
- Stick to agreed ground rules for feedback



Role of observer

- Listen carefully to the teacher's account
- Stick to description initially
- Praise first
- Be sensitive in bringing points to the teacher's attention
- Be constructive about identifying courses of action
- Be prepared to give opinion - eventually.



Process of feedback

Some useful starter questions:

- Did it go as you intended?
- What were the strong points?
- What were the less strong points?
- What would you do differently?

Process of feedback


Observer's view

- **Consolidate** (what is being done well?)
- **Extend** (what is done well but might be extended?)
- **Enhance** (what is satisfactory but might be better?)
- **Remove**
- **Change / innovate** (new ideas)



Teacher's role

- Listening to the observer's narrative
- Avoiding defensiveness
- Seeing it as an opportunity to reflect
- Responding constructively to advice



Both teacher and observer should ...

- Focus upon the process rather than the content
- Return the feedback to track if it becomes either anecdotal or judgmental
- Maintain the confidentiality of the procedure

Some observation debates

- Aren't we really concerned with learning rather than teaching?
- Is there a single best way to teach anything?
- Is excellence different, qualitatively, from competence?
- Is one person's judgement any better than another's, or just another partial view?
- Aren't you assessing the students and the facilities too?
- Doesn't teaching observation emphasise the formal, easy-to-assess aspects of teaching?