

Classroom Observations?

Teachers' responses and reactions

This is a review of one hundred comments from the LinkedIn professional group, “Teacher Training and Education” with 73,278 members; gathered during March and April 2016 in answer to the question.. **“Classroom Observations? Reactions?”**

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Classroom Observations

The three main purposes of classroom observations are:

- Assessment of a teacher's skills, which may be pay-related
- Professional development, by mentor or peer.
- Induction, of newly-recruited teacher or a trainee teacher

Executive Summary

The responses were assessed to be in one of these four categories, and the percentages of the total responses are shown in (brackets)

- I. Positive responses (51%)
- II. Quite positive responses (31%)
- III. Quite negative responses (15%)
- IV. Negative responses (3%)

Overview

Positive + quite positive = 82%

Negative + quite negative = 18%

Contents of this booklet

Part One

Review and analysis of teachers' responses and reactions to the question “Classroom observations?”

Part Two

Review and analysis of a training course for “Classroom observations and feedback.” developed and run by Martin Richards.

Classroom Observations? - Teachers responses and reactions

In March and April 2016, I asked the following succinct question on the LinkedIn group “Teacher Training and Education” “**Classroom Observations? Reactions?** There was an immediate, and ongoing (June 2016) flood of responses, which I have collated and summarise here.

I - Positive responses

What made the experience of classroom observations positive?

THEMES

The teachers' comments are sorted into themes, so you may more quickly get an overview.

Accepting

- I am sure it's completely necessary in order to improve your skills
- If a teacher has a positive attitude towards observation of teaching performance, that teacher eventually learn to do ongoing self evaluation, to reflect, to identify strengths and weaknesses,
- Embracing observation of teaching/ learning as a worthwhile instructional enhancement, can propel an ordinary teacher to an outstanding professional.
- Observations are a way for me to gather feedback about possible ways to improve
- You get immediate feedback
- I accept all comments whether positive or negative.
- I was aware that this observation would lead to a fruitful discussion post the session
- Great, some feedback on my teaching - someone to talk with first hand about what I am doing in my classroom.
- I think it should be taken sportingly

Relationship is important

- The senior teacher and me are partners
- I loved being observed by my colleagues to help me improve my teaching.
- I had a good administrator who afterwards put me at ease
- I would welcome my peers to observe me and give me feedback. I have learned most of my best practices from observing other teachers
- Create professional dialogue
- Classroom observations only work when both, observer and teacher are true to themselves.
- To improve they way of being a teacher WE had to work a lot: meetings before and after the lessons
- It should be done in a safe environment between the teacher and the observer.
- Intelligent and trustful relationships between teacher and students have to be observed and shared!
- I do really like to reflect on the process with colleagues, find it a very useful and energising
- If positively taken by both the one being observed and the one observing, observations can help us to grow professionally.

Have targets, check-list, (observation) skills, tools

- When both sides know the target and tools, why not?
- The administrators use detailed rubrics for lesson planning, lesson delivery and professional development outcomes.

- The key factor has been the knowledge, skills and understanding of the observer.
- Feedback should be constructive and actionable.
- Observation is good if the observer is good and smart enough to identify your strong and weak points
- Should be based on some special factors.
- We should be given a checklist as well before observation.
- I ask the observer to watch out for certain things for me!

Generally positive

- I appreciate professional feedback
- Observing others classes will also gives you chance to learn many new strategies. As teachers we motivate children to be brave to face challenges of life. We need to practice it with ourselves first.
- A bonus when I received meaningful/constructive feedback.
- Valuable feedback makes us grow in our profession.
- No plan survives contact with the enemy
- A positive or negative feedback is also a plus;
- Observations should be seen as support and praise
- They may see things that I miss and bring them to my notice.
- A more thorough understanding can be gathered that way.
- It made me reflect upon my own practice too
- Teachers observation is a two way process
- Teachers observation and feedback when given in a very productive and positive ways, can be very empowering, motivating

Teachers' actual comments

1. I go with that - observer, being observed, always **learn from observing ...**
2. I'm a second year teacher (still feel like 1st year) and have **benefited greatly from observations.**
3. Carry on as normal and do what you do best
4. Interesting, would be good to show how you do it and to receive feedback.
5. I'm heartened to hear these comments, as a researcher who observes teachers in their classrooms :). How much does **trust and respect** play into your **willingness to be observed**? I work hard at developing both with my participant teachers.
6. If the observation gives targeted and specific feedback then it's worthwhile. Both the observed and the observer must be using a tool that is well known by each
7. Just after several observations during half a year... and I like it. **The senior teacher and me are partners** trying to do their best on the same journey. I'm not able to see myself during lessons so **I appreciate professional feedback**, not only from my students or my own impressions. There are so many important details good to know. I'm a teacher who is paid also (not only) according to the result of the observation and it works well. **When both sides know the target and tools, why not?** Other interesting question for me is the student, his feelings and behavior during the observations...
8. I have been a teacher at ECE, elementary, secondary and tertiary levels for half a century. I can recall being observed at institutional level by school administrators, as a teacher in training at the Teachers' College, during final assessment for certification and as a master teacher to produce a video. Observation was beneficial because I was able to apply the feedback for improvement. **If a teacher has a positive attitude towards observation of teaching performance, that teacher eventually learn to do ongoing self evaluation, to reflect, to identify strengths and weaknesses**, and make immediate changes for improvement in order to facilitate learning. **Embracing observation of teaching/ learning as a worthwhile instructional enhancement, can propel an ordinary teacher to an outstanding professional.**

9. I love to observe other teachers to see how to improve my teaching when I was teaching. **I loved being observed by my colleagues to help me improve my teaching.** When it is observations for those reasons we all should look forward to it.
10. A few years ago, just thinking about the idea of being observed, made me nervous. Nowadays, **I am sure it's completely necessary in order to improve your skills** as a teacher
11. When I first started teaching it made me very nervous. Luckily **I had a good administrator who afterwards put me at ease** and let me know all the things I was doing right. Now that I have more experience **I would welcome my peers to observe me and give me feedback. I have learned most of my best practices from observing other teachers** and would love to pass my experiences on.
12. Its fun.. cause **you get immediate feedback** about your class which I am sure you won't be getting from your students. Its one way to know your strengths and challenges on which you can work upon. Also **observing others classes will also gives you chance to learn many new strategies.** As per my view observation should be taken as reflection , it only helps you to improve.
13. **As teachers we motivate children to be brave to face challenges of life. We need to practice it with ourselves first.** As children observe our behaviour all the time it is important for us to show them that we are confident during our tests.
14. I welcomed the opportunity of being observed. It felt important during my time in the classroom for my administrators to have an awareness of what was taking place and **a bonus when I received meaningful/constructive feedback.**
15. I think you can learn when you are being observed, provided there is good feedback. Things you think are good might even become better when taught in a different way. That's why I always ask the trainee teachers I train to give me feedback on my way of teaching.
16. Ha hafunniest part is ...Management always asked teachers to observe my classes and learn the method of interaction and implicationsand when I really was assigned to Judge them....they weren't comfortableits as simpleif we do our work sincerely we need not have any problem if someone is watching over Us...**valuable feedback makes us grow in our profession.**
17. It's about breaking down the barriers and ensuring that the purpose of observations is not seen to be to tackle underperformance, but to **create professional dialogue**, share best practice and help identify skills gaps which can be addressed
18. As a former Instructional Coach, I tried to instill a mindset that observations are not meant to be threatening or harmful. I do feel that merit pay hurt observations, it helped to stop collaboration as well.
19. Forget about whoever is observing and enjoy my lesson plan
20. I don't mind it is what it is. I work with challenging students and am a great believer in Rommel's quote, **no plan survives contact with the enemy.** Plan, plan again and be prepared to wing it.
21. When you're a veteran teacher it doesn't bother you!
22. Anyone who likes can come and observe my lessons. I focus on my students and the tasks more than the observers. **A positive or negative feedback is also a plus;** a positive one will motivate me and the negative one will teach me something :)
23. It is fine as a professional, we should not mind being observed doing our job. How many people walk by a building site and watch what is going on? **Observations should be seen as support and praise**, why would you be concerned if teaching is good or outstanding. Not wanting to be observed and keep the dark art of teaching a secret.
24. **Intelligent and trustful relationships between teacher and students have to be observed and shared!** So much is going on in a classroom. As a teacher I will be ready to learn from what the observer saw, and I ask the observer to enjoy the experience and get ready to learn about the subject and the way it is taught. Still I believe that Time develops learning relationships, and observations themselves ask intelligence and trust.
25. Preparation is key. Great teachers are never caught off-guard by an observation because they are always prepared for the lesson. The time put into doing it right day in and day out will manifest itself in a calm and effective lesson during an observation. No need to change anything. And the kids won't even notice because the bar will have been set high.
26. I'm very relaxed about it, although slightly unnerved if it is a senior member of staff with a clip board and the potential for a frown. **I do really like to reflect on the process with colleagues, find it a very useful and energising**
27. Years ago there was little structure to the observations which made people uneasy. Today **the administrators use detailed rubrics for lesson planning, lesson delivery and professional development outcomes.** So we're all on the same page and I can see where I may need some new ideas or methods. It's more instructive and beneficial for everyone.
28. Being a mentor for undergraduate students who do their practicum, I am used to having someone observing my lesson and my classes. However, I don't object to colleagues coming in my classes and observing. **They may see things that I miss and bring them to my notice.** They may suggest different approaches that I've never thought before. Generally, I believe that collaboration is better.
29. I too love observations and use them as tools to showcase my delivery and interaction. It is unorthodox as a Marine but effective.

30. Observation is so important, but it should be done throughout the whole year, and during several lessons, not only once or twice, to ensure that the teacher is being evaluated fairly. The idea of placing monitoring cams in the classrooms would serve perfectly in this case, as they reveal the real performance of the teacher without making him feel stressed or confused. However many teachers would reject this idea.
31. For me, **Observation is good if the observer is good and smart enough to identify your strong and weak points**. And to make it more effective, there must be a pre and post observation conference between the observer and the teacher.
32. I absolutely love the idea of being observed during a lesson. Not only do I like the idea of being observed during a lesson, but I also welcome the idea of being observed for partial days, since I think **a more thorough understanding can be gathered that way**. It can provide a clearer view as to how a typical day runs. **Observations are a way for me to gather feedback about possible ways to improve** as a Teacher Practitioner and possibly provide the observer with ideas to share with other practitioners.
33. **Classroom observations only work when both, observer and teacher are true to themselves**. Being positive about the all process helps to achieve the main goal, which is learning how to get the best out of students.
34. I have worked as an observer for four years, in a partnership with a university, and I can tell you it is not an easy job! But it is amazing what you can improve as a teacher and as an observer. The teachers I observed were young teachers finishing they training degree. It was they first year of teaching in a school. **To improve they way of being a teacher WE had to work a lot: meetings before and after the lessons**, building up materials for the pupils, testing them, observing pupils reactions in the classroom, ... Keeping an open mind, embracing the challenge, and work together as a team. It is a great job. My favorite so far!
35. I also had to observe Trainee Teachers as I mentored them through their PGCEs. I enjoyed observing their professional practice since I genuinely felt that I took as much from the whole experience as my students did. **It made me reflect upon my own practice too** which can never be a bad thing.
36. I believe **teachers observation is a two way process**, whilst observing teachers in training, although new to the professions, they had a great deal to offer me, as I have often felt that as much as they were gaining from my feedback I was also gaining from what they were offering, especially mature individuals who were bringing with them life practical skills from other areas of their life, it also enabled me to reflect on my own practice and also gave me some skills which I feel that I can also implement into my own practice. **Teachers observation and feedback when given in a very productive and positive ways, can be very empowering, motivating** and a vehicle for professional and self development.
37. Well, actually I think observations are indeed helpful but it **should be based on some special factors**. The most important factor is that, it shouldn't be on a very first session of the class . Anyway, this is a great way for gathering information and localizing the strengths and weaknesses of both teachers and students.
38. Observation is excellent since it helps us improve our lessons and teaching. I agree on a pre and post meeting including feedback. **We should be given a checklist as well before observation**.
39. Teacher observation is a very important tool for professional development, however, **it should be done in a safe environment between the teacher and the observer**. To introduce this approach in my school, I videotaped my session and I presented it to teachers in a workshop to evaluate me. I have supported them with some rubrics and they enjoyed doing it. By the end, I did my own reflection shedding light on what- went-wrong (www) and even -better- if (EBF) issues. Since that time, teachers were asking for peer-coaching for development.
40. I worked more than 15 years as teacher educator, I think it is necessary for trainee teachers to have healthy classroom interactions & teaching skills
41. It is very important . However, we understand it is unnerving as hell but we always tell teachers that it is for scaffolding and hand-holding. It is a very positive activity. Without class observations , teaching learning cannot be progressed
42. I don't mind being observed! It's very helpful for me with my teaching. **I ask the observer to watch out for certain things for me!** For example, do I call on the same scholars all of the time! Observations help me grow and stay on my toes!!!
43. From my years of teaching I have learnt that the majority of teachers don't feel comfortable when it comes to being observed teaching but they forget that they are under observation of their learners. Learners may not be writing any observations for us teachers but they are the greatest observers of our teaching. Personally I don't see anything bad in being observed delivering a lesson. **If positively taken by both the one being observed and the one observing, observations can help us to grow professionally**. However when teachers know that they will be observed by someone else they tend to behave in an abnormal way. Lack of adequate preparedness tend to make teachers hate observations. If well prepared a teacher will welcome any observation whether he or she has been informed in advance.
44. I've observed nearly 1000 lessons as an inspector, perhaps a hundred as a consultant, and monitored around 3000 observations as a lead inspector. I've also been observed myself, probably around 60 times. In all of this experience, **the key factor has been the knowledge, skills and understanding of the observer**. Without this, the experience is bound to be negative.
45. Classroom observations are part of the process for growth of the teacher or as a learning tool for other

teachers. If the teacher is doing a good job, an observation can be done at anytime.

46. I am observed on a regular basis as we work in an open learning environment. There are always teachers floating and working collaboratively. I won't say it is always easy but it is a necessary part of our own professional development as is self reflection.
47. It's piece of the puzzle to becoming of reflective teacher. **Feedback should be constructive and actionable.**
48. I have been observed many times in class, and I have enjoyed it because the feedback and comments from observers are crucial to my becoming an effective teacher. I look forward to these observations and especially look forward to the individual comments/feedbacks. **I accept all comments whether positive or negative.**
49. I have been a teacher, and since classroom observations were a regular part of our process, so I got pretty used to it, and could perform better and be prepared better, as **I was aware that this observation would lead to a fruitful discussion post the session.** I used to be excited about it!
50. My first reaction is, "**Great, some feedback on my teaching - someone to talk with first hand about what I am doing in my classroom.**"
51. **I think it should be taken sportingly** it provides you a self evaluation platform and working over your weaknesses ...

Classroom Observations? - Teachers responses and reactions

II - Quite positive responses

THEMES

The comments are sorted into themes, so you may more quickly get an overview.

Accept them

- It's just part of the process of teaching.
- As a teacher being observed is part of the job.
- It didn't bother me for years.
- I have gotten used to being observed
- First thoughts: OMG! Why? A second later: it doesn't matter.
- Typically I don't let observations bother me
- If one is doing what they are supposed to be doing

What's positive, in general

- At first, it is really uncomfortable
- Depends what class...;)
- I will certainly cringe when I know a scheduled one is coming but I want feedback,
- Observations are good for teaching. I enjoy hearing feedback.

Positive that the right person observes

- Being observed is more about the observer than about the observed.
- Observations are very helpful if they are done by the right persons
- However, observations that were given by administrators were a bit "offensive" though I believe it all depends on how observers give their comments and feedback.
- I have always found that the advice is always delivered and accepted if the reflection comes from a colleague as opposed to a supervisor.
- If its colleague related and involves co-operation and mentoring, great idea.
- The best observers I have had were the ones (real teachers even though not currently teaching) who came back at a later date with material
- It depends on who is doing the observation, and how much they know
- I encourage colleagues to come into one difficult group I have

Announced, planned observations

- I find the announced visits to be so much more stressful than the unannounced visits.

Role model for growth through challenges

- We expect our professional mentor teacher to treat us kindly in their judgements of our performance, just as our students have the same expectations of their teachers: us. It is no different.

What's not so positive (some warning signs)

- A new teacher evaluation system and constant negative feedback had me so paranoid about

anyone coming into my room...

- For me, I am this kind of person who gets confused and overwhelmed when I am under observation, and I don't do well.
- While I can see it as an invasion, it's also how you get better ideas.
- I can say that ignoring your observer completely is the best way ever
- My natural intolerance is exaggerated by those who wander (ever so professionally!) into the classroom arena on the pretext of encouraging or discouraging observation.
- I found it incredibly difficult to convince colleagues that an "extra pair of eyes and ears" was much more beneficial than "an extra pair of hands."
- I am always a bit miffed when one of the SMT decide to come in to 'share a lesson.'
- No "dog and pony" show because you are being observed.

Teachers' actual comments

1. **Depends what class...;**) but generally proud to let them see it
2. I learned quite a lot from class observations. Peer-observations
3. **If one is doing what they are supposed to be doing**, are well prepared, know their curriculum, know their students, the door should always be open and welcoming to anyone to come in and "participate " in the class. I remember one time I gave an observer the assignment to do/ follow along with the class and even tried to engage them with the activity, they were not very happy with me. I never could figure out why...
4. I don't mind it. We normally have people coming through our classrooms. Sometimes even parents become observers. **Observations are good for teaching. I enjoy hearing feedback.** It makes me a better teacher
5. **I have gotten used to being observed.** Aren't my students, parents, co-workers watching me? Don't get me wrong, **I will certainly cringe when I know a scheduled one is coming but I want feedback**, I want to grow and learn how to reach my students better and to teach to the best of my ability. If I am missing something tell me, if I am doing a great job tell me :-)
6. How do we help teachers to understand and accept the positive effects of being observed by others and not feel negatively about it?
7. We are graded based on our observations and performance and this does affect our pay. **Typically I don't let observations bother me**, though my current school can be a little volatile... the administrative team has changed 4 times in less than 2 years, so we never know if the changes we made since our last observation are recognized.
8. **I encourage colleagues to come into one difficult group I have** (but my Manager has stopped this) as I'd value their input. Recently I attempted to take in all mobile phones before the lesson (I'd cleared this action with my Manager...
9. **It depends on who is doing the observation, and how much they know.** The catastrophic error of 2005 was to say that any inspector could inspect anything. This is ignorance, impure and simple.
10. **At first, it is really uncomfortable** though, but if you're a serious teacher, I don't think this gonna be an issue. I simply think that it would also be my opportunity to share my best and even bad practices that we both could learn. We normally do our self reflection, do a post conference and exchange constructive comments.
11. I really think the bottom line is, just be the teacher you are all the time. **No "dog and pony" show because you are being observed.** Give to your students 100% all the time. That's why you trained to be a professional educator. To instill, to encourage, to impact, to embrace, or any other analogy you, yourself can come up with , to help students learn.
12. I concentrate on my tasks.
13. **If its colleague related and involves co-operation and mentoring, great idea.** If its data related and involves 'inspectors' its outdated and obsolete.
14. I love to be observed (weird?!).When I was observed by the HM himself, I felt so great - at last somebody was looking at my practice, and his expression right through the lesson and the questions he asked the children after that told me a mountain of facts about my lesson and how I generally teach! When coordinators come in to observe my lessons, I feel the same, that somebody can look at my practice and go away thinking that a job is being done in an innovative and result orientated way, rather than have an assumption of how I teach and then make silly and unwarranted remarks on my appraisal form! How I hated that! However there are other kinds of observers who haven't a clue about good practice, who are not excited by clever innovations, who miss the point and never take into consideration what the children got out of it, who are stuck themselves in some God - forsaken place in their most likely forgotten days of teaching practice! **The best observers I have had were the ones (real teachers even though not currently teaching) who came back at a later date with material** that might be useful to me for enhancing my teaching practice, because they were excited - their own

words - by what I had done!

15. **First thoughts: OMG! Why? A second later: it doesn't matter.** Everyone can come and observe me our my class. We will have a reflection talk afterwards. So that can be a great opportunity to learn for both sides.
16. The purpose of the observation is reflection by the teacher giving the lesson... This being the case **I have always found that the advice is always delivered and accepted if the reflection comes from a colleague as opposed to a supervisor.** Both of these concepts were sold to teachers across Australia... Supervisors however evaluate... If they can't trust us to be professional we certainly shouldn't trust them to evaluate our professionalism..
17. Having been observed many times over about 12 years, **I can say that ignoring your observer completely is the best way ever**, that is, act like there is nothing new!
18. It is a necessary thing in a lot of instances. **While I can see it as an invasion, it's also how you get better ideas.** Sometimes you are too close to a problem and some constructive criticism will help you improve.
19. When I was observed by colleagues and they gave me some comments. These comments were really helpful. **However, observations that were given by administrators were a bit "offensive" though I believe it all depends on how observers give their comments and feedback.** Thus I think it is absolutely essential that they are trained on how to provide instructors with feedback
20. I am a mentor teacher and more than often have undergrad teachers in my classes, throughout the year. This I don't mind! However, **I am always a bit miffed when one of the SMT decide to come in to 'share a lesson.'** Why? I have asked myself - as my lessons are always planned, the delivery is running smoothly, students on task..... I guess it is a sense of fear as SMT hardly ever (never) leave their 'ivory towers' and I am always cynical about their ulterior motive. (JMHO)
21. As a 2nd year teacher I have a minimum of 4 observations per year. **I find the announced visits to be so much more stressful than the unannounced visits.** Everyone has bad days or moments, I just hope they walk in when I'm having a better day.
22. **Being observed is more about the observer than about the observed.** If the observer has the ability to blend in with the rest of the class, the teacher remains at ease and the observer gets to watch the teacher perform as is; without pretence. Otherwise, nervousness and intimidation sets in and the teacher is not the same person; the observations are not entirely true of the teacher anymore.
23. Well, I just love observations cuz there you know your weaknesses as a practitioner and will try to work more on the weak areas
24. **For me, I am this kind of person who gets confused and overwhelmed when I am under observation, and I don't do well.** So I prefer being observed and evaluated through camera.
25. **It didn't bother me for years.** I was like many of the post here, "gave me a chance to show what we were learning in my class...constructive feedback on how to improve was welcome, etc." All of that changed when in one year I went from being a good teacher to suddenly I could do nothing right according to the evaluator. After years in the classroom and getting better at classroom management every year, **a new teacher evaluation system and constant negative feedback had me so paranoid about anyone coming into my room** that I left for another position elsewhere. Discussions with others let me know that I not alone in this experience.
26. **Observations are very helpful if they are done by the right persons.** I do get tense at the idea of being observed. And my first reaction would be - WHEN? Formal observations give time for the teachers to get prepared before being observed. And they do not reflect the true classroom environment. I think informal observations are beneficial to both teacher and the management.
27. **The objectivity of Classroom observation should be improvement in the teaching** planning, presentation, skills, etc and should not be used for any other reason/purpose like threatening, penalising, etc.
28. **As a teacher being observed is part of the job.** I agree with most people here that it depends on the observers attitude, knowledge and how the feedback is given. As a reflective practitioner always wanting to improve my practice I value effective observation but if it's done too frequently and a tick box exercise I feel it's ineffective and stressful.
29. **It's just part of the process of teaching.** I try to be open to learning something from it.
30. If pupils are being tested and graded in snapshot assessments, why should it be any different for teachers? **We expect our professional mentor teacher to treat us kindly in their judgements of our performance, just as our students have the same expectations of their teachers: us. It is no different.** We tell students that assessment has both formative and summative purposes, these too should be the foci of our learning journey. Teachers always have more to learn - knowledge increases, pedagogy changes, new digital affordances arrive on the scene. As teachers, we should be the role model for our students, showing them that we get value from observation and assessment and that they can too.
31. Even when they are not concentrating on the lesson, pupils are observing every nuance of what the teacher and everyone else in the classroom is doing. I spent almost all of my professional life in the classroom watching others teach and being observed teaching. **I found it incredibly difficult to convince colleagues that an "extra pair of eyes and ears" was much more beneficial than "an extra pair of hands."** And I learned much more about my own teaching from observation comments made by others than from introspection. **My natural intolerance is exaggerated by those who wander (ever so professionally!) into the classroom**

arena on the pretext of encouraging or discouraging observation. As my contribution demonstrates, taking a stance on observation is more about ready-made prejudices than finding out what pupils already know - much less what they are learning.

Classroom Observations? - Teachers responses and reactions

III - Quite negative responses

Some of the negativity comes from external sources, the government, the media. Others come from the observer's (anticipated) attitude and some of the negativity comes from the teacher's anticipation of the observation and (lack of) feedback.

Which of these negative contributors can you influence? How?

THEMES

I have sorted the comments into themes, so you may more quickly get an overview.

Most negative (some warning signs)

- Am I going to tick all the boxes?
- Which hoops am I going to have to jump through?
- I'm certain will be picked up on and cause me to fail.
- I curse the government for changing the goal posts so often
- Administrators use it punitively
- Used as a time to highlight faults.
- Most teachers have a negative attitude towards this type of observation

Time, frequency

- 20 minutes, once a year... How can one possibly do any realistic and relevant observation under those conditions?

Observer, agenda

- The less competent the observer, the greater the number of rash judgements and negative comments
- They are looking for particular things
- If the observer has a particular agenda, problems and negative reactions are bound to arise
- It is presently done to satisfy the needs of the department
- Every observer has an instrument - check list, and is observing from their position.
- I got really upset when an observer was just there to find mistakes.

Feedback

- Feedback that is entirely criticism can be crippling.
- There are no feedbacks and follow ups
- Even worse though, are the observations that offer no feedback

Teachers' actual comments

1. I must admit, I have been teaching for 18 years now, but the whole idea makes me uncomfortable.
2. Do I have all the required resources, are the learners engaging and **am I going to tick all the boxes!** Yes this is all very sad.
3. I ask whoever it is to join in a group activity....then they never stay long...I tell my students. ..Hey look Mrs. x is here to help today....??
4. My first thought is "**which hoops am I going to have to jump through** this time, what is the latest teaching buzzword?" Then it moves on to a harsh self-evaluation and mild panic about all the things I don't think I do well enough that **I'm certain will be picked up on and cause me to fail**. This progresses into a defensive attitude where **I curse the government for changing the goal posts so often**, and the media for constantly complaining about teachers. Before finally, realising that my students perform well in their summer exams and if I just do what I normally do in a classroom I'll be fine.
5. Major physical reactions happen to my body, every time I am observed. I become physically ill and I'm in hopes the entire time that I did everything correct.
6. In a way its a bit embarrassing but you need it to adjust yourselves to be somewhat perfect on what you do
7. Scary because many **administrators use it punitively**.
8. It's been a while since I was observed. It is a bit stressful because **they are looking for particular things** during the observation and need to ensure I make a point to present them to my supervisor/evaluator.
9. I work in school with almost all children with English as second language so when we are observed by native speaker, why don't they see that what background these children are coming from and still if they have this much knowledge so they should appreciate instead
10. It is part of professional development and helps one to reflect on ones work and improve. But however **it is presently done to satisfy the needs of the department** and a 1% salary increases. **There are no feedbacks and follow ups** to see whether there is improvement. Most of the head teachers are less experienced and under qualified than the teachers they have to observe, so that can't help teachers grow.
11. It has never bothered me to be observed, however, **if the observer has a particular agenda, problems and negative reactions are bound to arise**. I've rarely experienced any real feedback from supervisors other than what is required to be put on paper. Feedback from students and parents has always been outstanding. That doesn't seem to matter, though. I've been sent to conferences and have never been asked to share what I learned or experienced. Our required observations were **20 minutes, once a year**. Other than that, the observer never saw what was going on in the classroom. **How can one possibly do any realistic and relevant observation under those conditions?** What I found was that the less competent the teacher, the more concern there was about being observed and **the less competent the observer, the greater the number of rash judgements and negative comments** apparent during the observation.
12. I have very mixed feelings about observations. When an observer has feedback and data (i.e., engagement, specific academic praise, opportunities to respond), I very much appreciate it. I'm constantly trying to improve and effective evaluations are a tool I can use. On the other hand, **feedback that is entirely criticism can be crippling**. I am a self-reflective educator. If something isn't right with my lesson, odds are I know about it and I'm already taking steps to rectify it. Negativity does nothing to benefit my teaching and definitely puts me on the defensive. **Even worse though, are the observations that offer no feedback**. I'd rather have a negative reaction to my lesson than nothing at all.
13. It depends on the observer's attitude. **I got really upset when an observer was just there to find mistakes**. I like it when the observer looks for strong teaching techniques.
14. I often think of the professional relationship that I have with the observer. Lesson observation should be an opportunity to grow. Unfortunately, it can sometimes be **used as a time to highlight faults**.
15. In Macedonia, it is part of the Principal's and psychologist's responsibilities to observe classes. It is supposed to be done four times in one school year. The main goal is, in most cases, to see if all teachers are using active teaching methods. **Every observer has an instrument - check list, and is observing from their position**. A report is given to every teacher for the observed class, with strengths and weaknesses, and a copy of it goes into the teacher's portfolio. **Most teachers have a negative attitude towards this type of observation**, and most of them are trying to avoid it.

Classroom Observations? - Teachers responses and reactions

IV - Negative responses

Did you turn to this section first? There isn't much to report, just three people had something negative to say about classroom observations. Do you find that surprising? It's worth remembering that the survey was amongst 73,278 members in a closed LinkedIn group so contributors may have been choosing their words carefully.

It looks like one teacher would prefer to get on with their teaching, rather than receive the benefits of a classroom observation. Another teacher perhaps expects to like being observed. The third teacher thinks that classroom observations are useless.

What might you say to those teachers to guide them towards being observed?

Teachers' actual comments

1. Waste of time. **Disruption.**
2. **I don't like it.**
3. I think observations are **useless. It is only a snapshot of what you do.** What if you are in the middle of a lesson that you thought would be outstanding went horribly wrong? That happens to every teacher at some point. Plus, **why can't we be trusted to be professionals** like professionals in others professions such as in the private sector. Those professionals are judged on their results. We need to be valued for our expertise and professionalism, not judged by a 45 minute period of time!

Teacher Training Course “Classroom Observations and Feedback”



This is a review of teachers' comments after the teacher training course in “**Classroom Observations and Feedback**” at a college in Sweden held by Martin Richards.

Guidelines and Tools

The staff training course was designed along the following lines which describe what needs to be agreed upon for the three main stages of the process Before, During and After; which could last for several months as the teachers would observe each other several times. It was anticipated that the process of becoming better at supporting each others' professional development would in itself be, a process. So we designed the overall process we called 'AFORM', the first stage of which, Alliance is the most important and challenging. A key element in the success of AFORM is that the Observer is neutral to the Observed's observation criteria, they do not judge what they will be observing as being good, or necessary. The Observer simply, observes.

The teachers were trained in the skills of planning classroom observations, giving and receiving feedback. The training included a short lecture, demonstrations and a long workshop where the teachers coached each other under mutual observation using a feedback form.

Tools that were taught

AFORM, for structuring the whole Classroom Observation and Feedback process.
(Alliance, Formalisation, Reflection, and Modification)

GROW, conversation structure for structuring the Formalisation, Reflection and Modification conversations
(Goals, Reality, Opportunities, Willingness / Way forward)

SMART, for setting goals in the Formalisation and Modification conversations
(Specific, Measurable, Realistic and Timed)

Guidelines that were taught

Before observing

Create a professional relationship that is based on trust and confidentiality
The teacher who is to be observed chooses what the observer will pay attention to.
Create an agreed check-list of what to observe and how the observation will be done

During the observation

The observer only pays attention to those areas that have been agreed upon.
Neither person shall talk about the contents of the observation without the other being present, for a specific purpose, and in clear agreement.

After the observation

Give no more advice than the observed teacher asked for.
The observer reports only what they saw, heard (and maybe felt), according to the notes they took during the observation.
The observer asks open questions that explore, a little, the reasons for the teachers actions, and explore more some alternative strategies.
The teacher who is to be observed chooses how much advice they will listen to.
The teacher who is observed decides what to change or modify; and when to do that.

Teachers actual responses to the feedback questions

Note: Some of the the teachers' comments refer to 'the dogs', which is what we called the ideas and suggestions for improvement that pop up in the Observers head and which can lead to unwanted advice being given. “*Keep the dogs under control*”

Feedback questions

What did you get from this lecture and workshop?

What gave you the most?

- *Thinking about the agreements before coaching conversation*
- *Keeping the dogs out of the way*
- *The Conversation structures*
- *A positive impression of this way of working*
- *An enjoyable lecture*
- *Knowledgeable lecturers*
- *The structures AFORM, SMART, GROW*
- *Good to have suggestions of questions*
- *The exercises in pairs and threes was good.*
- *Important to practice I learned that coaching questions need not be so complicated. Simple questions, that are not judging or with advice, give a great deal*
- *Good to work in groups of three*
- *The questioning technique*
- *The ready-made questions were useful*
- *Important how one views the role of coach*
- *Asking open questions more difficult than I thought*
- *Practising not being too much of yourself and coming up with your own questions*
- *Interesting question is and a good structure for the base for coaching conversations*
- *At last we've got started with something that has been discussed for a long time*
- *AFORM, SMART, GROW*
- *The importance of creating trust and and an alliance*
- *Tips regarding questions you can use*
- *How to hold a coaching conversation*
- *Examples issues we can look at*
- *How to observe*
- *The exercises in combination with the tools*
- *New thoughts regarding the coach role and what it means I now have a greater understanding of how I should act as a coach*
- *The GROW concept*
- *The dogs!*

- *I got the most from the alignment conversation before the coaching conversations*
- *The positive things about coaching*
- *The importance of having an agreement about what to focus on*
- *You were positive clear examples, a good start to the coming work*
- *Structures to guide us*
- *We had a good day thanks*
- *I believe that coaching can give new insights and develop new ways for teachers to think. It's good to have a little structure around the questions and structures that we can use when we coach*
- *Smart goals specific measurable et cetera*
- *What gave me the most was to start thinking along these lines*
- *I've learned about the different models and I know that I'm going to use these models and tools in the continued work I think the exercises, and the insight on how important it is to have the alignment conversation before we start working, gave the most*
- *I have a greater knowledge of how to give feedback to my colleagues and how to give support and help by asking open questions*
- *Being open as observer*
- *I learned several new concepts and abbreviations that I've never heard of before, this will be of great help when I continue my education as a teacher.*
- *Different kinds of models that can be used to guide the conversation*
- *The group activity in threes this afternoon gave the most*
- *These structures in the conversation*
- *The first discussion where we should plan the next lesson observation gave the most*
- *Good to have tips about the different stages in the conversation and tips about what to think about both as an observer, and the teacher who is receiving feedback*
- *Useful to test this in groups of three, in this way we learn the tools and learn about each other. I feel better prepared for this task*
- *The dogs!*
- *The tools for the conversations*
- *The dogs (not letting them take over)*
- *To have the right focus i.e. not on me*
- *An interesting and rewarding day I am inspired to get started together with some colleagues*
- *I think that the coaching conversations can lead to further good conversations about teaching and learning at the school*
- *The best part was your attitude and that you focused on the importance of having trust and showing respect for the person you are observing and coaching*
- *That you get somewhere in the conversation*
- *The best part was the coaching exercises, especially in threes*
- *Practical tips*
- *Structures for coaching*
- *The kinds of questions*
- *How to coach in general*
- *The best part was to see the teachers on stage*
- *How to work with observation and feedback*

- *There was a good connection between theory and practical exercises*
- *I have greater awareness of what coaching means and the difficulty in asking the right questions and not judging or valuing.*
- *How important it is to know what the goal is not to give up without asking follow-up questions*
- *The best part was your experience and the two demonstrations*
- *I have learned the conversation models AFORM and GROW and hope they will help me in the future. For me the best part was coaching and being coached by my colleagues*
- *A reminder to listen and ask questions from what I hear, not what I think is relevant*
- *The best part was when you demonstrated coaching with volunteer teachers in front of the group*
- *The importance of active listening*
- *Keeping the dogs away - don't have to give advice*
- *The importance of asking powerful questions*
- *The best was insights on all the above, the film about the nail and having tested asking questions and thought about self assessment*
- *How difficult it is just put words to what it is you want to have observed*
- *The best was the questions for the coaching conversation and your experiences*
- *The importance of active listening without getting involved in what the teacher says and then the reflections that come from it*
- *That it is important to be in agreement on what specifically shall be observed*
- *For me the best was the exercise with three roles.*

If you wish to discuss how AFORM can support your staff's continuing development of becoming better at supporting each others' professional development, please contact us.

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