Enhancing Teaching Practices through Effective Lesson Observation

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ANNOTATION

In order to effectively educate and gain a deeper knowledge of students' needs and learning dynamics, observation is a crucial component. In physical education (PE), the function of observation becomes even more important because of the sometimes demanding nature of teaching in a physically active classroom. In order to shed insight on the complex dynamics and implications for instructional practices, this blog seeks to explore the subtle interactions between teaching and observation in physical education. By utilizing the knowledge of educational specialists and professionals, my goal is to expand on the comprehension of how observation may be used to improve instruction, encourage significant learning opportunities, and lessen the overall burden of physical education instructors.

KEYWORDS: Establish a framework, data collection, goal settings, action plan, documentation, follow-up observation, institutional reflection.

The need to support the development of self-regulated learners starting from primary school is widely acknowledged (e.g., Schunk and Greene, 2018). A critical dimension of self-regulated learning is knowledge and adequate application of learning strategies (i.e., activities carried out during learning that directly affect the process and outcomes of learning; Fiorella and Mayer, 2015a; Dinsmore and Hattan 2020; Van Meter and Campbell, 2020. Researchers differentiate between deep-level learning strategies (e.g., composing drawings) and surface-level learning strategies (e.g., rereading), emphasizing that deep-level strategies tend to support comprehension of new material such that learned knowledge can be later recalled and flexibly used for solving novel learning tasks (Fiorella and Mayer, 2015a; Hattie and Donoghue, 2016Dinsmore and Hattan, 2020. It is important to learn which strategies support deep-level or surface-level learning and how this support varies depending on the learning situation and task (Frey et al., 2017Dirkx et al., 2019). Knowing different learning strategies and adequately applying them in learning is important for students in order to independently learn new material, plan their studies, and establish objectives (Dignath and Veenman, 2020).

Since relatively high working-memory capacity and reasoning abilities are needed to appropriately use deep-level learning strategies, young children often use surface-level learning strategies instead (Schleepen and Jonkman, 2012; Seufert, 2020). Research across different countries has indicated that knowledge of deep-level learning strategies and the ability to apply them is poor, even among middle- and high-school students whose cognitive abilities are more developed (Bjork et al., 2013; Kikas et al., 2020). To understand the efficacy of

complex, deep-level learning strategies, (1) students need to explicitly discuss the learning process and different learning strategies that support students' metacognitive knowledge, and (2) students need to have the opportunity to practice different learning strategies' application (Dignath et al., 2008; Clerc et al., 2014). Teachers play an important role in this process (Kramarski and Kohen, 2017). However, classroom observations have shown that teachers primarily give indirect rather than direct (i.e., explicit) instruction regarding learning processes and strategy use (Hamman at a,2000 Dignath and Büttner, 2018). So far, classroom observations have only been used in a few countries and mainly in middle school (Hamman et al., 2000; Kistner et al. 2015; Zepeda et al., 2018).

The objective of a lesson observation refers to the specific and measurable goal or purpose behind the process of systematically watching and evaluating a teacher's instructional practices during a classroom session. The objective is typically designed to serve the broader goals of professional development, quality assurance, and continuous improvement in teaching and learning. Lesson observation refers to the process of systematically watching, assessing, and evaluating a teacher's instructional methods, classroom management, and overall teaching performance during a specific lesson or class period. This practice is common in educational settings and serves various purposes, including professional development, teacher evaluation, and quality assurance. A lesson observation, or classroom observation, is a form of professional development for teachers. Teachers are observed normally by a member or members of the senior leadership team, and they then record and measure the quality of teaching to ensure pupils receive the best possible education. Lesson observations are implemented in all schools and are used by external bodies to assess the school.

Any teacher can be observed and although the senior leadership team normally conduct lesson observations, this can be done by fellow teachers, administrators or external agencies. The majority of lesson observations will be planned and therefore, a teacher should be given five working days' notice for an observation. There are extenuating circumstances that could lead to a lesson observation being done with little to no notice. An Ofsted inspection, for example, will provide the school with a maximum of 1 day's notice.

Once the lesson observation is complete, you will receive lesson observation feedback. Lesson observation feedback should come in two forms, the first being oral and the second written. Oral feedback should be done as soon as possible after the lesson but not later than the end of the following working day. Oral lesson observation feedback is to be conducted during directed time, in a private, suitable environment. Written lesson observation feedback will be given to you within five working days. If any issues arise that are not part of the focus, these will be recorded in writing but also discussed with you for the next steps

It outlines what the observers aim to achieve through the observation process. Some common objectives of lesson observation include:

Professional Development:

To provide teachers with constructive feedback on their teaching methods.

To identify areas of strength and areas for improvement in instructional practices.

To support teachers in their ongoing professional growth and skill development.

Quality Assurance:

To ensure that teaching practices align with established educational standards and guidelines.

To maintain consistency and excellence in the delivery of education within the institution.

Reflective Practice:

To encourage teachers to reflect on their instructional strategies and classroom management techniques.

To foster a culture of continuous improvement and self-reflection among educators.

Feedback and Improvement:

To offer specific and actionable feedback to enhance the effectiveness of teaching.

To collaboratively set goals for improvement based on the observed strengths and weaknesses.

Student-Centric Approach:

To assess the impact of teaching methods on student engagement and learning outcomes.

To ensure that instructional strategies are aligned with the diverse learning needs of students.

Identification of Best Practices:

To identify and share effective teaching practices within the educational community.

To promote collaboration and the dissemination of successful teaching strategies among educators.

Cultivating a Learning Community:

To foster a sense of collaboration and support among teachers.

To create a learning community where educators share insights and ideas to enhance overall teaching practices.

Defining clear objectives for lesson observation is crucial as it provides a roadmap for the entire process, helps align expectations, and ensures that the observation contributes meaningfully to the improvement of teaching and learning within an educational institution.

Selecting observers for lesson observation is a critical step that requires careful consideration to ensure the effectiveness and fairness of the process. Here are some factors to consider when selecting observers:

Expertise:

Choose observers with expertise in the subject matter or teaching methods being observed. This ensures that observers can accurately assess the nuances of the lesson and provide meaningful feedback.

Training:

Ensure that observers have received proper training in the observation process. Training should cover the observation framework, data collection methods, and effective feedback strategies. This helps maintain consistency and fairness across observations.

Objectivity:

Select observers who can maintain objectivity and impartiality. Avoid individuals who may have personal biases or preconceived notions about the teacher being observed. Objectivity is essential for providing fair and constructive feedback.

Understanding of Goals:

Ensure that observers understand the overall goals of the lesson observation, which may include professional development, quality assurance, and fostering a culture of continuous improvement. This understanding helps observers focus on relevant aspects during the observation.

Communication Skills:

Observers should possess strong communication skills to effectively convey their observations and feedback to the teacher. Clear and constructive communication is essential for the success of the post-observation feedback session.

Empathy and Supportive Attitude:

Choose observers who can approach the observation process with empathy and a supportive attitude. The goal is to facilitate the teacher's professional growth, and observers should be able to provide feedback in a constructive and encouraging manner.

Scheduling Flexibility:

Select observers who can accommodate the schedule of the observed teacher. Flexibility is essential to ensure that observations can take place at a time that is convenient for both the observer and the teacher without causing disruption to the learning environment.

Peer Observation:

Consider incorporating a peer observation model where teachers observe each other. Peer observations can create a collaborative and supportive culture among educators, fostering the exchange of ideas and best practices.

Administrative Oversight:

In some cases, administrators or instructional leaders may serve as observers. They should be selected based on their experience, leadership skills, and the ability to provide guidance and support for teacher development.

Rotation and Diversity:

Consider rotating observers to provide a diverse range of perspectives. This helps prevent observer fatigue and ensures that multiple viewpoints contribute to the overall evaluation process.

Ultimately, the selection of observers should be based on their ability to contribute meaningfully to the improvement of teaching practices and the achievement of the lesson observation objectives. Regular training and ongoing communication with observers are essential to maintain the integrity and effectiveness of the observation process.
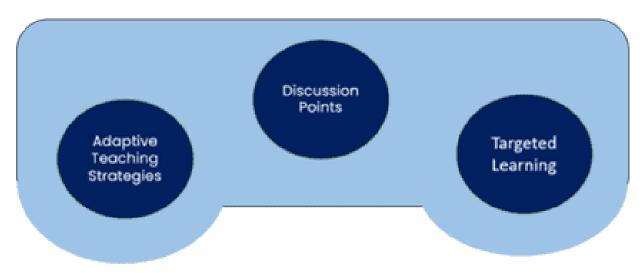
The teachable moments control panel concept is designed with precision, featuring three distinct buttons:

Adaptive Teaching Strategies: This button serves as a crucial tool for educators to fine-tune their approach in response to what they observe. By stepping back and observing with a clear purpose in mind, teachers can pinpoint moments when adjustments to the level of challenge or rules are necessary. It's about being attuned to the nuances of student engagement and skill acquisition, ensuring that every aspect of the lesson aligns with the desired learning outcomes.

Targeted Learning: The second button, 'Targeted Learning,' embodies the essence of focused instruction. By keenly observing specific individuals or groups within the class, teachers can identify opportunities for quick coaching to enhance performance. It's not about constant interference but rather judiciously stepping in when a student's development can benefit the most. Observation, therefore, forms the scaffolding upon which targeted learning is constructed, allowing for precise and impactful interventions.

Discussion Points: The final button, 'Discussion Points,' represents a broader approach to addressing common misconceptions or highlighting key learnings to the entire class. Here, observation plays a pivotal role in recognising patterns, both in mistakes and exemplary practices. When teachers step back and observe they can identify moments when a collective discussion will enrich the learning experience for the entire group.

The PE teacher can press any of these buttons at any time, but if they do they must understand that it will impact activity time. Therefore, when pressing one of the three buttons, it needs to be for a good reason.

They may be viewing a game in which the level of challenge is to low and therefore a rule can be introduced to make it harder. Perhaps a student isn't being included much within the game or it doesn't seem that the students are enjoying it. In this situation, the teacher may wish to press the 'Adaptive Teaching Strategies' button and make the necessary tweaks to the activity to ensure the issue is addressed.

The teacher might stand behind the control panel and view a group or an individual student for which some quick coaching might improve performance. If so, then the teacher can press the 'Targeted Learning' button and stop the group or individual to relay the required teaching.

Finally, the teacher could observe a number of students make similar mistakes or wish to correct any common misconceptions. They may have viewed some brilliant practice that needs sharing or review teaching points to ensure required progress is made. If so, then the teacher can hit the 'Discussion Points' button and stop the entire class. This button should not be pressed often, but a useful tool nonetheless.

The main purpose of the teachable moments control panel was to get my team to consider how many times they stopped students just practicing, how involved they were in lessons and ensure that they were not missing opportunities to deliver really meaningful teaching.

Lesson Planning:

Objectives and Outcomes:

Are the lesson objectives clearly stated, measurable, and aligned with curriculum standards?

How well do the planned outcomes align with the objectives?

Differentiation:To what extent does the lesson address the diverse learning needs of students?Are there strategies for differentiation, considering various learning styles and abilities?

Resources and Materials:Are instructional materials and resources relevant, current, and effectively utilized?How well-prepared is the teacher in terms of materials needed for the lesson?

2. Instructional Delivery:

Engagement and Motivation:How effectively does the teacher engage students and create a positive learning environment?

Are strategies employed to motivate students to participate actively in the lesson?

Clarity and Organization:How clear and organized is the presentation of content and instructions?Is there a logical flow to the lesson, with smooth transitions between activities?

Questioning Techniques:

How well does the teacher use questioning techniques to stimulate critical thinking?

Are questions varied and targeted at different levels of Bloom's Taxonomy?

Use of Technology:

To what extent is technology integrated into the lesson, and how does it enhance learning?

Is the use of technology purposeful and aligned with learning objectives?

3. Classroom Management:

Behavior Management:

How does the teacher manage student behavior and maintain a positive classroom environment?

Are proactive strategies in place to address potential disruptions?

Time Management:

How effectively does the teacher manage time throughout the lesson?

Are activities appropriately paced, allowing for student understanding and engagement?

4. Student Assessment:

Formative Assessment:

How are formative assessment strategies used to gauge student understanding during the lesson?

Are adjustments made based on real-time assessment data?

Feedback to Students:

How does the teacher provide feedback to students, and is it timely and constructive?

To what extent do students understand their progress and areas for improvement?

5. Reflection and Adaptation:

Reflective Practice:

How well does the teacher reflect on the lesson and its outcomes?

Are there insights into what worked well and areas for improvement?

Adaptability:

To what extent does the teacher adapt instruction based on student needs or unexpected events?

Is there flexibility in response to the dynamics of the classroom?

6. Overall Impressions:

Strengths:

Identify and commend specific strengths observed during the lesson.

Highlight positive aspects that contribute to effective teaching and student engagement.

Areas for Improvement:

Provide constructive feedback on specific areas where improvement is needed.

Offer actionable suggestions for professional development and growth.

7. Follow-Up and Action Plan:

Goal Setting:

Collaboratively set goals for professional development based on the observed strengths and weaknesses.

Ensure that goals are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART).

Support Mechanisms:

Identify support mechanisms, such as mentoring, workshops, or resources, to help the teacher achieve the set goals.

Establish a timeline for follow-up observations and progress assessments.

This framework serves as a guide for observers to conduct thorough and constructive lesson observations. It provides a structured approach to assessing various aspects of teaching, promoting consistency and alignment with the institution's educational objectives.

1. Observation Sessions:Observers and teachers agree on a mutually convenient time for the lesson observation.The observer arrives on time and is introduced to the class if necessary.

2. Data Collection:The observer uses the established lesson observation framework to guide their observations.Data is collected through systematic note-taking, recording observations, and capturing specific examples of effective or challenging moments.

Observers pay attention to the identified focus areas, such as lesson planning, instructional delivery, classroom management, and student engagement.

3. Focus Areas:Observers concentrate on specific aspects outlined in the observation framework.This may include assessing the teacher's clarity, engagement strategies, use of questioning techniques, and the overall flow of the lesson.

Observers may also note the level of student participation, the effectiveness of instructional materials, and the teacher's ability to adapt to unforeseen circumstances.

4. Adaptability:Observers assess how well the teacher adapts to unexpected situations or changes in the lesson plan.They observe the teacher's ability to think on their feet and make adjustments based on student needs or other factors that may arise during the class.

5. Interactions:Observers pay attention to the interactions between the teacher and students.

They observe the teacher's communication style, responsiveness to student questions, and efforts to create a positive and inclusive learning environment.

6. Classroom Environment:Observers assess the overall atmosphere in the classroom, considering factors such as student behavior, engagement, and the use of physical space.

They note any signs of a supportive and conducive learning environment.

7. Use of Technology:if applicable, observers assess how effectively technology is integrated into the lesson.They observe whether the use of technology enhances the learning experience and aligns with the instructional goals.

8. Behavior Management:Observers pay attention to how the teacher manages student behavior.They note whether proactive strategies are in place to prevent disruptions and how the teacher addresses any behavioral issues that may arise.

9. Time Management:Observers evaluate the teacher's ability to manage time effectively throughout the lesson.They assess whether activities are appropriately paced, allowing for student understanding and engagement.

10. Formative Assessment: - Observers observe how formative assessment strategies are used to gauge student understanding during the lesson. - They assess whether the teacher makes real-time adjustments based on assessment data.

11. Overall Impression: - Observers form an overall impression of the lesson, taking into account strengths and areas for improvement. - They remain focused on providing a fair and balanced assessment of the teacher's performance.The During Observation phase is a dynamic and active process that requires keen observation skills and adherence to the established framework. Observers aim to gather meaningful data that will contribute to constructive feedback and, ultimately, the improvement of teaching practices.

1. Feedback Session:

Scheduled Meeting: Observers and teachers schedule a meeting shortly after the lesson for the feedback session.The timing should be agreed upon in advance, ensuring that both parties have adequate time for a thorough discussion.

Private Setting: The feedback session takes place in a private setting, allowing for open and honest communication.The goal is to create a comfortable environment that encourages dialogue.

2. Objective Feedback:

Strengths Recognition: Observers begin by acknowledging the strengths and positive aspects observed during the lesson.

Positive reinforcement is essential for boosting the teacher's confidence and motivation.

Areas for Improvement: Constructive feedback is provided on specific areas identified during the observation that may benefit from improvement.

The feedback is objective, specific, and tied to the criteria outlined in the observation framework.

3. Goal Setting:

Collaborative Goal Setting: Observers and teachers collaboratively set goals for professional development based on the feedback.

Goals are formulated to be Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound (SMART).

Long-term and Short-term Goals: Goals may include both long-term professional development objectives and short-term action items.

The aim is to create a roadmap for the teacher's continuous improvement.

4. Action Plan:

Identification of Support Mechanisms: Observers work with teachers to identify support mechanisms that can help achieve the set goals.

This may include mentorship, workshops, training sessions, or access to relevant resources.

Timeline for Implementation: An action plan is developed with a clear timeline for the implementation of specific strategies.The timeline ensures accountability and progress tracking.

5. Documentation:

Written Summary: Observers provide a written summary of the feedback session, including identified strengths, areas for improvement, and the agreed-upon goals.

This documentation serves as a reference for both the observer and the teacher.

Institutional Records: Relevant documentation is filed as part of institutional records for future reference.The documentation may be used to track progress over time and inform ongoing professional development efforts.

6. Follow-Up Observations:

Scheduled Follow-ups: Observers schedule follow-up observations to assess the teacher's progress in implementing the action plan.Follow-ups are conducted according to the agreed-upon timeline.

Ongoing Support: Observers provide ongoing support and encouragement, reinforcing the collaborative nature of the improvement process.

This support may involve additional feedback sessions, resources, or adjustments to the action plan.

7. Reflection:

Encouraging Reflection: Teachers are encouraged to reflect on the feedback received and their progress toward achieving the set goals.

Self-reflection is a crucial component of the continuous improvement process.

Institutional Reflection: The institution reflects on the overall effectiveness of the lesson observation program.Adjustments may be made to the program based on feedback from teachers and observers.The post-observation phase is integral to the success of lesson observation as it transforms feedback into actionable steps for improvement. By fostering a collaborative and supportive environment, this phase contributes to the ongoing professional development of teachers and the enhancement of overall teaching practices within the educational institution.

In conclusion, lesson observation stands as a cornerstone in the realm of education, playing a pivotal role in the continuous improvement of teaching practices and the overall enhancement of the learning environment. This article has explored the significance of lesson observation, its objectives, benefits, and the comprehensive framework involved in its implementation. By delving into the pre-observation, during observation, and post-observation phases, we've highlighted the structured approach required for a successful observation process.

Lesson observation is not merely a tool for evaluation; it is a catalyst for professional development, encouraging educators to engage in reflective practice and fostering a culture of continuous improvement. Through the establishment of clear objectives, careful selection of observers, and the development of a robust framework, educational institutions can ensure that lesson observation serves its purpose of promoting effective teaching and student-centered learning.

The during-observation phase involves meticulous data collection, focusing on key aspects such as lesson planning, instructional delivery, classroom management, and student engagement. This phase demands active involvement, keen observation skills, and adherence to the established framework to gather meaningful insights.

In the post-observation phase, the collaborative feedback session becomes a crucial element. By acknowledging strengths and providing constructive feedback, observers and teachers work together to set goals and formulate actionable plans for professional development. This phase emphasizes a supportive environment, ongoing support mechanisms, and a commitment to continuous reflection and improvement.

Lesson observation, when implemented effectively, not only benefits individual teachers but contributes to the overall quality assurance within educational institutions. It promotes a culture of collaboration, where educators share insights, identify best practices, and collectively work towards creating dynamic and effective learning environments.

As educational institutions embrace lesson observation as a tool for growth, the impact extends beyond the individual teacher to reach students and the broader community. By investing in the professional development of educators through thoughtful observation processes, institutions lay the foundation for a more responsive, innovative, and student-focused education system. In essence, lesson observation becomes a catalyst for positive change, driving excellence in teaching and learning.

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