

Whitechapel College

67 Maryland Square, Stratford

London E15 1HF

8 November 2011

Peer Observation Policy

Peer observation is intended as part of a teacher's self-evaluation and development. It offers first hand experience and direct evidence of what happens in other teachers' classrooms. It is a practical and powerful way to support practice and knowledge about teaching and learning.

Peer observation involves one teacher observing a colleague's practice and feeding back, in a reflective way, on what they observed. It is about trust and support between colleagues so that the observation is mutually productive. It works best when colleagues choose to work together. Peer observation can take place when two colleagues take turns in each other's teaching sessions. Conducted in 'peer pairs' it should allow each teacher to identify and focus on the issues they want to address rather than dealing with the issues on someone else's agenda, as occurs in monitoring and inspection.

Peer observation can be used throughout the College. It is particularly useful when developing a new teaching strategy or in focusing on key moments in class, such as the way teaching sessions begin and end.

As the OBSERVER it gives the opportunity:

To watch and understand the development of complex classroom interactions;

To observe in a structured way how, when and with what effect a teacher uses different teaching strategies;

To internalise new approaches seen in others' practice and which then might become part of the observer's repertoire;

To connect knowledge and practice.

As the OBSERVED it gives the opportunity:

To unpack what you do in the classroom so that you can develop and pass it on;

To look closely at one particular example of teaching eg questioning techniques;

To experiment with new teaching strategies;

To discuss teaching style(s) in a non-judgemental environment;

To connect knowledge and practice.

Both teachers need to agree in advance a clear and manageable focus for what is to be observed. Observing a whole classroom session is often unnecessary. Focusing on a particular process eg the way a teaching session begins or ends or on techniques for questioning students' understanding will help each partner to explore the detail and the assumptions under the surface of a teaching session. The Observer can participate in a teaching session or can follow a silent 'fly on the wall' model.

Since feedback is a crucial part of the process, the observation needs to record activities related to the teacher's particular concerns and the focus of the observation.

Each teacher should be observed at least once each academic year. The observer needs to give feedback (based on a completed pro forma) to their colleague as soon as possible after the session. This feedback should be given in confidence and should be explicit, focus on the areas agreed beforehand, and aim to give and provoke reflection.

College management need only to be informed who is observing whom and on what date. No other information from the observation process should be disclosed by observer or observee. The completed pro forma should be retained by the observer and observed for their records only and to support their own practice.