



# THE EAP OPEN CLASSROOM

Creating positive peer observation experiences on a summer preessional

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Ronni Thomas-Osborne

[a.thomas-osborne@bham.ac.uk](mailto:a.thomas-osborne@bham.ac.uk)

# WELCOME TO THE SESSION

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- Opening discussions - our experiences of peer observation
- Challenges of peer observation in its traditional form
- EAP Open Classroom project: Aims, practice, outcomes
- Closing discussions - your contexts

# A NOTE ON LANGUAGE

## ‘Peer observation’

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- ‘Peer observations’ used in the title, abstract and for the opening discussions
- Used to mean ‘the traditional, common mentoring process of observation **plus feedback**’ (Hernandez, 2024, my emphasis)
- EAP Open Classroom: ‘Classroom visits’

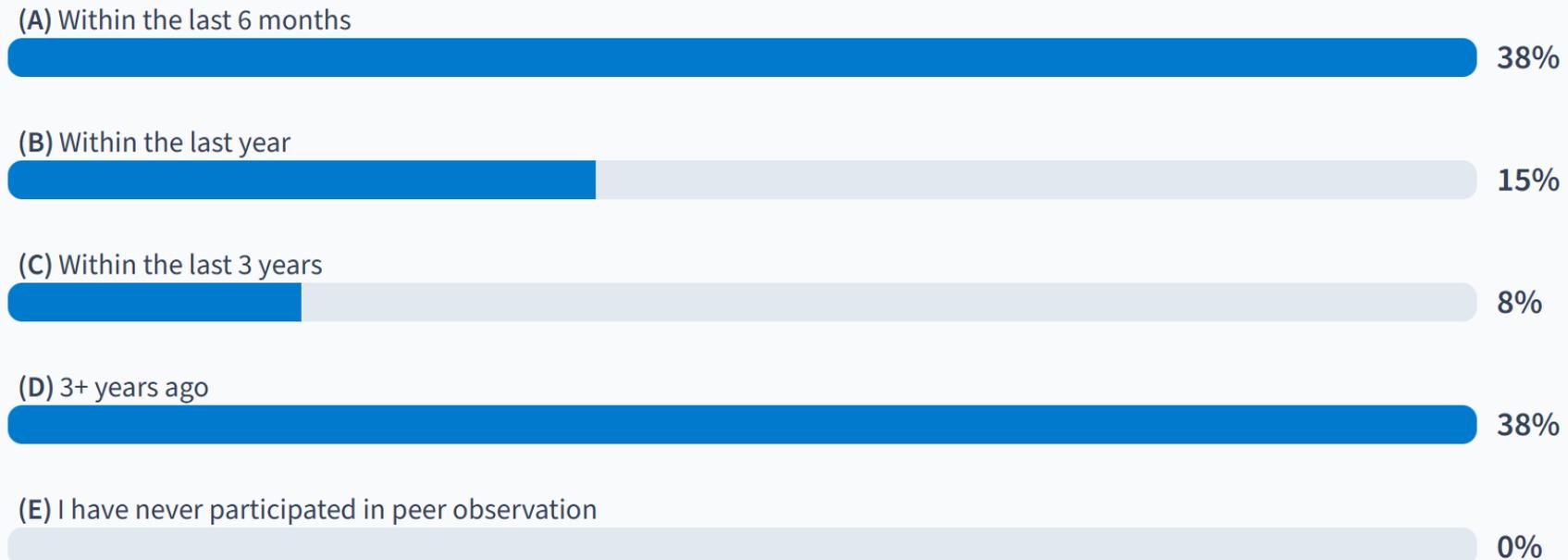
# Opening Discussions

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- When was the last time you watched a colleague teaching, outside of the context of a formal observation?
- Is it something you'd like to do more?
- What are some of the reasons why many of us don't watch one another teach more often?

# Responses from our teachers (1)

Excluding formal developmental, assessed, or accreditation observations, when was the last time you participated in peer observation?



Is it something you'd like to do more?

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yes

absolutely

yes

yes

absolutely

yes

ya

definitely

Yes!!!! I'd like to try something different/radical

possibly...

What do you think are the reasons why many of us don't engage in peer observation as often as we would like?

time, cover, who to ask (some people are very reluctant...)



Time.



previous bad experience;



Time and Cover



Lack of time



Not knowing people you "can" ask to observe



Time pressures. And maybe undue admin.



Unnecessary pressure



# So can I come and watch you teach?

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- Our teachers see the benefits, and would like to watch each other more often than they do, but there are emotional and logistical obstacles.
  - Need for an established relationship with an amenable colleague
  - Anxiety around being observed and also asking/observing a colleague
  - Admin (meetings, lesson plans, reports)
  - Finding time, finding cover

# Imposter syndrome / anxiety

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“Teachers often feel like imposters, certain that unless they’re very careful they’ll be found out to be teaching under false pretences. There’s the sense that just around the corner is an event that will demonstrate to everyone around you that you have no idea what you are doing.

One of the most important aids to critical reflection – having one’s practice observed by peers – is therefore one of the most common triggers to impostorship.”

Brookfield, S. (2017) *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher*

# Relationships: Knowing the “right” colleague

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- Will you be empathetic, encouraging and supportive?
- Is this going to make me feel more insecure about my teaching?
- Am I going to be treated as an expert / equal?
  
- If I ask you to let me observe, will this cause friction?
- Can I trust you to take in good faith any feedback I give?
- Are there going to be ramifications if I have to write a report?

# Theory – issues with traditional observation

## Hernandez, G. (2024)

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- Issues stemming from the feedback / judgement element of traditional observation, dubbed ‘judgementoring’ by Hobson & Malderez (2013).
- “This kind of judgemental mentoring, they argue, is detrimental to any sort of meaningful development” (Hernandez, 2024).
- “At worst [...] it can sort of destroy a relationship, right? If you don’t agree with the conclusions and the judgements or you see it as an attack” (ibid).
- “I often think that observations really say more about the observer than they do about the teacher or what has been seen in the class” (ibid).

# What happens if there's no feedback?

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- Mueller & Schroeder (2018) 'From Seeing to Doing: Examining the Impact of Non-Evaluative Classroom Observation on Teaching Development'
- Evaluated impact of 'campus-wide, non-evaluative classroom observation initiative' on teacher development

post-secondary institution. A survey found that participants in this study were likely to initiate and/or engage in self-directed learning in the area of teaching development simply by watching other instructors. Participants also reported that they would adopt or adapt teaching techniques they had observed. In general, the initiative was positively received and found to be a low-cost,

# Would you like to come and watch me?

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- No paperwork, no reports, no pressure – come and be a fly on the wall (or rather, a respected visitor)
- Just don't ambush me with critique afterwards (unless I ask for it...)

# EAP Open Classroom

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- Support staff who would like to visit a colleague's classroom (and will accept a visitor into their own) with no formal feedback or paperwork
- Entirely voluntary – teachers are invited to sign up via online form
- We assign partners, introduce via email, support with scheduling visits and arranging cover
- Developmental and reflective – for the benefit of the observer

# Aims

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- To create a culture of **regular, less stressful peer observation**, thereby granting a valuable opportunity for professional development in the specific field of EAP.
- To complement the current TD offering, by **further increasing opportunities for collegial discussion, networking, and sharing of best practice**.
- To **support with or remove some of the more sensitive or onerous aspects** of peer observation, such as reaching out to a colleague who you may not know well, scheduling cover, giving feedback to little-known colleagues, and reporting on your observation to coordinators.

# Values and etiquette

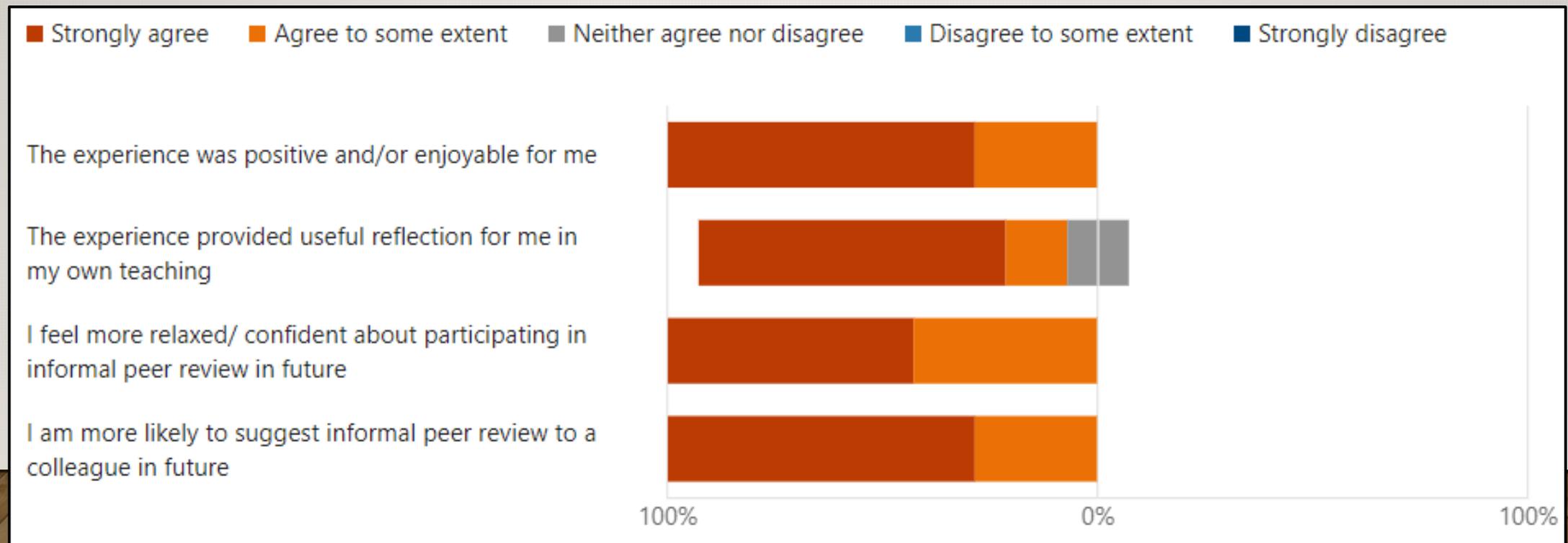
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- Language – ‘observer / observee / observation’ replaced with ‘partner teacher’ and ‘classroom visit’
- Detailed guidance provided for participants

Try to remember at all times that your colleague is opening their classroom to you to allow you the opportunity to watch another experienced teacher in action, as you are likely to be doing for them/other teachers. During the class and in your own reflection afterwards you can decide privately the elements you wish to reflect on, and possibly experiment with/incorporate into your own teaching, but avoid communicating any constructive criticism or negative reflections to anyone else, or to your peer unless expressly invited to do so.

# Outcomes: Participant Feedback (1)

- Feedback from participants for both 2023 and 2024 was overwhelmingly positive, and gave some insights into what teachers valued.



# Outcomes: Participant Feedback (2)

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- “Although the materials we use in class are the same, each teacher has their own style and so by watching them it helped me to reflect on how I would do the same thing and question whether I would like to change my normal approach to common tasks
- [...] there's no pressure, there's no write-up and feedback at the end (unless you want it!), and so no sense of being judged, which is what makes regular observations uncomfortable”

# Outcomes: Participant Feedback (3)

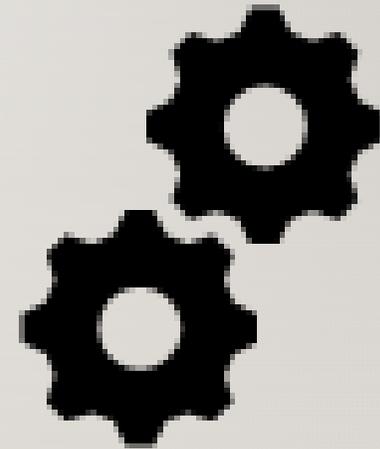
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- “This is a very useful and NEEDED thing for teachers on intense courses like the preessional”
- “a great opportunity, in an otherwise busy schedule, to see what another practitioner was doing and I would definitely do it again if possible.”
- “helped combat the loneliness of remote working [as there are] limited opportunities to forge a sense of community with one another when working online”

# Cross-disciplinary possibilities at UoB

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- Foundation – Insessional (year-round)
- EAP – other Foundation disciplines
- Wider institution(?)



# CLOSING DISCUSSION

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- (How) would a similar initiative work in your context?

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