

Observing Teaching

During your teacher training, you're going to be observed teaching, but you're also going to observe others teaching as well.

There are many things you will see during a lesson and everyone notices different things. As you undertake your teacher training, however, you should be looking for examples of things you want to adopt as part of your teaching. And in some cases, things you don't want to as well - all teachers are very different after all!

First of all, though - acknowledge that this can be a sensitive topic for most teachers. Allowing someone to observe your practice can be daunting for any teacher (regardless of their experience).

Teachers give their heart and soul to the job, so keep that in mind when making observations about their teaching, as it's probably something they take great pride in. Here are three tips for observing a colleague:

1. DO give positive feedback to the teacher - it's always rewarding to hear something positive about your own teaching.

2. If you are asked for any constructive feedback - try to do so in a supportive manner.

3. Always make sure you thank them for allowing you to observe them.

Below are four key themes to focus on and look out for during a lesson.

Tip 1 - Observing the Teacher

It might seem obvious, but you're going to want to observe the teacher during the lesson. But what do you need to look for exactly? Essentially, you want to find good examples of what makes them a great teacher. Use the teacher you are observing as a role model. What is it during the lesson that you're seeing that you like and would like to adopt as part of your own practice? This will be especially handy if you're going to be teaching that teacher's class.

Here are some additional suggestions on what to look for specifically.

- Have they got a good rapport with their students? What are they doing to achieve this?
- What's their body language like? Do they appear calm and in control of the classroom? (They might not feel it - ask them after the lesson.)
- How well do they know their students? What examples do you see of this?
- Are they keeping the momentum of the lesson going? How are they achieving this?
- Are they anticipating any issues and dealing with them before a problem arises?

Tip 2 - Observing the Pupils

This may also be obvious but is also sometimes forgotten about when observing teaching. The pupils are your means of measuring how well a lesson is going: the lesson is designed for their benefit after all.

Here are some suggestions for what to look for.

- Are the pupils engaged in their learning? How can you tell? Are there specific things keeping them engaged?
- Are the students motivated by the lesson? Can you pick out what is keeping them motivated? (These are good things to use in your own lessons.)
- What sort of work are the children producing? How much assistance do they have in producing it?

Your observations of the children shouldn't include any names, so make sure that they are anonymous, using initials if needed. Your observations of the pupils may also lead you to good ideas on how to further engage and motivate specific children as well.

Tip 3 - Classroom Management

This one is quite broad, but here you're looking for how the teacher has established a safe and productive learning environment for all involved. Classroom management is really important in maintaining a safe and productive learning environment and sometimes it can be the smallest details that really enhance a lesson. There are many things that you can look out for, so here are a few suggestions.

- Can you see any reward systems in place? How do the pupils respond to this?
- How are TAs deployed to enhance the learning?
- Are the children grouped? How are they grouped together? (E.g. ability, behaviour, motivation)
- Do you see any examples of behaviour management? How was it done and what was the impact?
- Observe the timings of the lesson. What time did it start? How long were the children doing certain tasks? How long were they given?
- Was the classroom/lesson set up in a particular way to support the lesson?

Tip 4 - Teaching Techniques

We're back to observing the teacher again, but this time we're focusing on the teaching techniques they're using. This will most likely be driven by the needs of their students, which can give you a great insight into how to plan and deliver your lessons, especially if you're going to be teaching their class.

- Different styles of questioning - are they using open or closed questions? How long are they giving children to answer?
- Are the children working independently, in pairs or small groups? How effective does this seem?

- How are they correcting any misconceptions? Is it in a discreet 1:1 way, or are they addressing this as a whole class?
- What style of teaching are they using? Kinaesthetic, auditory, visual? These are all extremely powerful delivery methods but will be carefully chosen to meet the needs of their class.
- What sort of work are the children being asked to produce? Is it written? Question and answer based? Creative?

Teaching techniques being used will be down to the needs of the class and the skill set of the teacher delivering the lesson. Every teacher has their own style and knows what works best for them, but this is why education professionals can all learn a lot from each other.

Finally, your course provider may well have a proforma that you can use to fill out your lesson observations. They may well have a certain way in which they like to conduct things, so you can choose to use this guide alongside theirs to help further enhance your lesson observations.