



Improving Teaching & Learning with Student Observers

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Student Observers

What?

- Observations involve pupils being trained as researchers
- Producing data/facts/figures as a result of observing teaching
- Being involved in discussions about teaching and learning

Why?

- It is in the interests of both pupils and teachers to improve classes
- Involving pupils in their own learning is important
- Thinking about what makes their teaching good is important for teachers

Who?

- Genuinely interested people – both pupils and staff
- Anyone who regularly attends school
- Anyone who has been trained in observation techniques

How would it work?

- A number of pupils would be trained in observation techniques
- Teachers and pupils would then discuss the programme of observation
- The teacher and observer would agree times and dates for observations
- Observations would take place
- Possible discussions may follow the research

The Rules

- Teachers have to choose to take part
- Only trained pupils can act as observers
- Both observer(s) and teacher(s) need to agree the focus of the observations
- Observation data and materials should be given to the teacher to help them think about their teaching
- Observations should always be negotiated and agreed in advance

Case Study: Forest Gate Community School Students as Researchers

Members of the executive committee of the school council asked the SLT if they could become more involved with issues of teaching and learning. Teachers were invited to volunteer to take part in a pilot programme whereby students would observe their lessons and provide feedback through a debriefing session.

It was essential for the staff to feel comfortable with the process, therefore they were involved in setting boundaries; they discussed the techniques that would be used, what they would be observing, how the feedback would be given and where it would be used.

The School Council Teaching and Learning committee were trained in:

- How to work with staff to identify measurable and impartial things to observe
- How to conduct the observations
- How to give constructive feedback to staff
- How to maintain confidentiality

The students observed gender bias, types of questioning and behaviour.

Staff felt very satisfied with the process and felt it had improved relationships with students and given them a fresh perspective and new ideas on their teaching methods.

Students felt that they were being taken seriously and contributing to the school. A Y9 pupil commented: *"This has helped me to see things in pupils and teachers eyes"* Following the success of the pilot, many more departments in the school have volunteered for student observers to work with staff.

Observation techniques

1. Coverage of room

The observation involves a map showing the teacher's coverage during a lesson

Resources

Map of room
Pen

How can it be used?

The map produced as a result of the observation can inform the teacher about their coverage of the room detailing which areas of the room the teacher visits and how often. Once the teacher has seen which areas are visited too little or too often they can begin to reflect on reasons why.

The map can be shared with the rest of the class who can then be challenged or involved in producing reasons for the teacher's coverage. Whole classes can be engaged in this discussion and in suggesting solutions. Teachers can continue using the mapping procedure to monitor changes.

2. Time spent on/off task

An individual pupil is tracked during a lesson, so that the observer shows when the pupil is clearly on or off task.

Resources

Printed sheet with a table for the minute by minute break down of the lesson and the activities that they could be engaging in
Watch with a second hand
Pen

How can it be used?

An individual can be tracked in a lesson to see when they are engaged or disengaged. It can also be useful in exploring how pupils respond to different teaching methodologies and tasks during the course of a lesson. After reflection, the observation can be repeated and used to aid monitoring as the teacher wishes.

3. Types of task within lesson

Observer records from a list - supplied by the teacher - the amount and types of different activities during the lesson

Resources

Printed sheet with a table listing the activities and teaching methodologies

Pen
Watch

How can it be used?

The observer records how many minutes are spent using each method to help the teacher reflect on the amount, variety and length given to each. The observer can record a one off lesson or a series of lessons which might make up a unit of work.

The whole class may benefit from being involved in the discussions about how the lessons are divided between different activities and tasks and how they felt about each one.

4. Use of teacher time

The observer records how much teacher time, talk and attention goes to boys and how much to girls.

Resources

Stop watches for each observer
Printed sheets with the activity/ issue being observed
2 different coloured pens – one for boys and one for girls

How can it be used?

It has been acknowledged that boys demand more attention than girls. This technique allows teachers to examine their own practice and any gender bias' within their own classes. Again the technique can be repeated to allow the teacher to monitor changes. Or the class itself can be presented with the results and involved in a discussion about how or why imbalances are occurring and what, if anything needs to change.

5. Tracking teacher encounters

The observer records the number of encounters the teacher has with each pupil in the room.

Resources

A map of the class showing where individuals sit

How can it be used?

It can give the teacher vital feedback about how often individual pupils are receiving help - as well as how often they are asking for it. The observer can distinguish between whether the interaction was teacher led or pupil initiated which can in itself raise important issues for the class and teacher to reflect upon.

It should be noted that this list is not intended to be complete or exhaustive, but instead an introduction to the type of techniques that teachers have available to them. Teachers are welcome – and indeed actively encouraged – to invent or try other ways of employing observers, or using the observation exercise as a way of stimulating discussions with their pupils and classes.

General Guidance for Trainee Observers

First of all, I want to thank you for agreeing to be involved in the pilot. We are really hoping that through your involvement we can make a real difference to the teaching and learning that happens in your school.

Secondly, there are some very important things that need to be considered before you start:

- You are in a very **privileged position**; do not abuse it
- The teachers you will be working with are trusting you to act in a mature and **respectful manner** – if you want the pilot to be successful (and the chance to work in collaboration with staff again) your attitude and role in the pilot will be crucial
- Some teachers may find this pilot challenging, it is your role to be **objective** not critical
- You have been chosen because of your maturity – **set an example** as you may be asked to train other, younger pupils
- Any information associated with the observations is **confidential**, should not be discussed with anyone and belongs to the teacher.
- The **teacher is in control** of the schedule; you are there to assist
- You may find the recording quite intensive; don't worry with **practice** you'll get better at it
- **Be discreet** - try not to draw attention to yourself when in classes. Do not speak to the teacher directly – you should both know well in advance what is happening and agree beforehand where you will sit. If necessary make a point of seeing the teacher the day before just to clarify that they are expecting you, will have prepared the class and thought about where they'd like you to sit
- You will need to arrive with all the resources and **materials you need**. In effect your presence should make no difference to the conduct of the class – this will not be true if you are hassling miss for paperwork and a pencil
- Do not engage in conversation with anyone in the class during the observation lesson – even if they are your friends, **do not discuss** with anyone what you are doing during the observation lesson

General Guidance for Staff being Observed

Before being observed, you will have met your observer to discuss what you would like them to monitor and how many times. All paperwork should be agreed before the day so that you both know exactly what to expect. The observer should know where they are going to sit and come with all the equipment they need, e.g. paper, pens, stopwatch etc.

This is about beginning a dialogue with learners about their learning, as well as facilitating discussion about teaching practice - it is not about individuals or personalities. Please remember that the observers are new to this too and they may need to practice and hone their observation skills.

- Try to be as normal as possible
- Do not speak to the observer unless totally necessary
- Prepare the class by telling them someone is coming in to watch you not them
- Ask them not to speak to the observer as they are busy all lesson recording
- Meet with your observer beforehand to agree seating, ensure they have the resources or materials they need to carry out the observation
- Arrange a time to debrief the observer and share the experience

Guidance for Debriefing

The teacher needs to think about how much of the process they want to share with the class as a whole – so it is crucial that the observer respects the confidential nature of the pilot.

It is up to the teacher what happens to the information/data produced in the observations. It is also up to the teacher to decide what involvement they'd like the observer to have next. This could include a general discussion or debrief following the observation(s) where both parties ask

- What does the data indicate about the area of focus?
- What do we think this data indicates and do we both agree?
- Do we need help analysing the data we have or can we draw some conclusions ourselves?
- If we need help who else might be able to help us reflect?
- Are there strategies we would like to try in the next class to address what has shown up here?
- Are there any changes we'd like to make to the observation methodology to allow us to gain other, extra data that would be useful?
- Do we need to involve other people by sharing this info with them?
- What are our next steps?
- When is our next scheduled observation appointment?
- Are we clear about what will happen then?

After the initial debrief the teacher could present the findings to the class as a whole and ask for responses, comments, feedback or suggestions. In any debrief, whether with an individual or a whole class, everyone needs to make sure that certain basic rules of courtesy apply. Comments should be couched positively and opinions ventured rather than blame. If you are struggling with particular issues of control and behaviour do not be afraid to confront the class with the evidence you now have; students taking responsibility - both for their learning and any behaviour that prevents it - is a large part of improving teaching.

Lesson Observation Template

Teacher:

Student(s):

Area of focus:

Use of questions

- *Amount of questions asked*
- *Type of questions asked*
- *logging/mapping who answers questions*
- *recording/logging wait times*

Methodology:

One observer will record every time a question is asked – later this may develop into more sophisticated data collection – dealing with the types of questions, both open and closed.

One observer will map the teacher's direction of questions recording on a seating plan who answers and where they sit.

Another observer will monitor the wait time. These could be done alongside each other with two observations being done during the same lesson.

Programme of observation:

- *4 weeks of intensive observation with KS3*
- *Followed by a debrief*

Resources required

- *Two students to carry out observations during class time*
- *Resource sheets to log questions, questions and interactions and room plans*

Date(s) for observations:

Time(s):

Teacher Evaluation

Teacher Name (*optional*): _____ Observer (*optional*): _____

1. How many observations took place? _____

2. What data was the observer collecting?

3. Did the observer arrive on time? Yes No

4. Did the observer behave in a professional manner at all times? Yes No

If no, please detail what you were unhappy with

5. Please comment on today's debriefing, noting how useful it was and things you have learnt:

6. If you will you be changing anything / an aspect of how you teach as a result of the observation, please give details below:

7. Any suggestions on how your observation experience could be improved?

8. Will you be taking part in any more student observations? (*please explain*)

Thank You

Student Evaluation

Teacher: _____ Observer: _____

1. How many observations took place? _____

2. What data was the observer collecting?

3. Did the teacher arrive on time? Yes No

4. Did the teacher let you carry out your job uninterrupted? Yes No

If no, please explain what happened:

5. Please comment on today's debriefing, noting how useful it was and things you have learnt:

6. Do you think anything will be changing as a result of the observation you did? (*Please explain*):

7. Any suggestions on how your observation experience could be improved?

8. Will you be taking part in any more student observations? *please explain*

Thank You