



BIRMINGHAM CITY  
University

space

# Unseen observations

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# What is unseen observation?



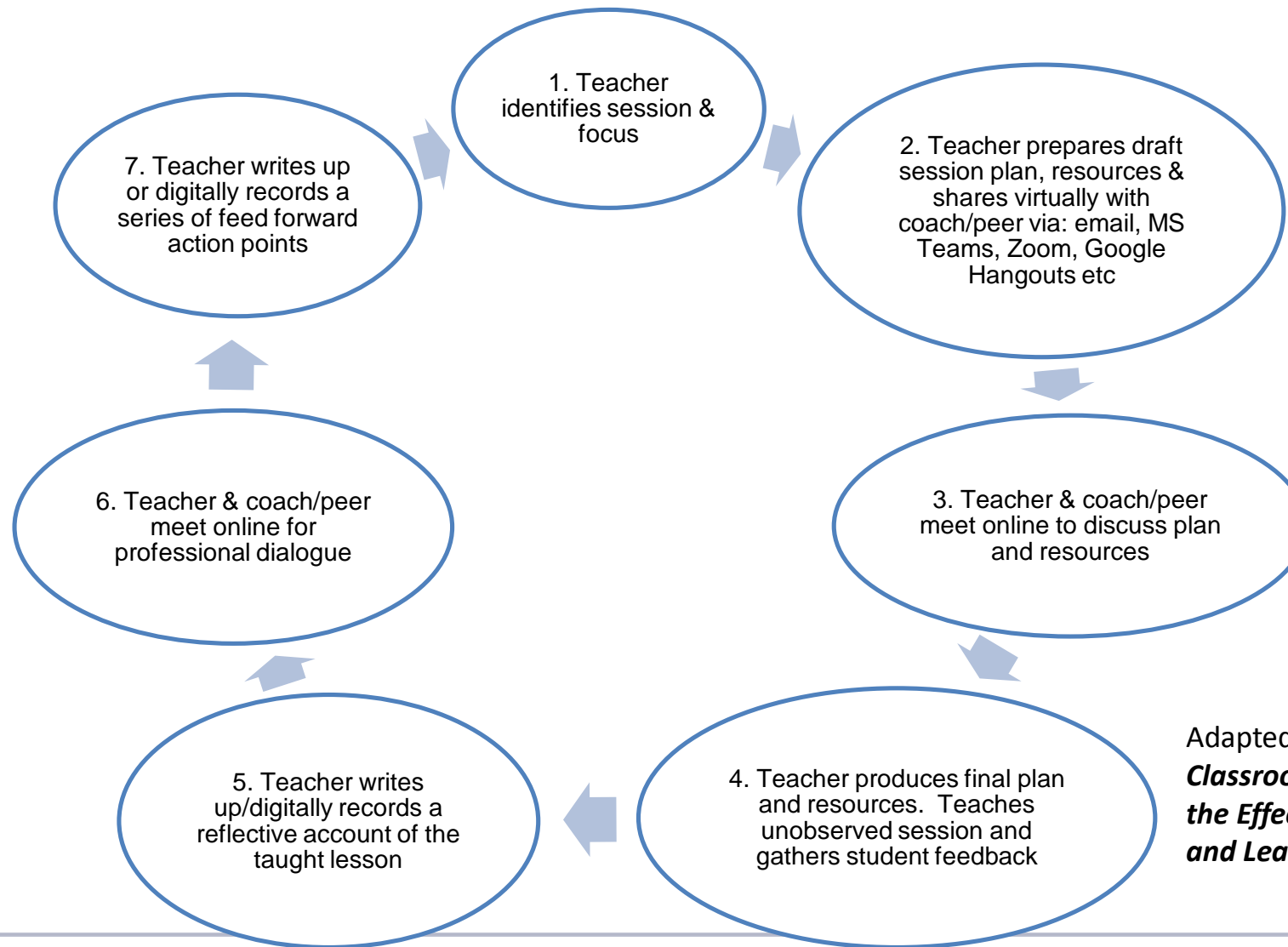
- A model of observation that relies on ‘self-observation’ rather than observation by AN other
- Teacher-centred model of observation where the fundamental “work” takes place in the pre- & post-session professional dialogues
- A teacher’s recounting & reflection on the taught lesson (+ pre-session meeting) provides the stimulus for professional dialogue between the teacher and their peer/coach/tutor

# Unseen observation: principles & purposes



- Reconceptualises how we think about observation as an educational tool to support teacher improvement
- Removes the ‘performance’ element traditionally associated with classroom observation
- Shift in locus of control from ‘observer’ to ‘observee’ – puts the control and accountability of the process back into the hands of ‘observee’
- Shifts the traditional emphasis of observation from a product-focused event to a process-driven practice

# An overview of the 7 stages of the virtual unseen observation cycle



Adapted from O'Leary, M. (2020) *Classroom Observation: A Guide to the Effective Observation of Teaching and Learning - Second Edition*



# Who is unseen observation for?

- Tutor/Mentor with a (trainee) teacher
- Pairs/triads/quartets of peers reflecting on their practice (remotely?)
- In Professional Learning Communities (across departments, colleges, schools)
- Manager with a team member
- The college/school observation team?

# Who has engaged with unseen observation recently?



- Teacher education programmes (university, college providers & Teach First)
- 20+ FE colleges & adult education providers (largely as a replacement and/or supplement to ‘performance management’ observations)
- Schools (as per FE experience)

# What can unseen observation be used for?



- Exploring a teacher's practice/aspects of pedagogy
- Focusing on student engagement and (virtual) behaviour
- Experimenting with teaching resources (e.g. digital technology)
- Refining a session stage, a style of activity, a technique
- Exploring a new approach to planning
- Reflecting on thinking processes, assumptions & decision making

# What are some of the benefits of unseen observation?



- Based on professional trust and honesty
- Situates ownership/responsibility with the teacher
- Depth & rigour
- Removes the Hawthorne effect
- Focus on developing reflection skills – bigger than the session
- Encourages creativity & risk-taking in teaching
- Flexibility



# What are some of the challenges of unseen observation?



- Relationship and rapport – trust and openness needed
- Development of reflective skills and modelling requires preparation & training (for both ‘observer’ and ‘observee’)
- Ability to look beyond the ‘episodic’ – focus on assumptions, rationales, patterns and connections
- Quality of listening - attentive focus by peer; following threads; noticing details; spotting themes
- Depth of questioning - probing, elaborating, clarifying, analysing and evaluating



# UNSEEN OBSERVATIONS



with Professor Matt O'Leary and Joanne Miles

**WHAT ARE THEY?**

ORIGINS: THERAPY

DEVELOPMENTAL  
NO ACTUAL OBS  
TEACHER-LED  
REFLECTIVE DISCUSSION



GROWTH ↑

GROWTH ↑

**REFLECTION TRUST**

**BENEFITS OF NOT WATCHING THE SESSION**

- "JOB WORK WITH THE TEACHER'S EXPERIENCE" (JM)
- TEACHER IS TRUSTED
- IT'S ABOUT THE TEACHER
- PROCESS OWNED BY TEACHER
- NO PRE-CONCEIVED IDEAS ("I SAW THIS...")

**VIRTUAL**

TECH TOOLS TO SUPPORT CYCLE

MS TEAMS  
VIDEO SESSION?  
GOOGLE MEET  
ZOOM

"DOESN'T ALL EFFECTIVE TEACHING RELY ON HONEST INTROSPECTION?"

MoL

**SKILLS OF THE REFLECTIVE PARTNER**

SAFE SPACE

LISTEN QUESTION

DEEP REFLECTION

threads + patterns

COACH PEER REFLECTIVE PARTNER

MODEL

**Benefits OF UNSEEN OBSERVATIONS**

1. TRUST & HONESTY
2. OWNERSHIP
3. FOCUS OFF SESSION
4. REFLECTIVE OPPORTUNITY

• BY MARTINE ELLIS •

# Any questions?



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