

## **Using Reflective Questions**

### **A Feed Forward Process in Peer Support of Teaching Observation**

#### **Abstract**

It is essential that lecturers reflect on their teaching practice in order to enhance students learning. This can be facilitated through teaching observation where colleagues act as helpers, though some lecturers consider it as intrusive and challenging their academic freedom. However, where it is appropriately conducted, in terms of pre- and post- meetings, observation in class, it can be a useful tool for both professional and personal growth.

Strathmore University in Kenya initiated teaching observation as a lecturers' learning process in 2007. The objectives of the peer support review as spelt out in the university's teaching philosophy include: to offer lecturers the opportunity to reflect on the teaching and learning process and to promote dialogue focused on professionalism in teaching. Although the university's policy is that a lecturer should be observed at least once per year, this is at the lecturers' discretion to invite the peers for the task, though for new lecturers, teaching observation is used for developmental purposes. However, the bone of contention has been the post-observation meetings' discussions where in some instances they have had a negative impact on the observed.

The study informing this paper sought to analyze the use of reflective questions as a feed forward process in the post observation discussions. The study was qualitative in nature and it was carried out by the author as the observer. The teaching observation exercise was a follow up on 'student focused approach' training that new lecturers to the university had attended three months prior to the observations. Ten lecturers were observed over a period of one month.

Data were collected through class observations whereby the field notes that were taken during the observations were later on converted into questions and sent to the lecturers (observed). The lecturers were given two to three days to reflect on the questions, answer, and send the responses

to the observer. Post observation meetings were then held between the lecturers and the observer. The reflective questions for each observation and lecturers' responses to the questions were tabulated, coded and themes extracted.

The major findings were that the use of reflective questions enabled the observed to participate actively in the post-observation meeting discussions, experience deep learning and fuse theory to practice. Additionally, both the observer and observed learned from the reflective questions. One of the conclusions from the study was that the use of reflective questions as a formative (feed-forward) learning process is quite an important learning tool. This is because lecturers have good ideas on students' learning, in most cases, save that they do not get an opportunity of reflecting on how to improve their teaching effectiveness. The observer's role therefore, is to assist the observed to reflect further and deeper.

*Keywords: Reflective questions; Teaching observation; Post- observation discussions; Feed-forward*