

LESSON OBSERVATION Pocketbook

By Roy Watson-Davis



Cartoons:
Phil Hailstone

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Summative observation



The development of observation as a creative process has been a slow one, largely because of the way institutions have viewed the process. Until the 1990s, lesson observation was mainly confined to teacher training – the observer monitored, assessed and judged the trainee as part of the course. Once qualified, apart from a couple of observations during a probationary period, you could confidently shut your classroom door and build a world of your own.

Schools then adopted lesson observation as a management tool for recruitment and for checking up on teaching. It was writ large as the government inspection model, with external observers coming in to observe and grade lessons.

In some schools this model has been enshrined in in-house processes, which often use external criteria – typically, in England, Ofsted's – and employ the observer as 'judge'. It is a summative process and limited as a support for professional development.

Formative observation



In enlightened schools, observation is seen as a complex professional interaction. It's a creative, *formative process* personalised for each institution. Observation criteria are discussed and developed in-house. They reflect the best practice, views and vision of staff. Feedback is an integral part of the process. There are three types of observation in these schools. All take place within the same supportive context and all three are covered in this Pocketbook:

1. Observation for the purposes of **assessing** and **monitoring** performance.
2. Observation where the professional development and feedback are for the observer, not the teacher being observed. **The observer is the learner.**
3. Observation where the teacher being observed selects both the focus of the observation and the person best qualified to observe and support them. The observer acts as **coach** or **expert adviser** and the **teacher being observed is the learner.**

Observers as learners



Lesson observation has enormous potential when it is centred on teachers working together in a supportive environment to improve teaching and learning skills. It is a potent two- or three-way process that fosters creative professional development.

As an observer, you get to experience different styles of lesson delivery; different ways of setting up a classroom; a wide range of approaches to classroom management; and you get to see how colleagues of different personalities deliver lesson content (and sometimes the same content, but in wildly different ways).

As a result of observing and talking about what you have observed, you get to feed new ideas and approaches into your own teaching, to modify, broaden and sharpen your skills. You will come across not only new ideas, but also practical resources: worksheets, web links, starting tasks, even just different textbook pages that you can import into your own lessons.

The **observer as a learner** is a powerful driver for professional change.

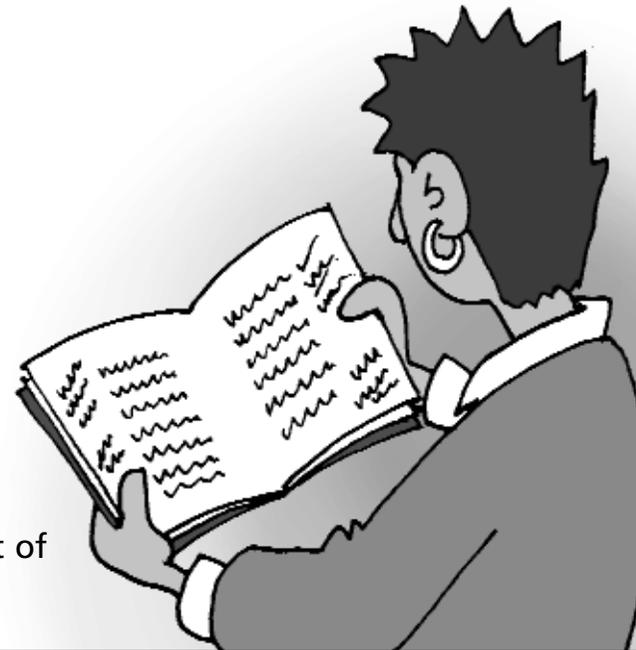
Observers as coaches – everybody learns!



The observer as a coach or expert adviser is an equally powerful model.

And because observation is such an excellent way to transmit good ideas and practice, nine times out of ten the coach or adviser will pick up ideas from the lesson they are observing!

An NQT mentor/coach saw how one of the NQTs had developed a really effective marking technique: students were encouraged to write comments next to the NQT's own marking. The coach exported the idea wholesale into his own lessons, with very positive results.



So everybody can learn when they are part of the observation process.

Being observed



As an **observed teacher**, you can focus on aspects of your own classroom development. Being observed generates genuine and powerful self-reflection, makes you really think through how you are teaching and inspires you to raise your game. It also offers positive opportunities to discuss and consider a range of personal professional development issues, such as classroom management, teaching styles, lesson pace and structure, and learning outcomes.

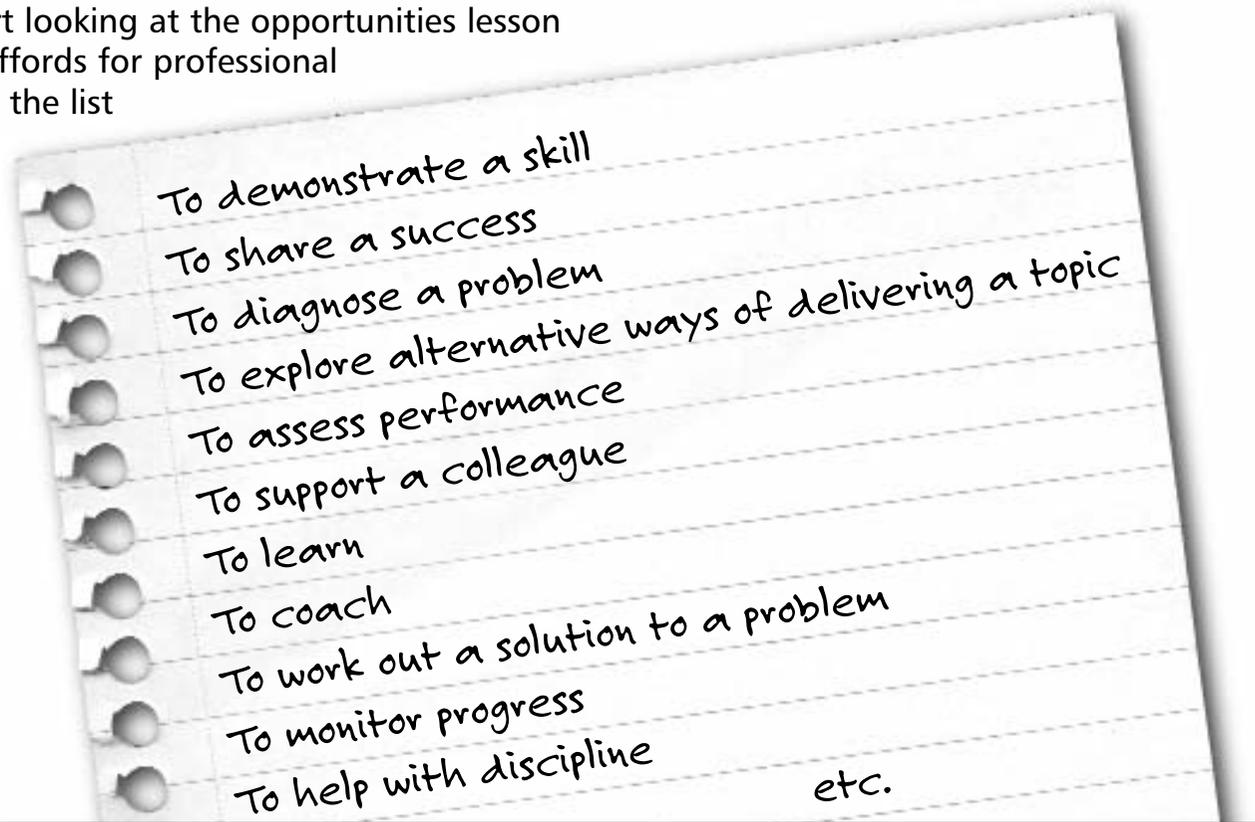
For both the observer and observed, lesson observation is a dynamic tool for professional development. It encourages links between colleagues, improves the effectiveness of teaching and learning, and generates a positive atmosphere of mutual support and development.

The question is not why should lesson observation be undertaken, but why there isn't more of it in schools! The next two pages suggest a few possibilities.

What's in it for you?



Once you start looking at the opportunities lesson observation affords for professional development, the list is impressive:



About the author



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Roy started teaching in 1992 and has worked as an AST since 2001. His professional interests include staff training, coaching and mentoring as well as developing ideas for student voice. In the course of his AST work he has observed and fed back on over 300 hours of lessons across all subjects and grades of staff. This book arises largely out of those experiences. He is the author of the *Creative Teaching Pocketbook* and the *Form Tutor's Pocketbook*.

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Dedication

For Dawn, with love