



REFLECTION TOOLS FOR TEACHER QUALITY

Title

REFLECTION THROUGH OBSERVATION - Diverse practice

Goal

Teachers need to cover the same material in delivering the curriculum in order to achieve learning objectives. However there are a variety of approaches that could be taken according to the teaching strengths of the teachers and the learning styles and needs of their pupils. This tool endeavours to show three teachers working towards the same learning objectives in individual ways in three parallel classes.

Target group

This tool can be used with teachers and student teachers, both in pre-service and in-service education.

The group involved should have a minimum of 6 participants.

Summary/description

These clips illustrate a range of data from pupils in the same age group in the first year of a middle school with ages of 12 to 13 years.

The focus is a humanities lesson, part of the national curriculum in England. The clips of classroom practice and subsequent teacher reflection show the three teachers working in different styles, with a variety of classroom management and organisation formats. The focus is on teacher approaches and strategies and their justification for the choices made. We also see the pupils interacting with the teacher and working together.

The activities aim to:

- develop awareness of a range of issues concerning differing approaches to teaching
- promote analysis of how planning for meeting learning objectives using a range of methods can be improved
- appreciate the importance of questions and explanation in promoting and supporting learning
- enable teachers to develop their own planning for developing their skills and addressing the learning needs of their pupils



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Methodology

Suggested times are 30 minutes for the first two exercises, or one hour if they are combined, 45 minutes for the third and at least an hour each for the others. They are largely open-ended however and the consideration of national quality criteria could be extended indefinitely according to need.

Having looked at the instructions for Activity 1 and 2 you may wish to allocate information-gathering tasks around the group. This will speed things up when answering the connected questions. Look for clear examples of the headings in the grid.

With reference to the above provisos, the clip can be viewed in one sitting. It is advisable to allocate logging tasks around the group and where this is a new experience to do a short 'trial' before the serious logging begins.

If some activities are more appropriate to your particular setting then it is suggested you give a longer time to them.

If you are following most of the Activities in the tool you will need a plenary session to draw all the learning points together before moving on from the tool.

The discussions in these should focus on the major objectives of the individual exercises but also seek to promote reflection on what other aspects of good and/or improvable practice and learning opportunities are visible within the happenings in the clip.

Specific suggestions about the use of the tool and the individual activities are given in the worksheets.

It would be particularly beneficial to have groups across nationalities/cultures and genders and, if relevant, age groups taught.

There are 5 exercises. To gain maximum impact all 5 should be done:

1. Mapping evidence
2. Justifying choices
3. Learning intentions and outcomes
4. Questions and responses
5. Reflection on teaching and learning

The clip also lends itself to a variety of other observational learning opportunities that the facilitator or group may wish to suggest.

The outcomes should provide the participants with a range of possible examples, strategies and actions to challenge assumptions about how, language, materials, support tactics in learning and teaching should be presented, whilst at the same time, allowing reflection on the participants' own practice, values and attitudes



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towards facilitating curriculum delivery and optimum learning in their classrooms. It should also highlight their own needs in the area of professional development in achieving improved teaching quality

Variations

See above.

The basic practices, attitudes and values arising in this clip of teaching and learning could also be applied to:

- different age groups
- other curriculum subject

Examples with a variety of differing approaches would give scope for comparison and a further opportunity to identify generic issues in facilitating learning.

Background/resources

The following materials would provide background information and practical examples

Boehm, A. E., & Weinberg, R. A. (1997). *The classroom observer: Developing observation skills in early childhood settings* (3rd ed.). New York: Teachers College Press, Columbia University.

EASEN, P. (1985) *Making School Centred INSET Work*. London: Croom Helm. Reprinted by Routledge, 1989.

Pianta, R.C. (2003). *Standardized classroom observations from pre-K to third grade: A mechanism for improving quality classroom experiences during the P-3 years*.

http://www.fcd-us.org/usr_doc/StandardizedClassroomObservations.pdf

Materials

DVD with classroom fragments and dvd player

- The clips used are in Humanities lessons. The teachers and their classes each discuss and work on part of the overall topic
- They focus on the contrasting classroom activities and approaches and the teachers explain their approaches to them.



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NB. Permission has been given to use this video material for Educational purposes and images of children and classrooms are limited to DVD transmission not freely available on the web.

The DVD can be ordered by sending an e-mail to M.Snoek@hva.nl.

Depending on the time available and the needs of a particular study group, sections of the clip could be selected and explored in greater depth. Specific attention could be given to language used, non-verbal triggers, materials, gender, involve the participants' own classroom anecdotes etc. dependent on individual requirements.

Strength and weaknesses

Strengths:

Many teachers still work in isolation. They are not familiar with even their school colleagues' classrooms.

The clips provide a window into an actual school and classroom in a different educational context for most of the participants

The observation focuses on real issues in a real classroom during actual lessons.

The teachers verbalize their intentions and reflect on aspects of learning and expectations.

Examples of different philosophies and approaches are given.

Childrens' actions and interactions are shown and verbalised during the teaching and activity sessions

The importance of both verbal and non-verbal interactions is illustrated

Weaknesses:

Only one age group is shown.

One specialised part of one curriculum area only is addressed

The participants may find it difficult not to concentrate on aspects of failure – either on the part of the teacher or the pupil, rather than using, for example, a child's not grasping the learning objective as an opportunity to look for reasons and alternatives. It is the facilitator's role to guard against this.

A defeatist attitude of 'the conditions are not right in my classroom/school/with my pupils to do things like that' could prevail.

The amount of in-depth reflection and possibilities for professional development taking place, hinges on the quality of discussion and elaboration of reflective questions, themselves dependent upon the co-operation of the group and the skill of the facilitator.



Identifying Teaching Quality (ITQ) Reflection through Observation

	Diverse practice
A Range of Methods	In which diverse practice is explored
	What you can do



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Introduction

There is only one 'right' way to:

- Organize a class
- teach a lesson
- approach a topic
- support childrens' learning
- meet childrens' needs
- select and use resources

The teacher's role would be less complex if only it were so!

This activity follows three teachers in one school using different methods to produce similar outcomes. The three classes are all working on the theme of 'medieval realms' and belong to the same age group (11 &12 year olds) in a school catering for 9 – 13 year olds. The focus is more on what the teachers say and do than on how the pupils are learning. Each teacher provides a commentary on his/her objectives and actions.

The learning objectives of this tool are for the teacher to:

- analyse a range of teaching methods for similar contexts
- set their own practice in the context of the call for enhanced quality in schools
- enable participants in the reflection exercise to consider changes in their own methods
- become aware of differing methods used across a number of countries
- consider ways in which professional development for teachers could arise from such an exercise in their own school/context

Guidance for Facilitators

GENERAL POINTS

To complete some of these exercises, participants in this reflection exercise will need a copy of any quality or competences criteria in use in their schools and/or country.

You are strongly urged to make yourself familiar with the clips and the exercises before you begin work with a group. Timings may be given but you will have your own views on likely variations that influence your planning, particularly when you grow more familiar with the members of the group. If you don't like the phrasing of some of the questions then change or add to it, but be sure to retain the learning-objectives of the activity. Thought should also be given to the use of the working space, comfort and visibility, small-group work areas etc and to the



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phasing of the items, allowing natural breaks etc. Try also to ensure the hardware is working properly and is well placed! Remember there is little benefit in watching a clip without doing follow up work. You may identify items other than those addressed in the suggested activities. Feel free to develop further activities of your own both on the focus/learning objectives given, or any other learning issues you or your group, feel the clip illustrates. Indeed that could be an extension item applicable to all the Tools.

Before starting on any of the tools in the tool-box please stress that these activities are not inviting you to criticize these teachers who are all volunteers, selected for their dedication and willingness to co-operate in benefiting others in the development of teaching skills. None of the material is role-play, it is all real. They are not offered as examples of 'best practice'. What they say and do is however often analysed within the activities. As a learning group, try not to come to verdicts or judgments about them. They, like you, are practitioners with strengths and weaknesses. Don't rush to conclusions such as 'I don't like that', 'I couldn't work with them'. Such conclusions will stop you from learning some valuable and important lessons about your own teaching. You are advised to share your own version of this warning with the group before starting each Activity. There is also the aspect of the group members' own vulnerability to possible approbation or isolation within the working group. These exercises involve rigorous analysis of individual teaching styles and strategies, referring directly to members' own strengths and weaknesses. Facilitators should be very sensitive to the feelings of others in this respect while creating opportunities for co-operative growth which need not threaten individuals.

Most activities will require the group members to copy or construct data gathering formats for their observation. The activities will require work in individual, small group and larger group formats. Make sure ample opportunity is given to use and develop data/perceptions gathered during each session.

In some cases follow-up/extension activities may be suggested. However please use this opportunity to create reflection in the most profitable manner for the needs, experience and contexts of the particular group you are facilitating.



EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE POINTS

If activities or sections of an activity are done in small multi-country groups then a shared or plenary session is necessary to take advantage of the wide range of experience and cultural and contextual difference within the group. In some instances this will be included in one of more items in the activity. In any case, please create opportunities where and when appropriate.

POINTS FOR THIS ACTIVITY

The clip is in three parts, one for each teacher. Facilitators may find it most rewarding to look at the sections individually with a pause for reflection in between, either individual or with longer pauses for substantial discussion and note taking in –between. The first two activities rely on direct evidence from the clips. It may be productive to allocate viewing and logging tasks amongst the group members. Suggested times are 30 minutes for the first two exercises, or one hour if they are combined, 45 minutes for the third and at least an hour each for the others. They are largely open-ended however and the consideration of national quality criteria could be extended indefinitely according to need. Having looked at the instructions for Activity 1 and 2 you may wish to allocate information-gathering tasks around the group. This will speed things up when answering the connected questions. Look for clear examples of the headings in the grid.

Clips

There are three parts each featuring a different teacher with their 11 and 12 year olds in 3 parallel classes. They are all working on a topic from the English National Curriculum: medieval realms. The teachers interchange the words ‘group’ and ‘class’ ambiguously at times; this potential distraction should not affect your collection of data.



Activity one

As you watch the three teachers with their classes try to log examples of teaching methods as in the table below. In each box that links a teacher to a particular method you might look for two kinds of information, firstly the direct evidence (e.g. the teacher reinforced the point by asking the whole class if they understood) and secondly a comment on the effectiveness of the method (e.g. half the class said they understood and the teacher carried on with a different point). You will need to re-draw the table to cater for your answers.

	Rob Breeze	Susan Roberts	Dawn Fomison
Use of open or closed questions			
Picking up children's responses			
Classroom management			
Control and discipline			

Use the data you gather to:

- construct some summary statements about the effectiveness of the range of methods seen for each teacher;
- reflect on any broad differences in style and method you can see;
- record ways in which the analysis you have just done tells you about the assumptions these teachers made about the needs and capacities of their pupils.

Activity two

This activity is a development of Activity one and could be done alongside it. Select some varied examples from your table and for each example describe an alternative or contrasting strategy that could have achieved a similar purpose. For example, 'another way of explaining "X" would have been to ...' Do make sure you explain why they are workable suggestions! When you have completed these, discuss what implications your alternatives would have for the **planning** of learning.



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Activity three

During the clips of the lessons the three teachers commented upon their reasons for choosing the methods they used. As you re-watch the sequences note:

- what these objectives etc. were
- strategies they used to achieve these objectives

Pick two you thought were particularly successful and analyse why you think this worked

How would you have developed this further in your own context?

Does this differ across the contexts of countries represented in your group?

Extension

An inter-country discussion on how and why certain aspects appear in some countries and not in others, leading to analysis of and reflection on underlying philosophies and practices of teaching and learning, to promote:

- Awareness of alternative views/practices
- The impact of expected norms on teacher practice
- Co-operative peer-professional development

Activity four

This activity uses the data gathered from the first viewing of the clips.

This time we will be viewing them against a set of criteria taken either:

- from early work done in the UK for a handbook used by the Office for Standards in Education in formal inspections of schools (OFSTED)
- or
- the quality criteria or competences used in your own school and/or country

In either case take 15 minutes to review the six questions below. See to what extent they overlap or conflict with your national set of criteria.

Then spend another 45 minutes to relate the criteria you are using to the initial analysis you did from the clips. You may wish to watch this again.

If you have no other criteria then use the six questions as given here.

Alternatively you may wish to use these six questions and then consider your national criteria.



OFTSTED Questions from the notes of Guidance

1. Is the teaching purposeful?

Purpose is demonstrated by effective planning, including the clarity of objectives and direction; the efficient use of time and whether or not sufficient ground is covered in the lesson

2. Does the teaching create and sustain interest and motivation?

Observation will show the extent to which the lesson's content is introduced with knowledge, skill and imagination, the ways in which the teacher seeks to encourage and maintain pupils' interest: and the range of teaching strategies employed to ensure pupils apply themselves to work with purpose and self-confidence.

3. Does the teaching cater for the abilities and needs of all pupils? Are teachers' expectations appropriate for all pupils?

Observation and discussion with pupils and teachers will show:

- The accuracy with which teachers judge pupils' levels of understanding
- The level of challenge in the tasks provided and the accuracy of time limits set for their completion in relationship to the pupils' abilities and understanding.
- The success of strategies used to help pupils who do not succeed at their first attempt, and to challenge the most able.

4. Are the lessons managed in ways that ensure an efficient and orderly approach to teaching and learning?

Observation and discussion will indicate:

- The extent to which the planned teaching style promotes the purpose of the lesson:
- The appropriateness of the resources selected for the lesson and the extent to which suitable modifications have been made to materials and organization to accommodate pupils' special needs and abilities;
- The effective deployment of support teachers and other adults;
- The usefulness of classroom routines, including the procedures for homework where appropriate.

5. Is there effective interaction between teacher and pupils?

Observation will show, for example:

- The teacher's command of subject-matter; the clarity of explanations; the quality of questioning; and the contribution of discussion to the pupils' understanding and in-class assessment of pupils' readiness to progress to new work;
- The quality of relationships, both among pupils & between teacher and taught; the effect on pupils' application to work;
- Teachers' knowledge of equal opportunity issues and sensitivity to the needs of particular groups.

6. Is evaluation of pupils' progress used to support and encourage them and to extend and challenge them appropriately?

In-class assessment is part of teaching and may be judged by the extent to which:

- The assessment in use, spoken and written, enables pupils to improve their performance;
- Teachers have a consistent and positive marking policy;
- The extent to which teaching encourages pupils to assess their own performance and strive for improvement.



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Your task is to match the evidence from the clips with the questions from the OFSTED Handbook or your own quality criteria to devise a synthesis of ideas about developing the skills and methods seen. What would need to happen in those three classrooms to make sure the OFSTED or your own criteria were met?

You may choose to focus on all, two or a single one of the teachers.

Extension

Compare and contrast the quality statements/competencies that are standard in each of the countries.

Activity five

You have seen the different teachers employing different methods for the same purposes. For any reflective teacher it is a useful strategy to consider several ways of doing the same thing in order to allow for differing learning needs, achieve variety etc. Some of these methods might be conventional, some eccentric and some not desirable.

Here are some fairly obvious examples:

Intention: to familiarise pupils with the use of historical artifacts

- Acceptable: pupils are asked to look at a variety of historical artifacts, handle them, with some explanation about their use, and answer questions.
- Acceptable; pupils are asked to answer questions about the use of historical artifacts without any discussion about their use but are provided with suggestions and material where they can find out for themselves.
- Unacceptable: young pupils are given pictures of historical artifacts and have a text about their use dictated to them.

Taking any of the examples from your original table of methods try to construct a similar range from acceptable to unacceptable based on them.

Extension – working towards professional development with colleague; planning and reflecting on purposes, methods and outcomes together

This part of the activity asks you to consider some teaching you will do in the near future, thinking about the close examination of methods you have made in all the exercises in this Activity.

You can do this as an individual though this exercise is particularly useful for colleagues who work closely together. Within your working group a pair or three of you could decide on a mutually useful topic and do the exercise together.

Reconsidering the 6 OFSTED questions in Activity Four, fill in the blanks.



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Very soon I/we will be covering (aspect of the curriculum)	With class
My/our purposes are	

Activity six

This activity looks at an aspect of teaching and observation that is often ignored or unarticulated when observing or analyzing classroom behaviour; that of body or non-verbal language. Elsewhere in this tool we have considered the use of language in teaching and learning. This activity asks you to focus on what is not said.

Look for examples of the following taking place in the clips. Briefly note what you think they signal. For example: a moving finger may illustrate the line of a graph, or the path of an object, two hands may indicate the size of an object, eyes can be used to scan the room or attempt to find out what a child is thinking, the teacher crouching beside a small child may indicate a way of being less threatening.

behaviour	who*	your interpretation

- T=Teacher; P=pupil

Discuss you examples in pairs and groups

Other reading

Boehm, A. E., & Weinberg, R. A. (1997). *The classroom observer: Developing observation skills in early childhood settings* (3 rd ed.). New York: Teachers College Press, Columbia University.

EASEN, P. (1985) *Making School Centred INSET Work*. London: Croom Helm. Reprinted by Routledge, 1989.



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Pianta, R.C. (2003). Standardized classroom observations from pre-K to third grade: A mechanism for improving quality classroom experiences during the P-3 years.

(http://www.fcd-us.org/usr_doc/StandardizedClassroomObservations.pdf)

Wragg E. Introduction to Classroom Observation 2nd edition. Routledge, London. isbn 0-415-19440-7

TEACHERS' TV. www.teachers.tv/

Tools And Techniques For Using Spark In The Classrooms
<http://www.kqed.org/assets/pdf/arts/programs/spark/video.pdf>

Watching Yourself On Videotape: Boss Davis Lawrence
teaching.berkeley.edu/compendium

Teacher Training Resource Bank www.ttrb.ac.uk/browse.asp