Observation form

Introduction

Observing an assistant can be an instructive experience for both parties. But how should you observe someone? Which factors should be considered?

1. Preparation
Before the observation it is important to make good agreements with the other assistant (and, if necessary, with the other members of the didactical team). It is also useful to discuss beforehand the context of the session, e.g. the objectives, and points of attention for the observer.

2. Observation
During the observation the behaviour of the students and assistants should be described as objective as possible, without interpreting or evaluating. The questions on the completion form can help you to do so.

3. Feedback and self-assessment after the observation
After the observation it is time to provide feedback so the observed assistant can assess the quality of its own session. This is the most instructive part of this exercise. The completed observation form can assist in doing the self-assessment and hence, improving the didactical skills.

But how do you give feedback? The tips below might help:

a. Make a distinction between facts and interpretations.
   For example, a point of criticism might be: ‘At a certain moment, you seemed distracted’. This is not a fact, but an interpretation. By saying this the observed assistant can feel himself in a defensive position. It is better to say: ‘You frowned and kept watching the time. I thought that you were distracted and felt annoyed by your students. Is that correct?’ Giving the objective facts helps the assistant to explain his feelings about the session.

b. Find a balance between positive and negative feedback. It is easy to give negative feedback because weak points are the most obvious. However, it is better to give positive feedback as well, even if the positive points are trivial.

c. Focus on behaviour which can have a significant impact on the learning skills of the students. Explain why certain actions lead to the observed student behaviour.

d. Select the negative remarks carefully. Negative remarks can decrease the motivation and self-confidence of the assistant. However, the negative remarks have to be given as well, because assistants can’t improve their didactical skills if they are not aware of their weak points. There are several strategies to provide negative feedback in such a way that it supports the assistants in improving their didactical skills. The most crucial strategy is to select the most important remarks. Insignificant remarks can be ignored or mentioned briefly. Weak points which can’t be improved shouldn’t be mentioned at all, because this can undermine the self-confidence of the assistant.

e. Be careful with suggesting improvements. This would put the observer in an expert function. Furthermore, it is possible that the suggestions for improvement are interpreted in a different manner than meant by the observer. Is the assistant capable (e.g. timing, communicative skills) to implement the suggestions? If this is not the case, suggestions might harm more than help. It is better that the assistant is guided in his search for solutions and to help him to implement these solutions. This method leads to creative solutions that fit the didactical style of the assistant.

f. Think before you speak. The negative remarks should be given in a describing, not offensive way. Problems should be explained in such a way that a realistic solution is readily available.
## Completion form

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observer:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Observed assistant:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OPO code and name:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice session, lab session or</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>excursion?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student group: (Ba/study programme/...):</td>
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### 1. Which structure was observed during the practice session?

a. Describe the different parts of the practice session?
b. Describe the student behaviour (attentive, noisy, calm, ...) in each part and indicate the interaction between assistant and students.

*Remark: The description of the observation should be concrete and objective. The aim is to describe the actions not to evaluate them.*

- session part 1:
- session part 2:
- session part 3:
- session part 4:
- session part 5:
- session part ...:
2. What did you appreciate in this session and why? What was, according to you, less good and why?

3. Which alternatives (structure, content, didactical method, interaction assistant/student) would you consider for this session?

4. *Box to be completed by the observed assistant (not by the observer):* Which information and tips on this form and after discussion with your observer will you consider in your future didactical activities?