



EDUCATIONAL GUIDE LESSON OBSERVATION



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INTRODUCTION

ONVU Learning is the education division of ONVU Technologies group. With over 20 years of education, video and technology experience, ONVU Learning is focussed on improving teacher coaching, development and satisfaction, and ultimately student outcomes.

Partnering with schools, governments and education advisors around the world, we are determined to design, refine and align multiple technologies to play an important part in defining the learning environments of the future.

PARTNER SCHOOLS

Read our success stories of how schools around the world are using ONVU Learning's lesson observation and teacher reflection tools to improve their teaching standards and student outcomes.



[VIEW ALL CASE STUDIES →](#)

EDUCATIONAL GUIDE LESSON OBSERVATION



HOW TO PREPARE FOR AND MAKE THE MOST OF LESSON OBSERVATIONS - WHETHER YOU ARE OBSERVING OR BEING OBSERVED.

In this Lesson Observation series, we share our research, experience and thoughts on how best practice in lesson observation can drive a school forward, change the culture and improve teaching and learning.

[DISCOVER MORE EDUCATIONAL GUIDES AND RELATED RESOURCES ON OUR WEBSITE →](#)

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CREATING A LESSON OBSERVATION PROGRAMME FOR TEACHER DEVELOPMENT

There's an obvious need for lessons to be observed occasionally - to check that teachers have a level of competency in communication, the right academic and pedagogic ability and that their classes have a suitable level of behaviour. But beyond that, why do it?

Recently, many schools graded observations and used them for performance management, with the 'punishment' for a poor grade being more observations, while others used 'tick boxes' to check the 'right' processes were being followed - usually in anticipation that an external inspector would be looking for the same things. Observation for development in many schools tended to be limited to trainee teachers.

However, there's an increasing amount of evidence that shows that lesson observation can make a real difference to teaching, learning, behaviour and teacher engagement - indeed it may well be the best form of CPD available. So, how can you set up an effective lesson observation and coaching programme in your school?

The first step is to gain buy-in from the top and set out what you want to achieve - the 'vision' for the project. Given the mixed experiences that many teachers have of lesson observation, this needs to clearly state that the aim of the programme is to improve teaching, that the necessary time and resources will be allocated, and that it will be supported by a named senior leader.

You then need to communicate this vision and engage a group of teachers to deliver a pilot project. Given that observation works best within a subject or phase grouping it would be better to select on this basis rather than choosing participants from across your school. Let them work with you on the project plan and timing.

Here are some further ideas to think about at this stage.

- Work on specific issues, rather than trying to feedback on every part of the lesson as often happens in formal observations. For example, you could look at how best to introduce new



concepts, questioning or in-lesson assessment.

- Make it as realistic as possible. In many formal observations, the teacher is 'on show' teaching a highly polished lesson that took them hours to prepare - and with a colleague in the classroom, children become much more focused than you would normally find - either because they don't want to get in trouble with the observer, or because they like the class teachers and want them to avoid trouble!
- Try to watch small parts of multiple lessons rather than whole lessons (this may make cover easier as well). Professor Rob Coe of the University of Durham said at a Teacher Development Trust/Teach First seminar, 'it's pretty clear that if you watch three separate 15 minutes from three different lessons you get a better judgement than watching 45 minutes from a whole lesson'.¹
- Use subject experts to give feedback. In many areas, especially in KS4 and KS5 classes, only teachers of that subject may understand the knowledge behind a lesson. In smaller or less experienced departments it is often a good idea to bring in an experienced external mentor to help here.



- Make time for it to happen regularly. CPD often fails when teachers are expected to do it in their 'spare' time (as every teacher knows, this disappears very quickly!). Waiting for the next formal 'INSET' day means teachers will forget what happened in the lesson. The best solution is to set aside an hour a week or two hours a fortnight for dedicated feedback and coaching. At Aston University Engineering Academy, two hours a week are set aside for CPD.²
- Make it easy to manage. Don't expect participants to fill in big forms with tick boxes – keep feedback as simple as possible – perhaps just a form with three sections – 'what I liked'; 'what I'd do differently' and 'that was interesting!', the final one letting you put down observations of the students

10 THINGS TO DO BEFORE YOU OBSERVE A COLLEAGUE

Once you've set up a pilot observation programme, it's important to take some time out to prepare for it. Here are some tips for the observer.

1 MEET WITH YOUR COLLEAGUE

It's amazing how many times an observer can just choose a date and time and then turn up. This creates stress, with the teacher second-guessing in an attempt to create a 'perfect' lesson that meets all the perceived needs of the observer.

for example.


- Share ideas and try them out. Regular meetings let you quickly discuss your ideas and perhaps revisit them with another similar class in the short term.
- Share best practice and create 'experts' on specific topics. Once you've got the programme up and running, you can share your findings internally, and introduce more and more teachers to the programme.

Bradford Grammar School in the UK has taken on a project like this – its 'Teaching Squares' programme links teachers together in a collaborative, low-stakes environment. Find out [more here](#).



2 DISCUSS THE LESSON AND WHERE IT FITS IN THE WIDER LEARNING JOURNEY

This is a far better way to place the lesson in context than trying to read a lesson plan while observing. Discuss what students have been learning, what the purpose of that lesson is and what will happen next. This becomes even more important if you're in a different department or phase to the person you are observing.

 [2- Watch our video from Aston University Engineering Academy 360 Degree](#)

3 AGREE ON THE PURPOSE OF THE OBSERVATION

Observations are best used purely for development, but if you are also looking to check compliance with school policies and procedures or to contribute to performance management or a qualification, this needs to be made clear.

5 AGREE ON A TIME FOR THE OBSERVATION

You don't have to observe a whole lesson – if you are focusing on activities that take place at a specified time it might be better to watch the same part of two lessons with parallel classes, or to watch how the same class behaves at different times of the school day.

7 FIX A TIME FOR FEEDBACK

This should be as soon as possible after the lesson so that you can both remember what happened, but should be long enough to have a proper discussion – at least 20 minutes.

9 REVIEW INFORMATION ABOUT THE CLASS

Once you know the lesson you are observing, review key information about the class – which students have special needs, have a history of bad behaviour or have English as an Additional Language (EAL).

4 AGREE ON A FOCUS FOR THE OBSERVATION

There's clear evidence that trying to observe lots of different things in a lesson is counter-productive. With the right culture in your school, your colleague should be happy to ask you to focus on areas they are concerned about – such as giving clear explanations or managing low-level disruption.

6 SHARE HOW YOU WILL BE OBSERVING

At the start of an observation programme, or if either of you are new to a school, it makes sense to talk through how observation will happen and what will be recorded where. Former head and teaching consultant Tom Sherrington, from teachhead, suggests using this single sheet of paper to find ideas to discuss later – you could adapt the headings to your agreed focus.³


8 ARRANGE A TIME FOR THEM TO OBSERVE YOU

Mutual observation is an important way to build trust in a school, as well as to share different levels of expertise. Qualified classroom teachers rarely get the opportunity to observe their peers, yet they are perhaps the best placed to offer practical and constructive advice.

10 VISIT THE CLASSROOM AND WORK OUT WHERE TO BEST OBSERVE FROM

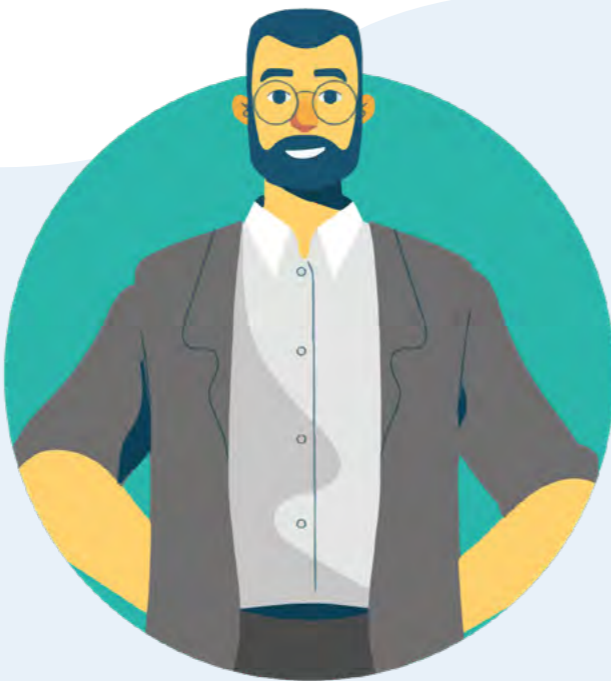
An observer will always change the dynamic of a classroom and you need to keep this to a minimum to add value to the process. If you can, watch from an adjacent classroom (science prep rooms often allow this) or sit somewhere unobtrusive. Don't try to be helpful and sit next to the students you think are worst behaved as you're really just offering them a further distraction.

"IT'S HELPED ME FIND MY TEACHING PASSION AGAIN." MARJ FRANCIS, HEAD OF MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES, THE HEREFORD ACADEMY (UK)

 [3- Download the Lesson Observation Feedback](#)



We hope these tips can help you prepare for a lesson observation and achieve the most positive experience from it. We understand that traditional observation methods can be nerve wrecking for even the most seasoned of teachers. If you are tired of such traditional methods, then please explore our innovative yet simple solution to help teachers self-reflect on their lessons and improve their practice – it's called [ONVU Learning](#)



10 THINGS TO DO BEFORE YOU ARE OBSERVED BY A COLLEAGUE

Once you've set up a pilot observation programme, it's so important to take some time out to prepare for it. Here are our tips for the person being observed.

1 FOCUS ON WHAT YOU WANT FROM THE OBSERVATION

It's easy to see an observation as a challenge that you forget about the opportunity of having direct feedback from an experienced colleague. Think about how best to use them – are there particular areas you'd like to improve on or things you've been working hard on that you'd like them to evaluate?

2 EXPLAIN WHERE THE LESSON FITS IN YOUR CLASS'S LEARNING JOURNEY

At one of our partner schools, [Aston University Engineering Academy](#), they don't use the word 'lesson' anymore – they talk about 'sessions' to show that there's a wider journey. This is highly useful information for an observer who will be better able to see how students are learning – are they recalling definitions and concepts from previous lessons or improving on the work they've already started?

3 FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THE OBSERVER

You might have an idea of the subject the observer teaches, but they can help in other areas – do they have experience in behaviour management, do they know the group you are teaching from their own experience, or are they researching particular aspects of teaching as part of a wider professional qualification?

5 LET THE OBSERVER KNOW ABOUT EXTRA CLASSROOM IMPROVEMENT ACTIVITIES

Teachers are often very curious about their professional practice but don't get many chances to talk to fellow teachers about the latest ideas. If you've been reading about the appliance of neuroscience to teaching and are looking at reducing cognitive load, or the importance of increasing vocabulary, tell the observer how you're using these ideas in your lessons.

7 SHARE HOW YOU'D LIKE TO RECEIVE FEEDBACK

Giving feedback is often seen as the role of the observer, but outside of any formal assessment process that your school insists on, your views should be taken into consideration. Ideally you can work together on a feedback form and process that, for instance, give actual examples of issues that are raised and suggest feasible responses that can be achieved while considering workload issues.

9 SUGGEST WHERE THE OBSERVER COULD SIT

An observer in the classroom has an obvious impact on the lesson and as the classroom teacher, you're probably the best person to know where the impact will be minimised. Don't leave it until the start of the lesson when the only place left is highly visible or leaves the observer in the direct eyeline of many students – make arrangements beforehand.

4 DISCUSS WITH THE OBSERVER THE MAIN AREAS TO FEEDBACK YOU ON

There's a lot of evidence that a whole lesson is too much to digest in one observation – the stress is multiplied for the teacher and the observer's attention may drift. If you're teaching parallel classes, it might be better to watch the same part of multiple lessons – if possible, with some feedback in between.

6 BRIEF THE OBSERVER ABOUT SPECIFIC STUDENTS TO BE WATCHED AND WHY

Feedback from our partner schools is that one of the 'quickest wins' from an observation programme is the insight it gives into individual learners – from the student that regularly starts damaging low-level disruption to the disengaged pupil who does very little unless directly addressed. Observers can often identify the triggers for these events and give the teacher evidence for one-to-one conversations.

8 ASK IF THE OBSERVER WOULD LIKE OTHER EVIDENCE BEFORE OR AFTER THE LESSON

Observers might want to know more about the class, or to see their work. But walking around looking in books or asking questions in the lesson just reminds students that they're being observed. A quick look at current work without context can be misleading; and taking work after the lesson can be irritating for students and teachers. The solution is to agree this in advance – for example, the teacher might be able to copy some of the work completed

10 ARRANGE A TIME TO OBSERVE THEM

This is the same final suggestion as in the last article for observers, but both parties should be open to mutual observation – especially colleagues who teach the same subject or phase!

WHAT TO DO AFTER AN OBSERVATION?

WHAT SHOULD HAPPEN AFTER AN OBSERVATION TO ENSURE THAT IT LEADS TO REAL, MEANINGFUL IMPROVEMENT?



MAKE SURE THE POST-OBSERVATION MEETING HAPPENS AT THE ARRANGED TIME AND LASTS FOR THE ARRANGED LENGTH

It can be easy to let the 'busyness' of teaching take over and for feedback to be limited to a passing conversation – something that the use (or misuse) of grades for lessons encouraged. Improving performance of teachers should be at the top of any school's list and teachers should be kept from cover or other duties and given the time and space to do this properly.

BE POSITIVE

Unless you're in a situation where there are serious concerns about the teacher's ability, the reason for the observation is to help them become better teachers. Added to this, and made more important by the current teacher recruitment and retention crisis in the UK, we've seen how positive feedback is a great way to re-engage and enthuse teachers!

DON'T DEGRADE LESSONS, EVEN IN PASSING

Ofsted don't grade lessons and research from the Gates Foundation shows that they are highly inaccurate⁴, but there's still a tendency for teachers to ask for a grade or ask equivalent questions such as 'was I good?'. Grades just make people think about grades. Instead, make the discussion about the actual lesson and the future development of the teacher – all teachers do many things well, but all can improve!

LET THE OBSERVEE TALK FIRST

It's easy for the observer to bring out a big list of 'things I would do differently' and run through them. ONVU Learning, advocates first inviting the teacher to fill in any gaps that the observer might have missed, such as clarifying the lesson intentions. After a process of joint analysis they can be encouraged to consider what they would have kept the same (if they were to teach an identical lesson), before eventually moving onto areas that, in light of their professional learning, they would now do differently.

USE ACTUAL EVENTS TO ILLUMINATE ISSUES

It can be very easy to generalise feedback – 'the class weren't engaged', or 'they didn't understand the idea' – in ways that can make the observee defensive. It's much better to talk about an individual situation, for example 'Tom didn't seem to understand the idea of fractions when you first introduced it and wasn't able to solve the problem'. If you can use evidence from video recordings, it's so much better!

MAKE A SHORT AND ACHIEVABLE ACTION PLAN

When Lucy Kellaway of Teach Now reported on her time as trainee teacher, she was given a list of 18 targets after one observed lesson. Even at the start of a career, and definitely later on, there's a real need to focus development – how can you work on 18 things at the same time? Choose two or three areas that can be worked on in a realistic time scale and set achievable goals – for example to ensure that in the next lesson you check understanding of a new idea before asking students to apply it.

ARRANGE TO OBSERVE AGAIN (AND AGAIN)

Hopefully this new way of doing observations will start to change the cultural approach to observations in your school. So, it's not about an imposition or something that needs to be controlled or limited to 3 times per year. And staff will want to be observed, to get the feedback that will make a difference to their practice. Schools we've worked with at ONVU Learning report that staff are moving to a culture where they want to share their lessons with someone – either to celebrate improvement over time or to ask for help.



4- Read the Gates Foundation Met Report: [Teacher Observation less reliable than test scores](#)

HOW TO ENSURE OBSERVATIONS LEAD TO BETTER TEACHING OVER

ONCE YOU'VE STARTED AN OBSERVATION PROGRAMME, HOW CAN YOU ENSURE THAT THERE'S CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT?

KEEP OBSERVING

An observation programme will tend to lose momentum at the end of the first cycle of observations. Performance management objectives may have been achieved and teachers may see this as time to 'catch up' with their other tasks. However, NFER research from 2018 is clear that 'high quality professional development requires sustained programmes of different types of support and training'⁵. One of the first people to take part in an ONVU Learning coaching programme reflected 'I think we see teaching improve by around 1% each time we're observed'.



BRING IN MORE PEOPLE

While other staff may be aware of the programme, now is a good time to get them actually involved. You can choose to involve them in your first ongoing programme or to help them set up as a group in a different subject group or phase, perhaps meeting from time to time to share findings.



REFLECT ON OLDER LESSONS AND HOW YOUR TEACHING HAS CHANGED

As an observation programme develops, it can help to look back from time to time at how your lessons have changed. You could look back at the notes you made in lesson observation or review footage, if you have captured the lesson on video.

USE AN EXTERNAL COACH

A new viewpoint can often help teachers see further ways to improve. This may be the time to bring in an external coach – either to help with subject knowledge or with teaching pedagogy. ONVU Learning has worked with many schools and identifies building trust as an important part of the process, adding, ‘The teacher needs to be convinced and assured that the external coach will keep the conversation confidential unless there’s an issue of safety. Once this has been done the coach and teacher can develop a professional dialogue of noticing, questioning and inquiry.’

TRAIN STAFF TO BECOME COACHES

The Sutton Trust report ‘Developing Teachers’⁶ highlights Seven Kings High School, Essex, in the UK, where every teacher is trained to be a coach, and Herbert Thompson Primary School in Cardiff where teachers work in triplets to develop both observation and coaching skills at the same time. As well as improving teaching and learning, creating coaches will help the school prepare for the imminent introduction of the Early Career Framework in the UK which will require schools to offer more support to teachers at the early stages of their career.

SHARE YOUR FINDINGS INSIDE YOUR SCHOOL

Your school may have existing opportunities to share your observation programme – through INSET sessions, a teaching and learning group or through an internal research journal. Or you could present your programme to senior leaders or governors in order to gather support for further development.

JOIN OR DEVELOP A WIDER COMMUNITY FOCUSED ON OBSERVATION

You may be able to learn more about observation by joining with other teachers across a trust, a local authority or a subject group. ‘Developing Teachers’ tells the story of how the Academy of Singapore Teachers supports a network of 70 lead Physics teachers across 170 schools.

SHARE YOUR FINDINGS EXTERNALLY

There are many opportunities to share your school’s observation and coaching experience with other schools. Examples in the UK include [ResearchED events](#), [Teaching Rocks](#), [Connect at the Chartered College of Teaching](#), or a local or subject-specific TeachMeet. As well as informing and helping other schools and teachers, you can develop links with other teacher-researchers and develop your own career!

[ONVU Learning] has given AUEA staff the capacity to develop their teaching and reflection skills, and the confidence to personalise the learning for the individual.

**DAVID CHAPMAN, VICE-PRINCIPAL,
ASTON UNIVERSITY ENGINEERING
ACADEMY (UK)**



[5- Read The Early Career CPD: Exploratory Research](#)



[6- Read The Sutton Trust: Developing Teachers](#)

USING OBSERVATION TO DRIVE WIDER SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

ONCE YOU’VE STARTED AN OBSERVATION PROGRAMME, HOW CAN YOU USE IT TO DRIVE REAL AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT ACROSS YOUR SCHOOL?



WE’VE PICKED SEVEN STRATEGIC CHALLENGES FOR SCHOOLS AND SHOWN HOW LESSON OBSERVATION CAN CONTRIBUTE TO THEIR SUCCESSFUL RESOLUTION.

1

USE OBSERVATIONS TO IMPROVE STAFF MORALE AND RETENTION

This might seem counter to everything you’ve heard about observations in the past, but reflective observations with or without the support of an external coach can help teachers realise how they can develop and, in the words of a teacher at one of our partner schools, ‘rediscover their teaching passion’. See [this recent tweet](#) for another example of a teacher engaged by observation.

3

USE OBSERVATION FEEDBACK TO EVALUATE INNOVATIONS BEING TESTED

Schools are often trialling a range of innovations in schools – technology such as visualisers or tablet apps; new teaching tools such as knowledge planners; or new ways of questioning or checking student knowledge. Observation allows the actual impact of these to be evaluated quickly, rather than waiting for a later assessment by participants or an assessment of learning which might be skewed by other activities.

2

USE OBSERVATION TO MAKE TEACHING AND LEARNING CONSISTENTLY BETTER

At Aston University Engineering Academy they’re [working on a project to improve the start of lessons](#). With 28 Lessonvu cameras installed across every classroom they can selectively see which techniques work well and share them to avoid learning loss in every lesson. It might seem a small thing, but just two minutes extra teaching every lesson adds up to over five student learning hours per day.

4

USE OBSERVATION TO TRANSFORM PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

Performance management tends to see observation as a fairly blunt tool – either as a grade or as a tool for unearthing areas of ‘weakness’ for development. But what if it instead led to a discussion about what type of teacher they wanted to become and helped identify where they would like to go in their career? This approach has revolutionised career development in the UK and in India.



5

USE OBSERVATION TO SOLVE THE TEACHER RECRUITMENT CRISIS

Schools are finding it difficult to differentiate themselves – and with the current ongoing teacher recruitment crisis in the UK this is a major barrier to finding the best new staff. But schools have overcome this problem by talking about their positive approach to recruitment and coaching in their advertising materials – a partner school that used this approach had no problems recruiting this year.

6

USE OBSERVATIONS TO DEVELOP COLLABORATION AND EMBED CHANGE

Creating a shared language of observation between schools in a trust, between a remote school and an external expert or between a school and an ITT provider means that learning can be shared wider and wider. And using cloud-based video (such as our [ONVU Learning](#)) that removes travelling time means that collaboration and change can take place even faster.



LESSON OBSERVATION AND SELF-REFLECTION USING 360-DEGREE VIDEO FOR TEACHER TRAINING

THIS LAST CHAPTER ROUNDS OFF THE SERIES BY LOOKING AT HOW ONVU LEARNING SYSTEM IS UNIQUELY SUITED TO DELIVERING THE MAXIMUM BENEFITS OF A LESSON OBSERVATION PROGRAMME.

ONVU Learning is a simple solution that uses a 360-degree camera, a high definition microphone and a gateway box that records the entire view of a classroom. The recordings are safely stored in the box or in the cloud and are only accessible by or with the permission of the teacher. The videos can be played back at the teacher's own time. Our discreet always-on system is entirely focused on helping teachers review all aspects of a lesson. In practice, this means these 5 reasons:

1

NO DISTRACTING SET-UP ISSUES

There's no need to set up the system in the classroom at the start of a lesson, with the distraction this brings to a class, the chance that the system is not charged up or the record button wasn't pressed. The ONVU Learning system is already set up and always on, so you can always 'go back in time' and take a look at key incidents without planning ahead the recording every time.

2

NO 'HAWTHORNE EFFECT' FROM OBSERVERS

Some lesson study programmes suggest having two or more observers in the room to make the most of lesson observations. But this inevitably influences the classroom dynamics ONVU Learning observations can be reviewed by multiple observers (with the teacher's permission) at the same time and wherever convenient.

4

TEACHER CONTROL

In all ONVU Learning schools, teachers control access to their footage (except in the case of a serious safeguarding issue). This changes the culture of the school – senior leaders have told us of staff keen to share successes as well as asking for help with specific issues.

3

A VIEW OF THE FULL CLASSROOM

ONVU Learning uses the latest technology 360-degree video technology from parent company ONUV technologies, giving a complete view of a classroom along with high quality audio. That allows teachers to zoom in to see how students are responding to tasks, listen to their responses to questioning and even view up to four parts of the room at the same time.

5

EASY CLOUD-BASED SHARING

Footage can be stored in the cloud and can also be shared (with the permission of the teacher) with external experts, for example our specialist coaches, SEN experts in other parts of a MAT or university-based ITT mentors. The forthcoming [Early Career Framework](#) in the UK will offer recently qualified teachers more mentoring and the ability to deliver this remotely should save schools money!



A LESSON OBSERVATION AND TEACHER TRAINING SOLUTION

THAT USES A 360-DEGREE CAMERA, HIGH-DEFINITION MICROPHONE AND GATEWAY RECORDING BOX.

[VISIT OUR WEBSITE TO DISCOVER MORE ABOUT THE BENEFITS OF THE ONVU LEARNING SOLUTION AND HOW IT CAN HELP YOUR SCHOOL ->](#)





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