

**Week 4 Open Door: Peer Observation of Teaching Scheme****Getting the most out of your observation of teaching**

This guide offers some ideas for how to get the most out of the opportunity of observing a fellow teacher.

- What questions might you ask yourself?
- What things should you look for?
- How might you use the session to reflect on your own teaching practices?

Just as importantly, what does it feel like to be a student in this class?

- Try to “put yourself in their shoes” – think about how they might be experiencing the class, *from* a student perspective?
- This can help us think about how students might feel in our own classes.
- Take the opportunity to watch and reflect on how they respond, which is difficult to do ourselves when we are busy teaching.
- It is good to attend a class in a different discipline which you know little about, because then you will be learning too and it will be easier to put yourself in the students’ shoes, rather than seeing the experience as a discipline expert yourself.

Here are some prompts to think about.

**Before the class:**

Reflect on what you might specifically want to get out of the observation?

- Are you going because a teaching approach or practice that you are interested in is being utilised? Is this something you would like to use yourself, or would like to see ideas for how you might improve, or adapt your own practice? If so, there may be key questions you have arising from challenges which you yourself have faced. If so, make a note of them, so that they are front of mind and you can particularly attend to them.
- Think about how you are going to approach the observation? Taking notes is a good idea. Maybe a rough diagram of the room to look at student-teacher interaction patterns if you are particularly interested in student engagement for example.

It is worth thinking about what you are particularly interested in and how you might approach it.

**During the class - what should I do?**

You want to use all your senses. Take note of:

- What you see...
- What you hear...
- What you notice...
- What questions come to you...
- What ideas come to you...

Note them all down quickly to reflect on them later.

**During the class - what things might I specifically note and reflect on?**

A range of prompts are provided below covering the key elements of classroom teaching and the challenges which we all face. They are provided to help you think about what might be of most interest and relevance to you, to inform your own teaching practice. They may not all be applicable or you might wish to choose a number which you are particularly interested in and focus on those.

Key ideas/questions:

- How does the teacher commence the class? What strategies are used to gain the students attention and set the tone for the class?
- Do the students understand from the beginning of the class what its purpose and focus is? Do you?
- How does the teacher hold the student's attention? How long is that attention held? How would you describe the 'ebb and flow' of the class? Is there a point where student attention starts to wane? Does the teacher notice and what strategies are used by the teacher to 'bring their attention back'? Are there different time segments during the class during which students react differently?
- How engaged in the class do students appear? How do students respond to questions posed by the teacher? What evidence is there of student disengagement? What are the students doing that help you draw these conclusions? Are there particular segments of the class behaving differently? Does the teacher seem aware of such dynamics and how do they respond? What strategies are used by the teacher to re-engage any disengaged students. Are these strategies successful and if so, why?
- To what extent is student interest and motivation evident throughout the class? What behaviours are evident to indicate student interest and motivation? What strategies are used to gain student interest and motivation (e.g. use of real-life examples; relating the topic or concept to professional practice skills and/or guidelines)? How successful and meaningful are these strategies?
- Are there any behavioural issues identified during the class? How does the teacher respond? How successful are their responses?
- How would you describe the teaching style? Do they appear enthusiastic about the subject matter? How do you think this influences student interest and engagement?
- How accessible were the concepts and ideas explored in the class to the students? If this is not your discipline area, how accessible were they to you?
- Is the material appropriately sequenced and paced? Is the volume of material covered appropriate?
- Did the level seem appropriate for the level of the students? Did students appear to gain understanding during the session? How well did they seem to 'get their heads around' complex ideas and concepts?
- How were misunderstandings or clarifying questions responded to? Were such questions welcomed and encouraged? Did students seem comfortable in asking such questions?
- What sort of technology does the teacher use? How do the students seem to interact with it?

**After the class:**

Some key questions which may help you reflect on the observation are:

- What approaches and/or techniques did you observe which were particularly effective in engaging students, or communicating difficult concepts? Are these transferable to your teaching? How might you use them?

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- Are any of the strategies you saw the teacher use which you think might be useful in addressing challenges you have confronted in your teaching?
- How would you describe the teaching style you observed? How does this differ from yours? If the styles are quite different, are there discernible reasons? Can you learn from or adopt anything from their teaching style into yours?
- Did anything in the class reinforce or contradict your beliefs about teaching and learning?
- Do you consider the 'ebb and flow' of classes when planning them and build in strategies to help gain attention and reinvigorate students?

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