

MATT

Welcome to our HEFCE project *Improving learning and teaching through collaborative observation*.

I'm Matt O'Leary and together with my colleague Vanessa Cui, we are the project team here at Birmingham City University.

Improving learning and teaching through collaborative observation is an 18-month project funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England that's taking place in the Faculty of Health, Education and Life Sciences at Birmingham City University. The project consists of 5 case studies from different subject areas across the faculty, each case study including 2 members of academic staff and 2 students.

The underpinning premise of this project is that improving the student learning experience begins by improving the teacher learning experience, and collaboration is central to bringing about improvement that is real and meaningful for both parties in the context of learning and teaching.

The primary aim of this project is to create an authentic and sustainable collaboration between academic staff and students using observation as a central reference point and as a tool for critical inquiry into learning and teaching.

The way in which we're doing that is by reconceptualising

and reconfiguring observation as a method. And what makes this particular project exciting and innovative is the way in which we're reconceptualising that. Traditionally in education, observation has tended to be used predominantly as a form of assessment, often for performance management purposes where judgements are made about people's professional competence and capability.

The first thing we're doing in terms of reconceptualising observation is removing it completely from an assessment context. And by that we mean we're not associating observation with any kind of assessment whatsoever.

We're using it as a method of inquiry, a way of gathering evidence and data about what both staff and students observe, witness and experience in the context of the classroom environment.

VANESSA

Our project puts student voice and their active involvement in informing and shaping learning and teaching practice at the heart of this collaborative approach to observation.

Removing observation from the context of assessment creates a safe, low stakes environment for reflection and dialogue between staff and students.

In doing so, this opens up new opportunities for the way in which observation can be used as a lens for informing staff and students' understanding of meaningful and

effective learning and teaching.

Our project conceptualises the complex and messy processes of learning and teaching as a collaborative act that has to include both learners and lecturers if we are serious about understanding and enhancing the learning experience.

In doing so, these two key agents come together to co-create and co-produce knowledge in their respective subject areas.

In this conceptualisation, students play an active role in reflecting their learning experiences and engaging in a professional dialogue with peers and lecturers about these experiences. This is different to the conceptualisation of students as passive recipients of subject knowledge, consumers of their degree qualifications, and evaluators of their lecturers' performances.