

Student Observation of Teaching: Enabling change for students and teachers

JISC Change Agents Network Conference, 17-5-23

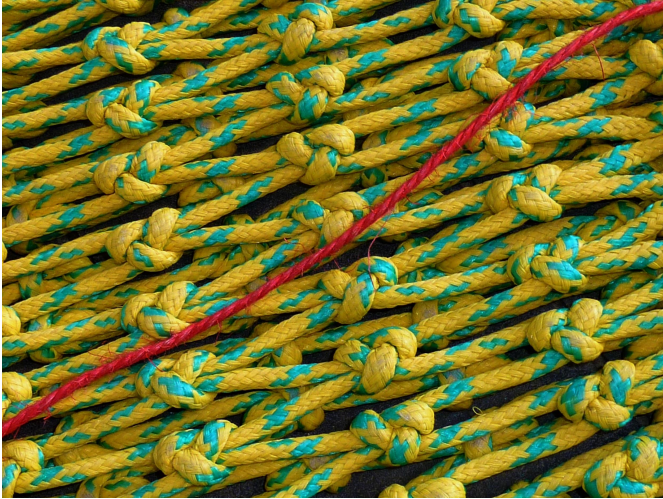
Federica Castellana (School of Health and Related Research), **Tim Herrick** (School of Education), **Oli Johnson** (Elevate), **Mengzi Li** (School of Education), **Matthew Martin** (301 Academic Skills Centre), and **Priyanka** (School of Physics and Astronomy)

Student Observation of Teaching

- A bit Ronseal - it does exactly what it says on the tin...
- Interested student and staff volunteers put into pairs, across departmental boundaries (e.g. a Chemistry student working with a lecturer from English), to have an informed discussion about learning and teaching
- Led by Tim Herrick (School of Education), Oli Johnson (Elevate), and Matthew Martin (301)
- Has run once or twice a year, since 2017, involving c.80 members of staff, and c.210 students - as a pilot, expanding to three times a year
- Works really well - **“This is one of the best experiences for me at The University of Sheffield”** (student participant); **“SOOT just provides that little push across the course of the semester to keep thinking and not just doing”** (staff participant)



Connections to larger ideas about student-staff collaboration



- Universities are full of people who want to discuss learning and teaching, so this scheme gives them a space and a shared focus;
- Clearly something sensitive to negotiate about *power* and the value of different kinds of *experience*
- Based on long-standing work by practitioners such as Alison Cook-Sather (e.g. Cook-Sather, 2008), Catherine Bovill (e.g. Bovill *et al.*, 2011) and Mike Neary (e.g. Neary and Winn, 2009)

Insights from student participants

Three students present today:

1. Federica Castellana
2. Mengzi Li
3. Priyanka



Federica - Environment in class -> impact on teachers and students

- Briefly about myself : EPH+ Student in ScHARR Department
- My motivation for participating in SOOT Scheme
- The experience with SOOT:
 - Working with a teacher from the Department of Education
 - The steps (meetings with the teacher, aims/agreement, observations, activities done)
- Results:
 - What I feel I gained from the experience
 - Impact on my Department

Mengzi - closer relationship with university staff

- How to participate in SOOT
 - Participating in SOOT is to reflect and think about teaching and learning from a different perspective in order to further develop my academic practice.
 - Work with a tutor from English Language Teaching Centre (ELTC).
 - All of sessions observed were small-scale seminars with an average of 6 students.
- Takeaways from this scheme
 - My voice is valued and my contribution is acknowledged by my teacher partner.
 - Learn about teachers' concerns and expectations for the classes.



4) Rapport - does the class have a friendly, non-judgmental atmosphere, conducive to learning?↵	↵
5) Do the students seem engaged ? Why/ why not?↵	↵
6) How does the teacher provide feedback ?↵	↵
7) Does the class involve any informal assessment ?↵	↵
8) What do you notice about the international students and home students - do they stay separate or work together? ↵	↵

Priyanka - Encouraging engagement

Attitude/energy of lecturer affects participation.

- Constructive feedback
- Motivation
- Using teaching aids
- Willingness to listen



Improving Student Engagement - Input from audience

Jamboard session - welcoming insights from audience on methods to improve student engagement.

Points to consider:

- Improving student engagement in large lectures vs smaller sessions
- Inviting regular feedback
- Assessing engagement periodically
- Potentially implementing SOOT to better understand and improve engagement

In summary

- SOOT enables change for participants at a variety of levels:
 - Individually, develop teaching and students' understandings of their learning;
 - Locally, helping influence departmental cultures, again on both student and staff sides; and
 - Institutionally, do something that contributes to the quality of the conversation about L&T, including moving it away from an over-emphasis on metrics
- Think about how you can structure student-staff learning communities in your own institutions, departments, or disciplines
- Treat it a little like jazz - understand how the rules of harmony, structure, melody etc. would conventionally work - then see what it would be like to play them a little differently

References

- Bovill, C., Cook-Sather, A. & Felten, P. (2011). Students as co-creators of teaching approaches, course design, and curricula: implications for academic developers. *International Journal for Academic Development*, 16(2), 133-145. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1360144X.2011.568690>
- Cook-Sather, A., 2008. 'What you get is looking in a mirror, only better': inviting students to reflect (on) college teaching, *Reflective Practice*, 9(4), pp.473-83
- Neary, M. & Winn, J. (2009). The student as producer: reinventing the student experience in higher education. In L. Bell, M. Neary, & H. Stevenson (Eds.), *The future of higher education: policy, pedagogy and the student experience* (pp. 192-210), Continuum