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| The LJMU Guide toObserving Lessons*for postgraduate secondary initial teacher education (4th Edition)* | **The purpose of this guide…**Throughout your Initial Teacher Education, and beyond, formal lesson observation will form an essential part of your professional training and development. In most cases, this will involve you being observed by expert colleagues in a coaching/mentoring role. However, your observations of these expert colleagues will inform and guide your development as a beginning teacher.Postgraduate Secondary Programmes (Initial Teacher Education)*‘Eventually, you will want to go beyond being a copier to becoming an implementer who develops ways of responding to teaching and learning episodes. What you interpret and understand from observation of and discussions with experienced professionals and mentors can provide a basic framework for evolving your own ideas and responses. This will become habit and allow you to make relevant and informed decisions for yourself and the learners you teach****.’***(Lange and Burroughs-Lange, 2017:10) |

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# A Guide to Observing Lessons

### For postgraduate secondary initial teacher education student teachers

## Rationale

Throughout your Initial Teacher Education (ITE), and beyond, formal lesson observation will form an essential part of your professional training and development. In most cases, this will involve you being observed by an expert colleague in a coaching/mentoring role. However, your observations of these experienced professionals will inform and guide your development as a beginning teacher. **Reflective practice**, supported by **feedback** from and **observation** of experienced colleagues, professional **debate** and learning from educational **research** are an integral part of teaching practice.

Some of the observations you make will be informal and unstructured, with reflections being assimilated and accommodated into your practice on a subconscious level. The reflective writing that you are required to undertake as part of your ITE is intended to develop a conscious reflexivity (i.e. reflecting on and responding to experience). Formal observations can aid this process and enable you to focus in on specific aspects of learning and teaching. Focused and purposeful observation can be very fruitful. However, unfocused observation, without a clear purpose, can be demoralising and counter-productive.

## Potential pitfalls

Many student teachers, however, find observation unhelpful, and are apt to dismiss it as a waste of time. The reasons for this include:

* Expert colleagues’ teaching is often *so fluent that it looks easy*; the skill, which cannot be seen by the observer, is very largely in the expert information processing and decision making that is going on;
* Student teachers *only see what they already understand*, and when they are first in schools they do not know enough to see how complex teaching really is.
* Student teachers have already spent *thousands of hours in classrooms as pupils*. At first, still with this *pupil perspective*, everything in classrooms looks familiar and obvious, and *they can find it difficult to see things in the way that teachers do*.
* Student teachers often have strong *preconceptions* about the kind of teachers they want to be. They are quick to judge the teachers they observe as falling short of these preconceptions, and therefore think they have little to learn from them.
* Student teachers are generally *keen to prove themselves* as teachers. They are *eager to get on with teach*ing and to learn from their own practice rather than from observing others.

## The flipside

Focused observation can serve a number of different purposes. Through guided observation student teachers can:

1. Be helped to shift from a pupil to a teacher perspective;
2. Learn to analyse what is happening in classrooms;
3. Get a sense of the expectations which teachers set;
4. Understand the curriculum in context as a pupil experience;
5. Discover different ways of doing things;
6. Learn to monitor progress in a lesson;
7. Identify things which they do not understand, and which can provide a basis for discussion with the teacher.

Observing and sharing good practice is an essential skill for the good and reflexive teacher. It helps you to know what works, or doesn’t, and maintain and improve the quality of your teaching.

## Summary

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Purpose of observation:** | **Most appropriate time:** |
| **1** | Shifting from a pupil to a teacher perspective: Helping student teachers to be realistic about the demands of teaching and their ability to handle them | At the beginning for you to see what teaching entails;At any time when you feel that important aspects of teaching are being neglected; |
| **2** | Learning to analyse what is happening in classrooms: Enabling you to recognise that while variations probably exist between the rules and expectations of different teachers, these fall within certain acceptable boundaries… | Early on;At any time if the standards you are setting in your own teaching are inappropriate; |
| **3** | Getting a sense of the expectations which teachers set: Reflecting on the personal and professional standards within the teaching profession and how these impact on personal impressions and aspirations… | At the beginning for you to see what teaching entails;Ongoing – developing professional attitudes and behaviours; |
| **4** | Understanding how the curriculum is translated into practice. Seeing how pupils experience the curriculum and the connections they make in their own subject knowledge development. | At any time; the curriculum is always offering something new to pupil experience. Seeing how teachers develop curiosity and engagement in the curriculum over time is important for new teachers. |
| **5** | Discovering different ways of doing things: Encouraging you to appreciate that teachers can bring about pupil learning in a variety of ways, and to extend their own repertoires of skills and strategies… | At any time; |
| **6** | Learning to monitor the progress of a lessonBringing home to you the importance of pace and timing, and the need for flexibility… | Early on when you are in a protected environment;Later, focusing on the need for flexibility and how teachers adapt their plan; |
| **7** | Identifying things which you do not understand, and which can provide a basis for discussion with your mentors: Identifying gaps in your knowledge and experience, which will enable you to progress and improve your classroom practice…  | At the beginning for you to see what teaching entails;Ongoing – developing professional attitudes and behaviours; |

# Beginning to observe

For an observation to be useful it needs to have a clear purpose and be conducted in a way that is appropriate for that purpose. There are many approaches to lesson observation. Here are some quick thoughts and examples:

* Straightforward observation using *field notes* to record general observations – a good place to begin, which can be reflected upon critically at a later time.
* Observe specific *parts of lessons* – e.g. demonstrations, classroom routines, transitions etc.
* *Tracking* individual learners, recording either general observation or specific, predetermined, criteria – for example, track a learner with special educational needs (SEND), using their Individual Education Plan (IEP) to inform observations (speak to the SENCO first).
* *Guided observation* of *specific criteria* or *learners* (ignoring everything else) – for example, observing individuals, groups or classes for specific behaviours (e.g. “on or off task”).
* *Timed observations*, where you make an observation of specific criteria at timed intervals. A grid can be used to record observations at predetermined intervals (e.g. every 5 minutes)
* *‘Reverse engineering’* a lesson plan from observing a full lesson – i.e. what would the lesson plan look like for the lesson you have observed?

These are just a few examples, and the format of recording depends on the method being used. In first few days of your Phase 1 placement you should make general field notes of observations and move towards observing specific criteria and/or learners. These notes can then be reflected on afterwards to identify patterns and trends etc.

Remember that you are observing to **reflect on your developing practice**, rather than making value judgements on the teaching being observed.

## Possible foci for your observation

* Beginnings and ends of and transitions within lessons
* Teachers’ questions and the kind of answers they generate
* Teachers’ explanations and instructions: how they are made clear and explicit?
* Organisation of equipment
* Methods of class control: verbal and body language
* Giving praise and providing instructional feedback

## Some questions to ask yourself when observing…

* **How do learners enter the teaching space (e.g. classroom, gym, lab, workshop etc.)?**
	+ What is the layout of the teaching space?
	+ What strategies are used to settle the learners?
	+ When does the teacher take the register?
* **Start of lesson – is the first activity long or short?**
	+ What is its purpose?
* **How are the lesson objectives shared?**
	+ Are they revisited during the lesson?
* **What is the focus of the teaching and learning?**
	+ i.e. teacher lead, group or paired work.
	+ Why did the teacher plan this?
	+ What was the impact?
* **What different activities are there for the learners to practise their new skills?**
* **How is new material presented?**
	+ What visual aids or support are there for learning?
* **What teaching resources are used?**
	+ e.g. handouts, slideshows, materials, equipment, etc.
	+ How is ICT used to enhance learning?
* **How does the material match the maturity of the age group?**
	+ How might it differ from, similar, materials for a different age group?
* **How does the teacher manage learners’ learning and behaviour?**
	+ What strategies were used?
	+ What are the timings for each activity?
* **How does the teacher communicate?**
	+ i.e. verbal and non-verbal, to the whole class, groups or individuals.
* **Are there points in the lesson at which the teacher assesses pupils’ understanding?**
	+ How does the teacher give feedback?
* **Are *adults other than teachers* (AOTT) used in the lesson?**
	+ e.g. technician, teaching assistant, learning support assistant, etc.
* **How does the lesson conclude?**
	+ Does the final activity allow pupils to celebrate their new learning and reflect on how they learnt?
	+ What homework was set?
	+ How were pupils dismissed?

# Observation 1: observing across lessons

Start your first observations with the pro forma below to record observations across a number of lessons, making notes on instances where you have observed different teaching approaches.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Area** | **Notes on observed activities** | **When?** |
| Starter activity |  |  |
| Plenary activity |  |  |
| Teacher modelling |  |  |
| Teacher explanation |  |  |
| Questioning |  |  |
| Group work  |  |  |
| Independent learning |  |  |
| Formative assessment |  |  |
| Behaviour management |  |  |
| Developing literacy |  |  |
| Developing numeracy |  |  |
| Homework |  |  |

# Observation 2: unstructured participant observation

Start your next observation without an agenda, other than to be part of the lesson and get involved with the lesson. Before the lesson, ask the teacher what they want you to do (e.g. support an individual or a group of pupils in the class). Record field notes immediately after the lesson with the table below.

|  |
| --- |
| **What is/was your role in the lesson?** |
|  |
| **What did the learners you observed do in the lesson?** |
|  |
| **What did you learn?** |
|  |
| **What questions do you have?** |
|  |

# Observation 3: observing with structure of a lesson

You will not participate in the learning activities for this observation. Find a position in the class where you are able to see the teacher and learners clearly without unduly interfering or disrupting the activities. Make a note of the time and a description of each activity you observe. Focus on transitions, such as how the teacher manages moving from direct teaching (e.g. an explanation) to pupil led activity (e.g. collaborative or cooperative learning).

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Subject:** |  | **School:**  |  |
| **Year:**  |  | **Date:** |  | **Classroom:** |  |
| **Time** | **Activity** |
| ***Introduction and start-up routines*** |
|  |  |
| ***Lesson activities (including episodes and mini-plenary activities)*** |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  | *Add more rows for more phases of the lesson…* |
| ***End of lesson routines*** |
|  |  |

# Observation 4: observing learner and teacher activity

In this observation, you will be undertaking a timed observation of learner and teacher activity. It is important to make quick notes that capture the activities of both the teacher and the learners at 5-minute intervals. This approach forces the observer to focus on the general activity in the lesson, rather than focus on specific phenomena.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Date:** |  | **Group:** |  |
| **School:** |  | **Room:** |  |
| **Learning intentions (objective / outcome / success criteria)** |
|  |
| **Minutes** | **Learner Activity** | **Teacher Activity** |
| **0** |  |  |
| **5** |  |  |
| **10** |  |  |
| **15** |  |  |
| **20** |  |  |
| **25** |  |  |
| **30** |  |  |
| **35** |  |  |
| **40** |  |  |
| **45** |  |  |
| **50** |  |  |
| **55** |  |  |
| **60** |  |  |

# Observation 5: observing a plan-teach-evaluate cycle

In this observation, you will be shadowing your mentor before, during and after a lesson to explore how effective learning and progress is planned and delivered in the classroom. Work with your mentor to identify a class to observe: (1) discuss the class and the planned activity before the lesson; (2) observe the lesson comparing the learning intentions with the learner activities and outcomes; and (3) discuss the lesson with your mentor afterwards to debrief and evaluate the impact of learning.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Class:**  |  | **Date:** |  | **Topic:** |  |
| ***Before the lesson, meet with your mentor to discuss and make notes on…*** |
| * What are the learning intentions?
* What will indicate that learning has taken place?
* What are the possible misconceptions in the lesson?
* What strategies will support and challenge specific learners?
* What are the learning episodes (activities) in the lesson?
* How do the episodes link and flow one to the next?
* How do the episode link to the learning intensions?
 |  |
| Identify specific learners (case students) to observe in the lesson.* Why have they been selected? e.g. a range of attainment, behaviours, etc.
 |  |
| ***During the lesson, observe the ‘case students’ and make notes on…*** |
| *Move around the room and talk with the case students, making field notes during the lesson if possible…** How did the teacher start/end the lesson?
* How and when were the learning intentions shared?
* What were the main learning episodes?
* To what extent were learners motivated and on-task?
* To what extent did the case students meet the learning outcome / success criteria?
 |  |
| ***After the lesson, discuss the lesson with your mentor, reflect and make notes on…*** |
| * To what extent were the expectations met?
* Which learners were above and below expectation?
* Why was this the case? What factors influenced learning?
* What was the impact of the teaching on learners’ progress?
* What are the implications for future lessons?
 |  |

# Observation 6: timed interval observation

This is a more quantitative version of the format from Observation 4. Don't attempt this observation until you have started solo teaching. This approach is effective for observing specific learner/teacher behaviours or phenomena in the classroom, such as:

* on/off task behaviour of specific learners
* interaction (e.g. talk or questioning): teacher to pupil; pupil to teacher; or pupil to pupil
* learning behaviours (e.g. reading guidance material, self or peer assessment, etc.)
* collaborative verses independent work
* etc.

Discuss the focus for this observation with your ITT Mentor. The columns can be used for **either** (tick as appropriate to this observation):

* observing *multiple individuals* for a single behaviours/phenomena **or**
* observing *a single individual* for multiple behaviours/phenomena

In these modes, the response every 5 minutes can be as simple as a tick (ü) or a cross (û). More advanced approaches can use simple codes to observe *multiple individuals* **and** *multiple behaviours/phenomena*. **Note:** this observation continues on the next page…

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Date:** |  | **Group:** |  |
| **School:** |  | **Room:** |  |
| **Observation focus:** |
|  |
| **Interval**  | **Minutes** | Use the columns on the below to identify specific individuals **or** behaviours/phenomena to be observed over the lesson. Be clear about the whether you are observing the teacher, the class, a group(s) or individual(s) – and record the details above. Decide on how you will ‘code’ observations – i.e. P/O, 1/0 etc. |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | **Comments**(to help you remember what happened) |
|  |
| A | **0** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| B | **5** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| C | **10** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| D | **15** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| E | **20** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| F | **25** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| G | **30** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| H | **35** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| I | **40** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| J | **45** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| K | **50** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| L | **55** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| M | **60** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

*Continue over page…*

*After the observed lesson…*

|  |
| --- |
| **Field notes** (additional comments and observations recorded immediately after the lesson) |
|  |
| **Reflections on observations and interpretation of collected data** |
|  |
| **Targets** |
|  |
| **Required action** | **Required Resources** | **Required by (date)** |
|  |  |  |

**Note:** other time intervals can be used for timed observations. See **Appendix 1** for an example of a timed observation.

# Observation 7: unstructured observation

Use the form below to record unstructured observation notes. Try to focus on recording what you see without analysing and interpreting during the lesson. After the lesson, identify and refine emerging themes, and reflect on the implications (including questions for further enquiry).

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Date:** |  | **Group:** |  |
| **School:** |  | **Room:** |  |
| **Observation notes** |
|  |
| **Analysis** (trends and themes) | **Reflection** (learning and implications) |
|  |  |

# Lesson Observation Pro Formas

Now it is over to you!! Downloadable and editable versions of the observation pro formas in this guide are available in the Placement website at:

<http://www.itt-placement.com/pgce-secondary/planning-and-learning-activities.php>

Student teachers are encouraged to experiment with, adapt and evaluate a variety of approaches throughout the programme – even not using a form, or even a piece of paper! As confidence increases, new methods can be used – either adopted from other sources (e.g. from a research article or book) or designed for specific circumstances, such as:

* using seating plans to analyse movement or other activity

# Further Reading

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# Notes

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