

# Help!: i'm being OBSERVED!

In the first of regular series, Peter Greaves tackles that horrible feeling of being watched...

**A** looming observation date equals extra pressure for all teachers, no matter how experienced or inexperienced they are. As solitary creatures, teachers have very few opportunities to receive the validation that we crave! This means we pile the pressure on ourselves in the hope that our self-doubt will be swept away on a tide of positive feedback.

As the observation comes closer, most teachers find themselves vacillating between two extremes. The first is the, "I'm not going to do anything special, they can take me as they find me," attitude. Whilst this might seem a position of integrity, it doesn't lead to peace of mind before, or satisfaction after. Instead it puts you at the mercy of events rather than giving you the chance to take control of them.

The second attitude is, "I've got to put on a show!". This can lead to teachers attempting all sorts of ideas, activities and strategies that neither they, nor the pupils, are confident or comfortable with. In a previous school, I remember asking some pupils when they did drama in their classroom. "Whenever someone is coming to watch us", came the reply.

In truth, neither of these positions is the ideal. As deputy in my school, I take my turn at 'doing' the observations as well as being 'done' and I find going into someone else's classroom every bit as nerve racking as having someone come into mine. So from being on both sides of



the fence, I think I could sum up all useful advice in three words: keep it simple. This might not take all the anxiety away, but it will help to keep what is, whether we like it or not, a necessary part of our job in perspective.

## Easy does it

Keeping it simple for you means planning ahead so that the right lesson falls on the right day. Avoid a lesson that you won't really look forward to teaching, and avoid teaching a 'one-off'. The ideal is a lesson that will allow you to show that you're building on what's gone before, whilst moving pupils on to new skills and understanding.

To keep it simple for the pupils, you can do

those extra little things that will make transitions smooth and management clearer. If you need scissors, have them out and ready, the same with their books, whiteboards, digit cards or anything else that might be needed. Usually independence and organisation is worth teaching in its own right, but on these occasions, it's better to keep the learning objective the focus.

Keeping it simple for those watching means planning a lesson that has clear sections. This helps to keep the lesson pacey, as you move the class on from one part to another and also allows the holding of 'mini-plenaries' all the way through. Those watching can then see the learning being done. Many observations these days take the form of a 'learning

walk', where you can never be sure which part of the lesson is going to be seen. A lesson in sections ensures that there will be opportunities to see more steps of the teaching sequence. Make sure there are spare copies of the lesson plan for your visitors too. It provides the answer to many questions.

Finally, if you find observations really tough, the best remedy is to do some yourself. Ask your head if you could do some joint observations perhaps of someone on the senior management team. When you have the chance to be one of 'them', taking part in the 'doing', you begin to understand the benefits there are for the school in observing lessons, and you realise that any visitor comes in with bags of good will and a positive regard. So don't panic, everyone is on your side. Plan it well and keep it simple.

**Keeping it simple for you means planning ahead. Avoid a lesson that you won't really look forward to teaching, and avoid teaching a 'one off'.**

**NEXT MONTH: Help! My class isn't making any progress!**