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The FE Toolkit: A Magazine for Grade 1 Teachers

LESSON OBSERVATION

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NEWS

Of the colleges OFSTED inspected during 2010/11, just over a quarter had improved and just under a quarter had declined from their previous inspection.

Annual Chief Inspection Report 2010/11

At the end of June 2011, 9.8% of 16-18-year-olds were not in education, employment or training.

NEET Statistics - Quarterly Brief - Quarter 2 2011, Dept Education.

Quality of Teaching in FE

"One of the key findings in last year's Annual Report was that, across the learning and skills sector as a whole, there was too little outstanding teaching. This remains a concern this year".

(Annual Chief Inspection Report, 2010-11, p90)



"The observation method...may arguably be the most valid criterion for the evaluation of practicing teachers, i.e., classroom performance."

(Pennington and Young, 1989, p636).

Assessment Corner

Simple ways to test learning

Pictionary

Assessment of student progress will be the determining factor in future judgments of lesson quality. Divide students into groups, and then ask each group to draw a picture that represents what they understand by the session's learning outcome(s). Give 5 minutes for this. Then ask each group to justify their drawing to the rest of the group.

WHAT'S NEW AT NEWBUBBLES



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22 March 2013

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Michael Portillo
Broadcaster



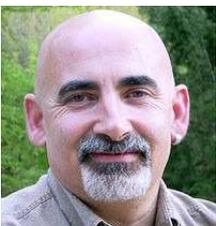
Dan Taubman
UCU Policy Chief



Joy Mercer
Association of Colleges



Lynne Sedgemore
Chair 157 Group



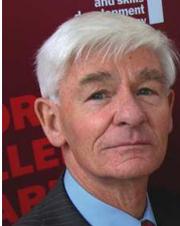
Dylan William
Institute of Education



Phil Race
Leeds Metropolitan University



Toni Fazaeli
Institute for Learning



Frank Coffield
Institute of Education

Bookings can be made by e-mailing Emma Jackson at gradeonetraining@newbubbles.com

Quote

"The recent announcements that Ofsted will evaluate the leadership of T & L; that the grade of 'satisfactory' will be replaced with 'requires improvement'; that no provider will be considered outstanding if T & L are not outstanding; and that no-notice inspections are to be introduced, all significantly intensify the pressures on staff and make T & L the number one priority ... at long last..."

"...Tutors accept the need for accountability and are keen to improve the quality of their teaching. Besides, they feel that observations are conducted in a professional manner and that feedback is constructive. What they object to is the damage that grading lessons has on relationships, that it creates a climate of fear, where even experienced staff feel they cannot innovate or take risks with their teaching..."

"...Three conclusions: principals now need to be educational leaders as well as business managers; improving the quality of T & L is the secret of success; and if SMTs want to create a culture of learning in their college, let them abolish the grading of lessons".

Frank Coffield (2012)

In Parliament...

Mr Don Foster (Bath) (LD):

"Graduates with first-class degrees in shortage subjects receive higher teacher training bursaries than those with second-class degrees. Is there any research evidence showing that those with a first-class degree are better teachers than those with a second-class degree?"

Mr Gibb: *"There is evidence that teacher subject knowledge has a direct bearing on the attainment of pupils. There is also a correlation between the degree classification and the propensity of trainees to finish their course. There is also evidence from around the world that the highest performing education jurisdictions are those that take their trainees from the top 10% or top quarter of graduates"*

Daily Hansard Debate, 16/04/12, House of Commons



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MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR INTELLECTUAL ASSETS

THE IMPORTANCE OF LESSON OBSERVATIONS: WHY OFSTED WANTS IMPROVEMENT

Lesson observation is not new. It has always provided managers with information about the quality of teaching. Yet it remains controversial - graded or non-graded? Development or surveillance? Constructive or destructive? Which scheme should be adopted? Is lesson observation really essential for better teaching?

A MESSAGE FROM MICHAEL GOVE, EDUCATION SECRETARY

In June 2011, Education Secretary Michael Gove insisted that teachers had 'nothing to fear from lesson observation', adding, "Not only (is) learning from other professionals the best way to improve, (but) confident performers should relish the opportunity to show what they can do" (in TES, 13.07.12). He was talking about schools, but he could easily be referring to FE Colleges.



Lesson observations in FE are a popular measure for tackling teaching performance for a number of reasons:

- They provide information (via grade profiles) on how individuals and departments are 'performing' at any given time in the academic cycle.
- They encourage a dialogue between observer and observed on how best to improve teaching performance.
- They enable good practice in teaching to be identified and disseminated.
- They offer a strategy for managers to influence and improve student outcomes for a particular teacher or course.
- They provide a system for identifying poor performance and (hopefully) options for development to 'correct' this.
- They provide 'hard evidence' of a college's ability to monitor and improve the quality of teaching and learning.

Findings of the Annual Chief Inspector's Report 2010/11: Could Do Better!

Lesson observations are back in the spotlight because OFSTED (and the government) is concerned that FE teaching standards are not improving quickly enough. The Annual Chief Inspection Report for 2010-11 gave a less than ringing endorsement for FE teachers: of the **84 college inspections** that took place in 2010-11, not one was rated outstanding in teaching and learning; 16 colleges were rated 'satisfactory' for their third successive inspection; **only 11% of lessons were judged 'outstanding'** and 44% colleges previously rated as 'good' saw their grade decline. In colleges who were awarded a 'good' for teaching and learning, 27% of lessons remained 'satisfactory' and 2% 'inadequate'. OFSTED maintained that there was too much variation in teachers' lessons, which undermined the sector's claims to put learners at the centre of learning: "One of the key findings in last year's Annual Report was that, across the learning and skills sector as a whole, there was too little outstanding teaching. This remains a concern this year".

(Annual Chief Inspection Report, 2010/11, p90).

Purpose of FE

"The learning and skills sector has a critical part to play, both in working with young people who are currently disengaged from education, or at risk of becoming so, and in supporting adults with low skill levels to achieve their ambitions in life, work and learning".

(Annual Chief Inspection Report 2010/11, p90)

Independent Providers

OFSTED reported an 8% increase in the proportion of independent learning providers found to be good or outstanding. These organisations include large and small private, not for profit and voluntary organisations.

(Annual Chief Inspection Report 2010/11, p10)

Employer Provision

10 of the 16 employer providers inspected in 2010-11 were judged to be outstanding or good and six were judged as satisfactory. This represented an improvement on 2009/10.

(Annual Chief Inspection Report 2010/11, p10)

THE NEW 2012 COMMON INSPECTION FRAMEWORK

Criteria for Judging teaching, learning and assessment.



"The most important purpose of teaching is to promote learning and improve outcomes for learners. A **rigorous and informative assessment process** is essential to successful learning, as is the support learners receive" (*Evaluation Schedule, Inspection Handbook, 2012, p44*).

Inspection Handbook for FE:

Sept 2012

- learners benefit from high expectations, engagement, care, support and motivation from staff
- staff use their skills and expertise to plan and deliver teaching, learning and support to meet each learner's needs
- staff initially assess learners' starting points and monitor their progress, set challenging tasks, and build on and extend learning for all learners
- learners understand how to improve as a result of frequent, detailed and accurate feedback from staff following assessment of their learning
- teaching and learning develop English, mathematics and functional skills, and support the achievement of learning goals and career aims
- appropriate and timely information, advice and guidance supports learning effectively
- equality and diversity are promoted through teaching and learning.

Inspection handbook for FE:

Sept 2009

- learning and assessment activities are linked to initial and current assessments and related activities to make sure they build on and extend learning for all learners
- interesting and appropriate teaching and learning methods and resources inspire and challenge all learners and enable them to extend their knowledge, skills and understanding
- technology is used effectively to promote and support learning, where appropriate
- staff have appropriate skills and expertise to provide good-quality teaching, learning, assessment, and information and support services for each learner
- assessment of learners' performance and progress is timely, fair, consistent and reliable
- learners receive constructive feedback on their progress and how they might improve
- learners receive help to develop literacy, numeracy, language and key skills to support the attainment of their main learning goals
- learning, teaching, training and assessment advance equality and support diversity

Summary of Changes

The New Common Inspection Framework for 2012 has reduced the number of criteria for effective teaching performance, and sharpened up the focus on student learning.

- There is now an explicit reference to assessment in the evaluation schedule (see opposite).
- 'Progress' and 'attainment' are central considerations in judgements of lesson quality.
- The concept of 'high expectations' is highlighted in the main criteria for the first time.
- Stronger links are made between learning goals and career goals.
- Functional skills is explicitly featured for the first time.
- There is less emphasis on specific teaching methods, resources and technologies (*teacher focus*) and more on meeting the needs of each learner (*student focus*).

Notes for Observers

Under the new 2012 CIF, observers are expected to consider:

1. Clear *starting points* for each lesson.
2. *Visible assessment* methods that show students 'making progress' against set targets.
3. The use of resources to *accelerate* learning.
4. The quality of student '*work products*' when judged against an 'average' class.
5. *Subject-specific* and *level specific* learning issues.

GRADE BOUNDARIES ATTRIBUTES: INSPECTION HANDBOOK 2012

'Outstanding' (Grade 1) Characteristics: Inspection Handbook 2012 pp49-50

- Much of teaching, learning and assessment for all age groups and learning programmes is outstanding and never less than consistently good. As a result, **the very large majority of learners consistently make very good and sustained progress** in learning sessions that may take place in a variety of locations, such as the classroom, workplace or wider community.
- All staff are highly adept at working with and developing skills and knowledge in learners from different backgrounds. Staff have **consistently high expectations** of all learners and demonstrate this in a range of learning environments.
- Drawing on excellent subject knowledge and/or industry experience, teachers, trainers, assessors and coaches **plan astutely and set challenging tasks based on systematic, accurate assessment of learners' prior skills, knowledge and understanding**. They use well-judged and often imaginative teaching strategies that, together with sharply focused and timely support and intervention, match individual needs accurately. Consequently, the development of learners' skills and understanding is exceptional. Staff generate **high levels of enthusiasm** for participation in, and commitment to, learning.
- Teaching and learning develop high levels of resilience, confidence and **independence in learners** when they tackle challenging activities. Teachers, trainers, and assessors **check learners' understanding effectively throughout learning sessions**. Time is used very well and **every opportunity is taken to develop crucial skills successfully**, including being able to use their literacy and numeracy skills on other courses and at work.
- Appropriate and **regular coursework** contributes very well to learners' progress. **High quality learning materials** and resources including information and communication technology (ICT) are available and are used by staff and learners during and between learning and assessment sessions.
- **Marking and constructive feedback from staff are frequent** and of a consistent quality, leading to high levels of engagement and interest.
- The teaching of English, mathematics and functional skills is consistently good with much outstanding. **Teachers and other staff enthuse and motivate most learners** to participate in a wide range of learning activities.
- Equality and diversity are integrated fully into the learning experience. **Staff manage learners' behaviour skilfully**; they show great awareness of equality and diversity in teaching sessions.
- Advice, guidance and support motivate learners to secure the best possible opportunities for success in their learning and progression.

'Requires Improvement' (Grade 3) Characteristics: Inspection Handbook 2012 p51

- Teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement and is not yet good. It results in most learners, and groups of learners, making progress that is broadly in line with that made by learners nationally with similar starting points. However, there are weaknesses in areas of delivery, such as in learning or assessment.
- There is likely to be some good teaching, learning and assessment and there are no endemic inadequacies in particular courses, across levels or age groups, or for particular groups of learners. Staff work with and develop skills and knowledge in learners from different backgrounds satisfactorily. Staff expectations enable most learners to work hard and achieve satisfactorily, and encourage them to make progress. Due attention is given to the careful initial assessment and ongoing assessment of learners' progress, but these are not always conducted rigorously enough, which may result in some unnecessary repetition of work for learners, and tasks being planned and set that do not fully challenge them.
- Staff monitor learners' work during learning sessions, set appropriate tasks and are capable of adjusting their plans to support learning. These adaptations are usually successful but occasionally are not timely or relevant, and this slows learning for some learners.
- Teaching strategies ensure that learners' individual needs are usually met. Staff deploy available additional support carefully, use available resources well and set appropriate coursework for learners.
- Learners are informed about the progress they are making and how to improve further through marking and dialogue with staff that is usually timely and encouraging. This approach ensures that most learners want to work hard and improve.
- The teaching of English, mathematics and functional skills is satisfactory overall.
- The promotion of equality and support for diversity in teaching and learning is satisfactory.
- Advice, guidance and support help to motivate learners to succeed in their learning and progress.

'Inadequate' (Grade 4) Characteristics: Inspection Handbook pp51-52

- Teaching, learning and assessment are likely to be inadequate where any of the following apply.
- As a result of weak teaching, learning and assessment over time, learners or groups of learners are making inadequate progress and have been unsuccessful in attaining their learning goals.
- Staff do not have sufficiently high expectations and, over time, teaching fails to excite, enthuse, engage or motivate particular groups of learners, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.
- Staff lack expertise and the ability to promote learning.
- Teaching of English, mathematics and functional skills is inadequate and a significant proportion of learners do not receive appropriate support to address English, mathematics and language needs.
- Learning activities and resources are not sufficiently well matched to the needs of learners and, as a result, they make inadequate progress.
- Staff show insufficient understanding and insufficiently promote equality and diversity in teaching sessions.

'Outstanding'

"Outstanding teaching and learning are characterised by highly skilled and enthusiastic teachers who use their extensive expertise to inspire a culture of learning and challenge. Very effective planning leads to brisk, lively and imaginative teaching that ensures that learners' differing needs are met. Teachers' expectations of their learners are high, checks on learning are frequent, questions are probing and work is appropriately challenging. Learners are fully involved in evaluating and reflecting on their own learning and they learn quickly and make good progress. Learners needing additional help are identified early and effective support is provided promptly".

Annual Chief Inspection Report 2010/11, p97, para 261

'Inadequate'

"In the least successful lessons, teachers talk too much, suppressing learners' contributions, and deliver content that is unimaginative. Questioning is rarely sufficiently penetrating to make learners think hard enough to develop their ideas, or to research, explore or communicate their ideas independently. Too many learners remain unchallenged and their own expectations of what they might achieve are not extended sufficiently. Teaching is dull and uninspiring, so learners find it hard to maintain their interest and make progress".

Annual Chief Inspection Report 2010/11, p97, para 262



Chief Inspector Michael Wilshaw is critical of the teaching standards in FE Colleges.

LESSON OBSERVATION: WHAT OFSTED SAYS:

“The challenge for providers is to put in place the rigorous systems and processes of observing teaching, critically reflecting on practice, and supporting targeted professional development, that will enable outstanding teaching and learning to be more widely replicated”.

Annual Chief Inspection Report 2010/11

Assuring Quality

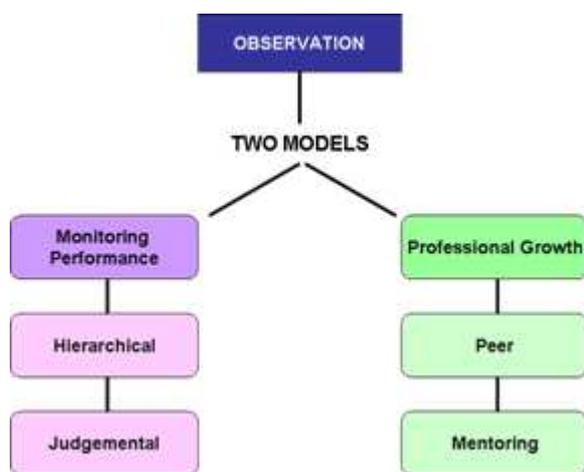
Key Questions to Ask about Your Observation System:

- What is the **purpose** of your scheme? To grade? To satisfy OFSTED? To ensure compliance? A tool for CPD? To share good practice?
- Is the data you produce from lesson observation reliable and valid? **Do you over-grade?**
- Is it **benchmarked** against OFSTED criteria from similar colleges?
- **How do learners feedback** on the quality of the classroom experience?
- How do you **feedback** to teaching staff observed?
- Do you deal rigorously with **poor teaching?**
- How do you improve **satisfactory teaching?**
- How do you **share good practice** in the college?
- How do you convert the data and experience from lesson observations into **Continuing Professional Development (CPD)** opportunities?
- Is lesson observation producing **positive change** in teaching and learning?

FE Facts

89 Colleges are 'outstanding'.
50 of these are not rated 'outstanding' for teaching and learning.
114 Colleges are 'satisfactory'.
29 have failed to improve their grades over three inspections.

TES, 13 Feb 2012



Lesson observation serves two explicit purposes:

It judges performance (graded model)– it measures the quality of teaching by comparing classroom performance against an established standard of good practice (e.g. OFSTED framework) and awarding a grade on the 1-4 scale. This model is favoured in FE colleges.

It develops capability (growth model)– provides teachers with an opportunity to obtain feedback on teaching and share ideas for improvement. Peer observations are often a part of this scheme. This model is considered to have higher impact on teacher performance (O’Leary, 2012) and is favoured in HE institutions.

OFSTED is fairly clear that lesson observation, used appropriately, can be linked to improvements in teaching and learning.

“In the best colleges, procedures for monitoring, evaluating and improving the quality of teaching and learning are detailed and thorough and findings inform staff development. Observations of teaching and learning are used extensively and effectively to improve teachers’ skills and are a key part of the college’s quality assurance system. Good opportunities exist for sharing best practice. Peer observations of each other’s lessons and coaching from advanced practitioners improve staff confidence. In the less effective colleges, observation records are descriptive rather than evaluative and take too little account of learning and progress, resulting in sessions being graded too highly by senior leaders”.

(Annual Chief Inspection Report, 2010/11, p97).

OFTSED recognises that lesson observation is a useful management tool for monitoring and evaluating teaching quality. What is less clear from inspectors is whether they prefer the graded scheme or the non-graded scheme. Perhaps it is telling that the Inspection Handbook 2012 contains:

- Only 14 references to the word ‘observation’ or ‘observations’
- No reference to the word ‘observation’ in the evaluation schedule i.e. the section that describes the key questions, performance criteria and grade characteristics (some 26 pages long)
- No mention of the terms ‘observation grade’, ‘observation grading’ or ‘lesson grade’

Some would argue that it doesn’t really matter which scheme is adopted, as long as the scheme is having an impact on teaching performance. But the fact remains, the majority of FE colleges *DO* prefer a graded scheme, though this is *not* a requirement laid down in the Inspection Handbook 2012.

THE OBSERVER'S CHECKLIST

Before You Even Start! The New Inspection Framework 2012 is increasingly interested in the way accommodation and facilities are used by teachers to support learning:

Instant Signs that 'All is Well'

- The teacher starts on time.
- Seating arrangements encourage student communication and participation in learning tasks.
- Equipment is operational and fit-for-purpose.
- Classroom rules are displayed prominently.
- Wall displays are relevant and up-to-date.
- Student work is celebrated on classroom walls and through teacher-talk.
- The learning environment is clear of clutter.
- Learners arrive before the lesson officially starts.
- Students are greeted warmly.
- Teacher takes the register.
- Students apologise to the teacher if they are late.

Whilst it is important to recognise that this is not a prescriptive set of requirements, and indeed a number of these items may not be demonstrated at observation, it nevertheless may say something important about the quality of teacher-student relationships and the 'respect' that inspectors see as so vital to a productive learning environment.

Put another way, an observation where most or all of these elements are missing is likely to say something serious about the quality of teaching, learning and assessment that is taking place across the year. As a CPD, exercise, colleges may wish to consider these elements in the form of a discussion with staff to gauge their views and develop consistent ways of approaching these matters.

A former quality manager with over 1000 lessons observed, Tully (2012) suggests the following attributes of a grade 1 lesson:

1. Vivid 'hooks' to stimulate initial interest and 'surprise'.
2. Clear links between the session and course assessment
3. A short recap or 'spotquiz' to test prior learning that involves all learners.
4. Simple, explicit learning outcomes that provide increasing challenge for learners
5. Nominated (directed) questioning of all learners, leading to detailed, evaluative answers from the majority.
6. Learners – unprompted – asking higher-level questions of the teacher and other learners.
7. Learner-centred tasks based on 'real' problems and involving learners in specific roles, and rotated feedback.
8. Strong attention to 'time-on-task' and task completion.
9. Frequent positive reinforcement.
10. Plenary review that summarises and congratulates learners for their achievements in-session.

Time on Task

There are some benefits by simply giving *more time* to a task: for example, students who are struggling to master the content or skills, those who have learning disabilities, English language learners, and highly anxious learners (Johnston, 2009).

More effective is the teacher's control of time whilst students are engaged on-task. Tasks need to be clearly explained at the start and linked to targets at individual or group level. The teacher sets clear time limits for target-completion and uses 'walkarounds' to check progress, ask questions and keep students focused. Expert use of medal & mission techniques are in evidence (see Petty, 2008).

Interventions are expertly judged, and include modelling, coaching & corrective feedback from the teacher. Students are encouraged to answer their own questions, and spoonfeeding is actively avoided.

The emphasis on targets, time and task-completion provides a sense of purpose and pace to the lesson, introduces 'stretch & challenge' through personalised goal-setting and encourages higher quality student work. It is an approach that works particularly effectively in vocational subject workshops.

(Tully, 2011)

Grading Workshops

Workshops are different animals to traditional classroom contexts, but observers should look for the following:

- Introductions are punctual, crisp and well-explained.
- A thorough approach to health & safety issues is present. Learners are thoroughly prepared and appropriately dressed.
- Learning tasks are problem-centred, challenging and closely approximate activities typically encountered in industry.
- Learners work effectively both in teams and independently without supervision, using clear methods of tracking their own progress.
- There is good evidence of peer sharing and mentoring.

AIDE MEMOIRE—GRADE BOUNDARIES IN BRIEF

Grade 1 – Outstanding:

Quality of teaching and level of learning is exceptional; teacher inspirational; learning outcomes are focused & challenging; excellent use of resources; learning is thoroughly student-centred; timings for activities are expertly judged; student feedback is very positive; students eager to be involved in lesson and ask questions; progress is significantly higher than the 'average' class.

Grade 2 – Good:

Quality of teaching and learning is good and well exceeds the minimum requirements of the College; teacher is highly competent and knowledgeable; learning outcomes are mostly achieved; appropriate pace in most cases; good student feedback, most students give appropriate answers to posed questions; some are actively asking questions.

Grade 3 – Satisfactory:

Quality of teaching and learning is acceptable and within the College minimum standards; teacher does not offer sufficient opportunity for interaction with students; lesson is more teacher-centred; learning resources are not fully present or exploited properly; activities are appropriate but unimaginative; student feedback is flat; students respond to questions when asked, but the answers lack depth and imagination.

Grade 4 – Inadequate:

Quality of teaching and learning fails to meet minimum College requirements; little or no learning takes place; little evidence of planning; lesson activities not well-matched to the needs of the group; pacing is either too fast or too pedestrian; activities are routine and uninspiring; teacher lacks control and/or authority over class; negative feedback (verbal, body language) provided by over 25% sample of students present in the lesson; questioning of students is unplanned, students do not ask questions, are apathetic and/or lack enthusiasm.

Adapted by Tully (2012)

LESSON PLANNING

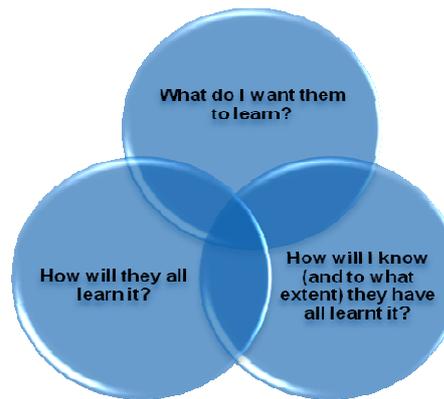
By Bradley Lightbody, 2012, CollegeNet

The new Ofsted Common Inspection Framework for both colleges and schools provides a firm focus on learning, *"The most important purpose of teaching is to promote learning and improve outcomes for learners"*. The criteria may be best summarised by the following three key questions which all teachers should ask themselves when writing a lesson plan.

The clarity of the lesson start is key in terms sharing the expected learning outcomes with the learners and for a Grade One edge a touch of *"inspire and challenge"*. The second step is to consider carefully how learners will learn and absorb new knowledge i.e. selecting the most appropriate learning strategies with an eye to the favourite Ofsted phrase "brisk pace" and strategies that will not only build knowledge but also functional skills, wider employability skills and embed equality and diversity good practice.

With regard to the latter although the limiting grade has been lifted it will be impossible to gain a Grade One for 'Teaching, Learning and Assessment' with weak E&D practice and without a Grade One it will be impossible to gain a Grade One for Overall Effectiveness. In essence a limiting grade is still in force. The third and final step is the most significant of all. Too many teachers work hard at the front of the classroom imparting knowledge do not stand still often enough to check progress and learning. There is a huge difference between 'covering the curriculum' and 'understanding the curriculum' so ensure sufficient time and energy is invested in effective Assessment for Learning (AfL) strategies to judge the extent and depth of learning by all rather than some.

Our lesson observers must cease operating as judges but become coaches and offer suggestions on how to strengthen all three steps. Make those three questions the core of post lesson feedback and discussions if you wish to advance learning and secure Grade one judgments. Beyond immediate classroom practice be alert to the wider aspects of the new CIF in terms of a focus on the individual. We do not teach classes but groups of individuals who all happen to be in the same room. Capture the individual in an ILP with meaningful targets and ensure effective interventions when targets are missed. Finally, focus on the 'narrowing the gap' agenda and the promotion and extension of independent learning preferably via an opportunity rich Virtual Learning Environment with 24-7 anyplace, anytime learning access.



Flexible Delivery

Chief Inspector, Sir Michael Wilshaw, has said recently that teachers will be judged on their ability to help pupils learn and not on their entertainment value. He added that every teacher needs to develop a style of teaching with which they feel comfortable, and which was flexible enough to cope with the demands of the lesson.

He said:

"A good lesson is about what works. A formulaic approach pushed out by a school or rigidly prescribed as part of the inspection process traps too many in a stultifying and stifling mould..."

He said teachers needed to be aware of when the mood of the lesson changes so they can alter their approach:

"The worst lessons are those where a teacher ploughs through the plan irrespective of how well, or how badly, the lesson is going. Ofsted won't require lesson plans when observing, but they will want to see a planned lesson."

Writing the Plan

In the era of 'no-notice' inspections, there will need to be changes to how FE colleges view lesson plans.

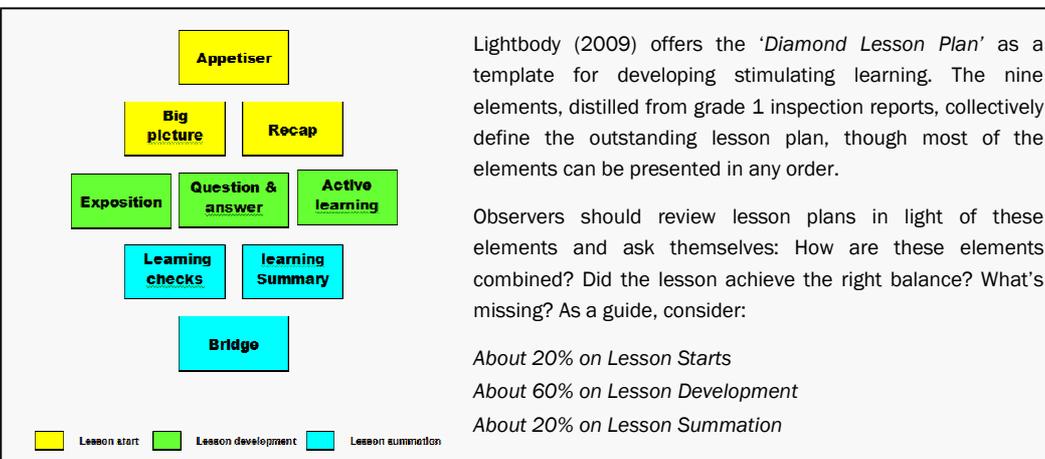
In: Evidence of planning that clearly includes challenge, develops students' learning skills' and offers differentiated learning outcomes and tasks.

In: Detailed exposition of the teacher's assessment approaches and how they relate to the session's outcomes.

Out: 4-page lesson plans that are repetitive (e.g. contain sections asking for the same or similar things) and meticulously describe every minute of the session.

"One of the greatest weaknesses of lesson plans in FE teaching is the precision of the assessment information offered. For example, a teacher who puts 'Q&A' in their assessment column believes they have offered something worthwhile...they haven't! What are these questions? Are they differentiated? What types of answers are expected? These need to be specified on the plan!"

(Tully, 2011, the FE Animal)



Lightbody (2009) offers the 'Diamond Lesson Plan' as a template for developing stimulating learning. The nine elements, distilled from grade 1 inspection reports, collectively define the outstanding lesson plan, though most of the elements can be presented in any order.

Observers should review lesson plans in light of these elements and ask themselves: How are these elements combined? Did the lesson achieve the right balance? What's missing? As a guide, consider:

- About 20% on Lesson Starts
- About 60% on Lesson Development
- About 20% on Lesson Summation

Inspection Handbook: Criteria for Lesson Planning

Staff use their skills and expertise to plan and deliver teaching, learning and support to meet each learner's needs

To make this judgement, inspectors will consider:

- how learning is planned to meet individual learners' needs and makes best use of staff knowledge and skills
- how effectively and creatively staff use resources, including accommodation, equipment and technology, and specialist advice and guidance to promote and support learning
- the relevant qualifications, training and experience of teachers, trainers, assessors, coaches and support staff
- the attention that is paid to the quality and safety of learning resources, particularly in specialist areas and practical settings
- how effectively learning is monitored during sessions, including where learners are receiving additional learning support
- the promotion and development of independent learning skills, for example, through the use of a range of technologies, including a virtual learning environment.

WHAT'S 'IN': 'EVIDENCE BASED TEACHING'

Hattie's top ten influences on student learning

Professor John Hattie's landmark meta-study into 'what works' in the classroom has significantly enhanced our understanding of effective teaching. Hattie's (2009) top ten influences on student learning (adapted from **Bradley Lightbody's (2009)** book *'Outstanding teaching and learning 14-19'*) are presented below:



Rank	Effect	Influence	Application
1	1.44	Self report grades	Learners providing accurate feedback to teachers about their progress against course standards/criteria, working closely with teachers to set improvement goals.
2	1.28	Piagetian programmes	Being alert to students' level of thinking skills in relation to Piaget's stages of learning and setting increasingly more difficult work to push students beyond their current level.
3	0.90	Formative evaluation	Teacher reflection on effectiveness of lessons via self and peer assessment – these reflections centre on the question: "how am I going"?
4	0.88	Micro teaching	Testing new strategies, reflecting on their impact and offering short demonstrations/ presentations to show others what has been learned.
5	0.88	Acceleration	Advancing the most able through the curriculum at a faster pace
6	0.80	Classroom Management	Classroom interventions/policies to curb poor behaviour and promote effective student participation (including those with learning difficulties).
7	0.75	Teacher clarity	Clear communication of learning goals, progress against milestones and checks on learning
8	0.74	Reciprocal teaching	Students encouraged to peer examine, review meaning of text and take the lead in discussions and take a turn at being the teacher.
9	0.73	Feedback	Discussing with students what they understand and what they do not understand, and using this to set goals for improvement.
10	0.72	Teacher-student relationship	Developing positive, motivational relationships involving listening, empathy, caring and mutual regard.

Effect-Sizes:

- An effect-size of **0.4** tells us that there has been a positive (visible) influence on learning – this is the benchmark for comparison.
- An effect size of **0.5** is equivalent to a one grade leap (e.g. C to B) in GCSE performance.
- An effect-size of **1.0** is equivalent to a two grade leap (e.g. C to A) in GCSE performance (or improving a person's rate of learning by 50%).

Effective Teachers:

Hattie isolated *three* major attributes of the most effective teachers:

- **Teachers who use particular teaching methods (based on evidence of 'what works')**
- **High expectations for all students**
- **Positive teacher-student relationships**

The Concept of 'Expert Teachers'

According to Hattie, the *three* things that separated 'expert' from 'experienced' teachers were:

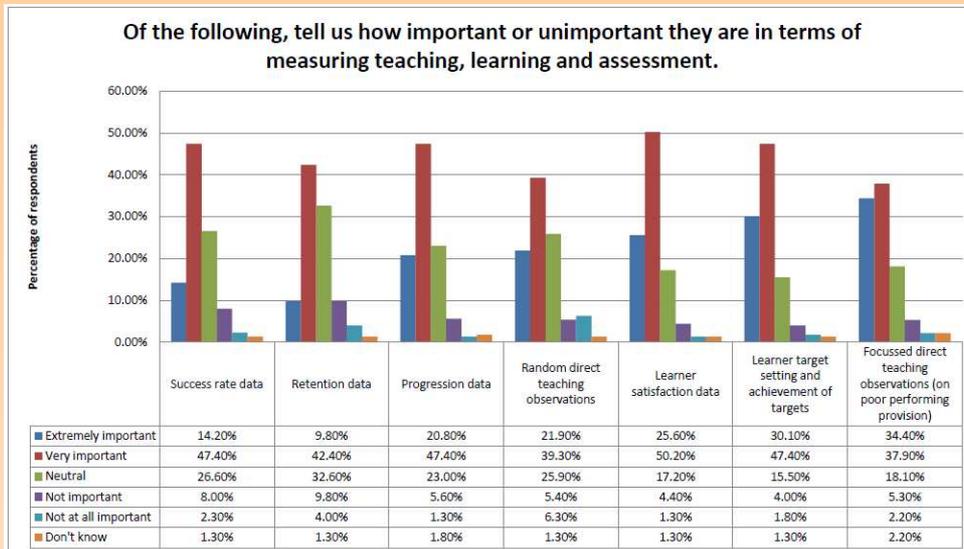
- the **degree of challenge** presented,
- **depth of student processing of knowledge** and representation of what was worth finding out about, and
- **ongoing monitoring and feedback.**

Try this!

Geoff Petty advocates the use of **same-difference diagrams** to encourage students to distinguish common and distinctive attributes of two comparable items or issues. Works best as two overlapping circles, with a central section for the 'common' areas. High effect sizes!

RECENT SURVEYS ON LESSON OBSERVATION

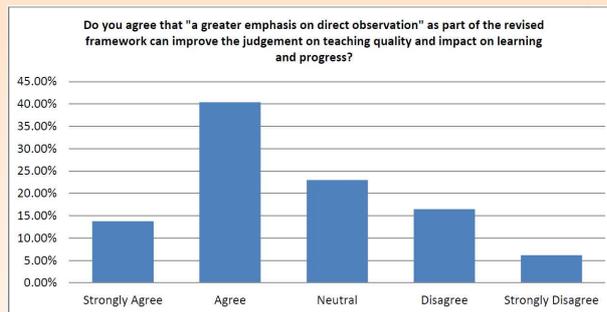
IFL Survey (2012): 'A Good Education For All': Given the recent publicity about the quality of FE teaching, the IFL wanted to seek views relating to the measurement of teaching, learning and assessment. It collected 259 responses from the FE sector.



When compared with other devices, lesson observation came out top (34.4%) in terms of respondents who felt it was 'extremely' important as a tool for measuring the quality of teaching & learning (which rises to 72.3% when added to the 'Very Important' responses).

IFL Survey (2011): CIF (2012) - An IFL Response Paper

The majority of respondents (54.2 per cent) agreed with the view that lesson observation could improve teaching quality compared to 22.7 per cent who disagreed, though it remains debatable—from our reading of the inspection handbook 2012— whether the new framework has actually put a 'greater emphasis' on direct observation as the IFL survey infers (p14).



Comments on observation feedback (p14):

When asked how satisfied respondents were with the feedback they had received from their observation (from inspectors), views were mixed between some very positive and some negative experiences. Of those respondents who had experienced an observation, 41.9% said that they had been satisfied with the feedback they had received, 8.7% of which said that they were 'extremely satisfied'. On the other hand, 22% had expressed dissatisfaction with their observation feedback, 5.8% of which were 'extremely dissatisfied.'

The survey offers a good picture of how to present observation feedback:

"It should, be supplied orally and in writing, reference specific CIF criteria that were met/not met, identify areas of good practice and areas for improvement, refer to recognised, agreed and identified learning theories/current policy, refer to specific examples of practice seen or recommended to the teacher/trainer and cover planning and delivery of the session"

"It is easy to criticise but what we need is a greater understanding of the pressures teachers are under and practical suggestions on how to be more effective in the classroom and how to cope with learners who have a vast array of social problems/disabilities."

"Focus more on positives, less critical and more developmental. That doesn't mean there shouldn't be any criticism but I have seen excellent teachers demoralised by feedback...or left feeling they weren't given any real feedback on how to improve..."

NASUWT VIEW

The National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers, which represents teachers at primary, secondary and tertiary levels, has been critical of the rush to increase the use of lesson observation in schools.

"Lesson observations should be recorded in a way that supports professional dialogue and exchange. It is not appropriate for lessons to be graded. Such an approach is simplistic and ignores the importance of a holistic approach to performance management. Ofsted has made it clear that it does not require schools to grade individual lessons using the Ofsted grading system. The data collected through lesson observations should be used to inform the school's evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning and school improvement planning".

<http://www.nasuwt.org.uk/>

DID YOU KNOW

Lesson observation is strictly regulated in schools. The maximum observation time permitted in an academic year is 3 hours (NASUWT). There is currently a debate about the status of "learning walks" (drop-ins) by managers and Heads and whether these should be defined as formal 'lesson observations'. If a manager takes notes on the teacher's performance, it is classed as a lesson observation and contributes to the three hour allocation.

UCU VIEW

"We consider that if a system of lesson observation is to operate successfully, it must have credibility and be owned by the academic staff. Mere consultation by management on such a crucial issue is insufficient and will not deliver a regime that has credibility amongst those being observed....UCU would argue that lesson observation can and should be much more. It should be an opportunity for teaching professionals to receive advice and guidance on their strengths and weaknesses, to provide material for professional reflection, and to identify areas for CPD and further training. Lesson observation should be part of the developmental processes of an organisation. It should be objective and transparent to those being observed. It should not be used to stigmatise and single out individuals. It should not be used as part of performance related pay scheme"

(UCU, Lesson Observation: Guidelines, pp2-3)

MANAGING THE OBSERVATION

Observation Planning:

As **Pennington and Young (1989)** note, observations work best when the observer is well-trained, experienced and respected amongst his/her fellow peers:

- Gives at least one week notice for the observation window.
- Arrives before the class begins (to allow some minimal contact with students and an introduction to the class before the lesson begins).
- Sits in an inconspicuous place where both students and teachers can be seen well (generally at the side or back of the room).
- Avoids distracting behaviour during the observation (such as frowning, moving about, or making unnecessary noise).
- Resists the temptation to give any kind of verbal or nonverbal input or feedback during the observation (either to students or to the teacher).
- Is present in class for a minimum of 45 minutes.
- Approaches the observation with a completely open mind.

Principles and Guidelines for Giving Feedback After Lessons

(based on work by Dawber & O’Gorman, 2005)

A significant amount of emotional and psychological investment goes into every lesson plan when the teacher knows an observer will be present, so bear this in mind as you begin your feedback!

- Feedback should be *specific, constructive* and *timely* (within 72 hours preferably).
- The observer should also be encouraged to *reflect* on what they saw before making up their mind that they ‘saw it’.
- *Give the observee a ‘voice’* at the feedback session: allow them to discuss what happened and why; encourage them to review the session early in the feedback before offering your own judgements; remember this should be a conversation!
- *Start with something factual* so that the initial focus is easily recognised by the teacher and not felt to be threatening. For example, levels of attainment, students, etc.
- Introduce early some positive comments, basing them on *specific evidence* that the teacher will recognise.
- Areas for development should be presented again with specific evidence, in terms of cause and effect.
- The teacher should be encouraged to understand his/her strengths and weaknesses, and be prepared to take away and act upon any issues relating to the latter.
- Praise should be based on evidence and given for professional competence.
- Constructive criticism should be based on *evidence* and related to professional actions, decisions and performance in the classroom.
- Ensure that the actions or targets are limited to around three and achievable (these should be focused on student outcomes).
- Leave the teacher with a clear summary of the feedback, again emphasising both the positive features and weaknesses that the teacher can seek to improve on.
- There should always be a balance of positive and negative feedback.



Grade-Inflation:

Grade Inflation undermines the credibility of the observation system and should be strongly resisted. This is most likely when Heads of Departments have ‘targets’ to achieve for ‘good or better’ teaching, and there is pressure to achieve these targets. Grade inflation can be counteracted by:

- Undertaking paired (moderated) observations (5-10% of total sample)
- Having clear criteria for making grading judgements
- All observers trained in the same observation practices
- A sample of observations performed by observers outside of the department
- Using an external observation team
- Doing away with targets for ‘good or better’!

Satisfactory is NOT Satisfactory!

“In most of these persistently satisfactory colleges, leaders were ill-informed because effective systems to monitor and quality assure provision were not securely in place. Particularly evident were weaknesses in monitoring the quality of teaching and learning: for example inspectors frequently found that senior leaders were over-generous in lesson observations and did not challenge the quality of teaching and learning sufficiently, leading to poorly focused action plans”.

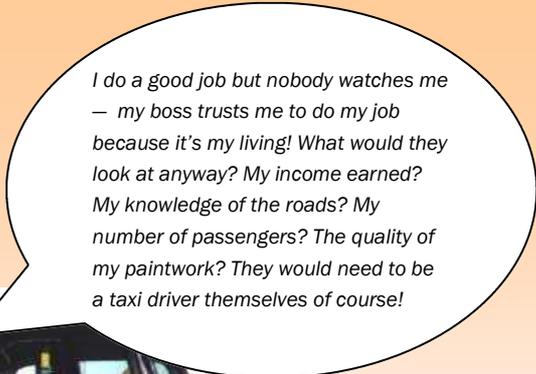
Annual Chief Inspection Report 2010-11, para 250

“The poor assessment of students was at the heart of why many of these colleges had failed to improve. Students’ progress was not closely monitored by their teachers, leading to declining achievement and managers were typically too slow to spot these problems. Errors in initial assessments led to students taking unsuitable courses...”

Annual Chief Inspection Report 2010-11, para 251

GRADED OR NON-GRADED: THE RESEARCH

It is a fact of life for FE teachers that they will be observed many times in their career, whether they are good, bad or indifferent. It has become an almost religious exercise amongst some colleges and management regimes. But is it delivering results?



I do a good job but nobody watches me – my boss trusts me to do my job because it's my living! What would they look at anyway? My income earned? My knowledge of the roads? My number of passengers? The quality of my paintwork? They would need to be a taxi driver themselves of course!

We don't observe taxi drivers, or doctors in their waiting rooms, or solicitors making telephone calls, or builders carrying bricks up a scaffold. Matt O'Leary asks: what is this obsession with graded observations?

"My research uncovered repeated examples of teachers encouraged to demonstrate normalised models of 'effective practice' based on prescribed notions of 'excellent' or 'good' teaching, often cascaded from senior management, who were understandably keen to promote their version of 'best practice' given the high-stakes nature of OTL assessment. My research data also revealed that one of the repercussions of this pressure on teachers to perform was how it encouraged what Ball (2003) refers to as 'inauthenticity' in teacher behaviour and classroom performance during graded OTL. This was typically manifested in the delivery of the 'rehearsed' or 'showcase lesson'..."

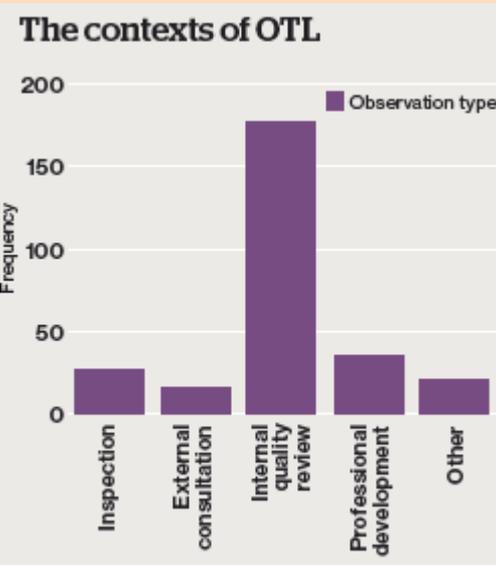
MATT O LEARY'S RESEARCH ON TEACHER OBSERVATION

Matt O'Leary, of Wolverhampton University, has conducted a number of studies in the effects of lesson observation schemes in Further Education. He argues that many colleges have adopted a 'restrictive approach' to the use of observation that relies of the 1-4 OFSTED grading scale to measure performance, putting management priorities above professional development needs (see graph). Instead, colleges need to consider 'expansive' approaches. O'Leary's research included the views of 500 FE teachers from ten 10 West Midlands Colleges.



"...A recurring theme from both the questionnaires and interviews was the perceived lack of benefit of graded OTL to teachers and trainers. Some said that the college SMT was the only beneficiary while others referred to college-wide OTL as a 'box-ticking' exercise..."

O'Leary, Intuition, Issue 4, 2012, pp17-18



Restrictive Approaches (Less effective)

- Grading using the 1-4 scale
- Staff are separated into 'performers' and 'under-performers'
- The teacher has no control over the observation process
- Limited if any CPD linked directly to observation outcomes
- Observation regarded as a punitive tool by teachers

Expansive Approaches (Most Effective)

- A 'development' focus based on improving practice
- Seen as an opportunity to share and promote good practice
- Observer and observee regard each other as mutually supportive professionals
- Greater autonomy for teachers to choose the observed session
- Observer is often, though not always, a subject specialist
- Observation is seen as one of several important sources of information to assess the quality of teaching

"The problem with the current system of observation in most FE colleges is that they confuse grading with development. If the aim is to improve the teacher, it is professional dialogue which makes the most difference. Grading is simplistic and divisive, leaving most of a college's workforce entirely dissatisfied"
 (Tully, 2012, The FE Animal, Unpublished)

QUALITY MANAGER RATIOS

Most observation systems look for—or should look for—the following ingredients: Clear start, goals and aims, student centred activities that engage and challenge, inclusive assessment & feedback strategies, logical and purposeful structure. If you want to use your observation system to make *truly transformative changes* to teaching and learning, look for and encourage the following numbers:

- **Praise:** 4:1 ratio (4 bits of praise for every 1 bit of constructive criticism)
- **Communication:** 3:1 ratio (learners talk 3 times more than the teacher)
- **Teacher Talk:** 25% or less of the lesson assigned to 'teacher exposition'
- **Learning Outcomes:** No more than 3 learning outcomes in any 1 hour lesson
- **Planning:** At least 60% of the lesson dedicated to creative, student-centred tasks
- **Lesson Content:** An equal—50:50—balance between content and skills
- **Questioning:** 100% learners answer at least one question in the lesson

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13.11.12	Differentiation Masterclass	Portsmouth	Robert Powell	
14.11.12	Achieving Grade 1 in Equality & Diversity	Portsmouth	Trevor Gordon	
20.11.12	Improving Motivation & Retention	Bracknell	Arnie Skelton	
23.11.12	The Grade 1 Lesson	Guildford	Bradley Lightbody	
28.11.12	Counselling & Coaching Skills for FE Teachers	Portsmouth	John Perry	
30.11.12	Creativity in the Classroom*	Portsmouth	Geoff Petty	
06.12.12	Outstanding Leadership & Management in Vocational Departments*	Bracknell	Mary Mussell	
14.12.12	Grasping the Nettle: From Traditional to Blended Learning	Portsmouth	Rebecca Blyth & Neil Spurgeon	

*Cost of this workshop is £129.00 exc VAT

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Developing Creativity

Creativity isn't just the domain of artists, musicians or dancers. Creativity is for every student, and can be delivered by every teacher. But it must be planned!

Using **Guy Claxton's** reference to '*wild topics*', all teachers should be encouraged to critically evaluate their schemes of work and teaching tasks against the following criteria:

1. **RICHNESS:** Topics chosen for study can be explored in depth
2. **CHALLENGING:** The topic contains real difficulty
3. **EXTENDED:** There is time and opportunity to go into depth
4. **RELEVANT:** The topic connects with students' own interests and concerns
5. **RESPONSIBILITY:** Students have some genuine control over what, why, how and when they organise their learning
6. **REAL:** Solving the problem or making progress genuinely matters to someone.
7. **UNKNOWN:** the teacher does not already know the 'answer'

Further Reading

Outstanding teaching and learning in 14-19

Bradley Lightbody, 2009

Next issue ...

QUESTIONING SKILLS

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