UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

Peer Observation of Teaching

Observation option 4

What to do/look for when observing a peer's teaching or reflecting on your own teaching

One way of carrying out peer observation is to adopt a relatively **open** approach. This is good for those with some experience of observing teaching, and may take various forms, including:

- Make a chronological record of what happened during the session as a stimulus to recall events for discussion at the debrief meeting, and / or to gauge the balance of activities or time spent on each topic etc
- Other forms of stimulated recall, e.g. using a video of the teaching session, or referring back to your teaching/lesson plans (see also the article on Teaching Process Recall in the Resources/Peer observation of teaching section of the Higher Education Academy website).
- "Ethnographic": A style of recording where the observer notes down anything that strikes him or her, for discussion with the observee at the debrief meeting (e.g. 'I noticed that you did X, and that would never have occurred to me/where I would have done y. Could you explain your rationale for doing x?' (the template provided here is for this)
- Measurement-based criteria: You could choose to observe the breakdown of teacher talking time versus student talking time, or look at interaction patterns, or gender bias of where you give your attention during the teaching time, to give just a few examples;
- Critical incidents or critical decisions: noting down occasions when the observee seems to have made an important decision (perhaps pre-planned, but often 'on the fly' when something unanticipated occurs during a session), and then using the post observation discussion to explore what might have happened if alternative decisions had been taken.

You do not have to use the form given here if you prefer to use a different one, or if you have agreed to focus on a specific area. However, you should agree on your approach **in advance** of the observation session, and if necessary, source or prepare your own observation proforma.

If this approach to peer observation is new to you, or you want to know more, go to http://www.prodait.org/approaches/index.php

See also Directed Observation options 1, 2, 4 and 5.

Note: The current (June 2005) **University Guidelines on Peer Observation of Teaching** state that '**All forms of teaching activity** should be subject to observation' (section 3), so you can interpret 'teaching' in its broadest sense, to include not only lectures and classroom teaching, but seminars, research and professional supervision, online tutoring, lab supervision …

The University Guidelines (section 2) also state:

'Enhancement of an individual's teaching performance is always the primary purpose of peer observation of teaching'

- The process should be such that the observer has an opportunity to identify good practice from the observee, and that particularly good practice can be disseminated in the Department/School or beyond.
- Self-evaluation and formative feedback are normally confidential to the observer and observee.
- Observation should primarily consider the delivery of teaching, rather than the content.

You can view the Guidelines in full at: http://www.ppd.bham.ac.uk/policy/cop/peerguide.htm

You will also need a copy of the peer observation report form, available from http://www.ppd.bham.ac.uk/policy/cop/peer.htm

PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL
This part to be completed by the observer during the session, and used as the basis for the post-observation discussion

School of _____

Peer Observation of Teaching

Observer record of a Teaching Session

Name of lecturer / tutor	Name of observer
Module Title:	Degree programme / year of study:
Topic/Title of session and type of activity:	Date:
Number of Students present:	Level/Year of Study:

Approximate time	Observation notes	Queries or comments to raise in discussion

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