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KOSOVAN PEER LED QUALITY ASSURANCE MODEL

A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO EFFECTIVE LESSON OBSERVATION

"Support to basic and upper secondary education" Project

Introduction

This booklet is designed to help educational professionals observe lessons effectively.

The advice in this booklet is based on proven academic research. However, as this is a practical guide it will not quote academic sources.

The bibliography at the end of the booklet contains the academic sources that underpin the advice in this booklet.

Glossary

Acknowledgement Marking is when a teacher uses ticks, simple marks or corrections (10/10), a stamp and/or brief attainment-based comments.

Differentiating content means using various delivery formats such as video, texts, lectures, or audio.

Differentiating by product means teachers assess the same knowledge or skill for each student but they offer their students a variety of ways to demonstrate their knowledge (e.g., video, written report).

Differentiating by process, means teachers teach the same concept or skill to each student but they vary the manner in which it is taught. Students might work in pairs or groups, use technology, use objects to help them understand a concept.

Differentiating the learning environment means the teacher makes changes to either the physical environment or the atmosphere the students work in.

Feedback can be written or oral. It is information given by the teacher to the learner about their performance. (Giving students a grade e.g., 1,2,3,4,5 is not feedback).

Formative assessments: are used to inform the teaching and learning process. They identify misconceptions, and gaps in learning, and they improve teaching as well as the learning, e.g., quizzes; in class reflections; use of hinge question; surveys; low stakes group work.

Long-cycle formative assessment: Student attainment is monitored across teaching units. The cycle might be 4 weeks to 1 year. Data is used to align the curriculum, monitor teaching of the curriculum and monitor student achievement over a longer period of time, e.g., an end of term assessment; an end of year assessment.

Medium-cycle formative assessment: This takes place at the end of a phase of learning.

This takes place every 1 to 4 weeks, e.g., an assessed piece of writing which is the culmination of three weeks of work; a mathematics test after two weeks of teaching about fractions.

Glossary

Short-cycle formative assessment: Another word for this is 'responsive teaching.' This takes place within and between lessons. The teacher responds to data gathered in the lesson and adjusts the teaching accordingly. For example: Hinge questioning, Teacher observation, Quizzes, Answering a question on individual whiteboards or scrap paper.

A Hinge Question is a key check for understanding at a point of a lesson that is critical for students to understand. Every student must respond to the question within two minutes. The teacher must be able to collect and interpret the responses from all students in 30 seconds and decide how to proceed with the lesson.

Metacognition is about the ways learners monitor and purposefully direct their learning.

Peer assessment is when students take responsibility for assessing the work of their peers against set assessment criteria.

Responsive teaching: is another way of saying short-cycle formative assessment.

A rubric is a guide used to evaluate performance, a product, or a project. It usually includes performance criteria; and a rating scale (Excellent, Good, Satisfactory, Unsatisfactory or 1,2,3,4,5 or A, B, C, D,E)

| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
|---|--|--|--|------------------------------|
| Showed a thorough understanding of the task | Showed a comprehensive understanding of the task | Showed a basic understanding of the task | Showed a limited understanding of the task | Did not understand the task. |

Self-assessment: is when students assess or evaluate themselves. They might assess their actions, their attitude, or their performance.

Self-regulated learners: understand and control their learning environment. Self-regulation abilities include goal setting, self-monitoring, and self-instruction.

Student council: is a group of students elected by their peers to address issues of concern

Success criteria: is a list of features that a teacher wants the children to include in their work during the course of a lesson.

Outstanding professional practice

| | Outstanding |
|--|---|
| Planning | <p>Lesson objectives are clear and related to the topic. The plan clearly evidences individualised learning through the use of activities, differentiation, and assessment strategies.</p> <p>Proposed resources are clearly aligned with lesson objectives.</p> <p>Students are appropriately challenged</p> |
| Subject Knowledge | <p>Excellent subject knowledge. The teacher adapts academic knowledge to the age and ability of the students. The teacher skilfully connects the subject with practical real life situations.</p> |
| Students' behaviour and attitude to learning | <p>Very high level of engagement, courtesy, collaboration and cooperation among all students. There is a productive climate for learning in which students feel valued and secure.</p> |
| | <p>Lesson proceeds without interruption. Behavior management strategies contribute to a consistently positive climate for learning. Students' attitude towards their own learning and the attitude of others' learning is exemplary.</p> |

Outstanding professional practice

| | Outstanding |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| Formative assessment and Feedback | <p>Prior learning is assessed accurately through diagnostic assessments such as hinge questioning and other short cycle formative assessment.</p> <p>Diagnostic assessments are used appropriately. The teacher responds effectively to diagnostic assessments within the lesson and adjusts lesson accordingly.</p> |
| Teaching strategies | <p>Lesson includes imaginative strategies that challenge students. They encourage critical thinking and creativity. Teaching strategies individualise learning through the differentiation of process content, product and learning environment.</p> |
| | <p>Questioning systematically probes understanding, identifies misconceptions and anticipates interventions. The teacher response to questioning has a noticeable impact on student learning.</p> |
| | <p>The teacher manages the lesson excellently. Pace is used appropriately to extend knowledge appropriately and challenge students.</p> |
| Learning progress | <p>All students show high levels of enthusiasm and interest. They are confident and engaged in the lesson. Students lead the learning and understand the next steps in the learning process.</p> |

Unsatisfactory professional practice

| | Unsatisfactory |
|--|--|
| Planning | Planning and preparation is inadequate, unclear or absent. |
| Subject Knowledge | Limited knowledge of subject. Or the subject knowledge is inappropriate for the age and ability of the students The teacher makes frequent mistakes about the subject matter being taught. |
| Students' behaviour and attitude to learning | There is no evidence to demonstrate that there is a positive climate for learning. |
| Formative assessment and Feedback | Assessment takes little account of prior learning. There is no evidence of diagnostic formative assessment such as hinge questions within the lesson. The teacher does not make any adjustments to teaching and learning. |
| | Students are given a grade 1,2,3,4,5 without written or oral feedback. |
| | Students do not self-assess any of their work. They are given a grade 1,2,3,4,5 without feedback |

Unsatisfactory professional practice

| | Unsatisfactory |
|---------------------|---|
| Teaching strategies | No evidence of learning objectives or differentiation. Students all do the same task at the same pace. Activities do not meet individual student needs. |
| | Teaching is characterised by closed questions to a few students. Diagnostic/ formative assessment questions are not used. |
| | The lesson lacks pace and results in little student engagement. Students appear to be doing the same task at the same pace. |
| Learning progress | Students are passive. Teaching fails to engage, enthuse or motivate students. |

Informal Observations

Informal observations are often unannounced short classroom visits of between 10 and 15 minutes.

They can also be whole lesson observations that are carried out by colleagues to offer **support** and **guidance**.

Formal Observations

Formal observations are usually carried out by members of the school management team. They are always arranged in advance and usually involve pre- observation and post-observation meetings.

Formal observations are used as part of an *appraisal process* and are designed to ensure *accountability* of staff.

Purpose of supportive informal lesson observations

The purpose of supportive informal lesson observations is:

- To develop, mentor, and coach teachers to improve their skills.
- To share effective professional practice among individual staff and departments.
- To develop innovative approaches to teaching.
- To make observations about individual students or cohorts of students to support teachers.

Informal lesson observations should not be judgemental or used as part of a formal appraisal process.

Informal lesson observation best practice

- Schools should have an 'open door policy' where supportive and constructive informal lesson observation is embedded into the school culture.
- All members of staff should have the opportunity to 'drop in' to colleagues' lessons.
- Informal lesson observations should be used to follow up after professional development workshops. They can help schools assess the effectiveness of the workshops.
- Informal observations should be used as the basis for **teacher coaching**. Effective coaching between colleagues can only happen when lessons have been observed.
- Informal observations should be used to assess whole school performance and feed into school self-evaluation.

An effective self-evaluation of teaching and learning can only be written after extensive informal observation of lessons within the school.

Purpose of formal lesson observations

Formal observations can be used in the same way as informal observations.

Formal observations can be used:

- To develop, mentor, and coach teachers to improve their skills.
- To share effective professional practice among individual staff and departments.
- To develop innovative approaches to teaching.
- To make observations about individual students or cohorts of students to support teachers to adapt their professional practice.

However, formal observations are also used to **ensure accountability** of staff. They are used as part of a formal appraisal process.

As a result of this they are not as effective as informal observations in gathering accurate data about the quality of the day-to-day teaching and learning in a school.

Formal lesson observation best practice

- Schools should **not** rely on formal observations to assess the day to day quality of teaching and learning.
- It is important that schools have an 'open door policy' where supportive and constructive informal lesson observation is embedded into the school culture.
- Although graded lesson observation matrices are useful to assess professional practice it is important that teachers are not graded **without feedback** on how they can improve.
- Although graded lesson observation matrices are useful to assess professional practice, some managers may feel that labelling a teacher with a grade is counter productive. Their professional advice is more important.

Lesson observation techniques

Where to sit

The observer should sit somewhere in the classroom that does not disrupt the lesson too much.

Observe the learning not the teaching

The observer should make notes about the **learning** not the teaching.

It is important to understand that even if a lesson is being presented skilfully, this does not mean that the students are learning anything.

The observer should identify:

- student engagement levels
- the level of difficulty for students
- the impact of the lesson on learning.

Note taking

If the observer is observing a whole or half lesson, the observer should write down as much detail as possible on what students are doing at particular points in the lesson.

It is important to write the time and the observation. If possible write the name of the students in the notes aswell.

For example :

10 min: All students engaged in presentation.

25 mins: 1 group of students not active because they did not understand instructions.

40 mins: Albana finished work and sought out extension activity without prompting from teacher

Informal observation notes

If the observer is carrying out series of quick informal drop ins, it is better to write notes after they have left the classroom to ensure the creation of a supportive informal observation culture in the school.

Talk to students

The observer should try to talk to the students quietly and ask them what they are learning. (But the observer should not disrupt the lesson.)

For example:

- What are you learning today?
(To check students understand the lesson objective)
- What do you have to do?
(To check students understand instructions)
- How challenging is the work for you?
(To check if learning is individualised)

The observer should focus on observation rather than interaction but should also respond sensitively to the specific class environment and act accordingly.

Focus of lesson observations

All lesson observations should focus on key pedagogical areas first.

- **Assessment and Feedback**

- The observer should look for evidence of responsive teaching strategies such as hinge questioning, or the use of individual whiteboards to answer diagnostic assessments.
- As a result of this short cycle formative assessment lesson content should be adapted in real time to better meet individual student needs.
- The observer should look for evidence in books that student self-assessment is systemic.
- Teachers should never give student grades 1,2,3,4,5 without written or oral feedback about what they did well and what they need to do to improve.
- The observer should look for evidence that rubrics are used to make grading more transparent between student and teacher .

- **Planning**

The observer should analyse the lesson plans of teachers.

Lesson plans **do not** need to be overly detailed, but they must include:

- A clear learning objective and success criteria.
- A variety of pedagogical strategies.
- Short cycle formative assessment strategies. (e.g. Hinge questions, diagnostic assessments, use of mini whiteboards etc.)
- Individualised learning. Lessons are differentiated by content, process, product and/or learning environment.
- Challenge. Teachers should try to plan a challenge for students in every lesson.

The plans should evidence the reality of what is delivered in the classroom.

It is essential that the observer compares the planning with the delivery of the lesson.

It is good practice for a teacher to change elements of a plan based upon responsive teaching strategies such as hinge questioning and other in lesson diagnostic assessments.

- **Teaching strategies**

- When observing the lesson, the observer should look for **active and collaborative learning strategies** that are linked to clear lesson objectives.
- The observer should look for evidence of **success criteria** or **rubrics** that students are using.
- The observer should look for evidence that students are given opportunities to record and present their learning in a variety of ways.
- The observer should look for evidence that learning is **individualised** as much as possible. The lesson should be differentiated by a combination of *content, process, product and learning environment*.
- The observer should look for evidence that the teacher uses a range of **questioning techniques**, not just closed questions: open questions, probing questions assessment for learning questions.
- The observer should look for evidence that students **self-assessment** and **reflection** is a systemic part of teacher's professional practice.
- The observer should look for evidence that the teacher has the requisite **subject knowledge** to teach effectively.

- **Behaviour Management**

The lesson observer should assess the level of student engagement, collaboration and cooperation among all students.

The observer should assess the climate for learning and note down all disruptions to learning.

The observer should look out for positive behaviour management strategies such as:

- **Positive behaviour specific praise:** I like how you are.....
- **Silent signals:** hand gestures, facial expressions etc.
- **Quiet corrections:** Not embarrassing students by correcting them publicly.
- **The signposting of expected behaviour:** Frequent sharing of clear behavioural expectations.
- **The establishment of clear routines:** Students always know what to do at the start of the lesson or if they have finished their work.

No lesson time is lost through inactivity.

Lesson observation feedback

- **Informal lesson feedback**

The lesson observer may not give individual feedback from a series of short informal lesson observations.

Informal lesson observations do not always need feedback because they are often information gathering exercises.

- **Evaluation of teacher professional development**

If the informal lesson observations are used to assess the effectiveness of a teacher development workshop, then the observer should share a general email or deliver a general presentation about what they saw in lessons.

It is important that this feedback is not judgemental and does not criticise individual teachers.

- **Formal lesson observation feedback**

If the observer is coaching teachers or carrying out a *formal observation*, the observer should use specific examples of what they saw students doing in the observed lesson.

For example:

Specific Observation:

When you made the silent signal of putting your finger on your mouth the whole class stopped talking.

Specific Observation:

You asked a closed question and 4 students put their hand up.

Specific Observation:

In minute 15 I saw Arianit and Liridon were not engaged in the lesson and were talking to each other.

- **Questioning techniques**

The observer should ask the teacher questions to elicit what might have been done differently.

The observer should use questions to lead the teacher to their own conclusion about what they could have done differently.

For example:

Specific Observation: In your presentation you asked students What.... ? and 4 students put their hand up.

Question to teacher: How could you have engaged more of the class?

Answer: You could have used the **Think/Pair Share strategy**. First ask the question. Then tell students to talk with their partner first. Then ask them to put their hand up to tell the answer to the whole class.

- **Use evidence not opinion**

The observer should not give an opinion without evidence or give advice in the first person. The observer should base their advice on proven pedagogical practice.

For example:

Specific Observation: In your presentation you asked students What.... ? and 4 students put their hand up.

Do not say:

*"I would have used **the think pair strategy** with my students."....."*

Say:

*"It is good practice to use **the think pair strategy** with students"*

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