



# “It’s like a thousand stars are shining on you, [or] it’s like you’ve died” FE Teachers’ Lived Experience of Graded Observations



## Introduction

This research aims to collate the experiences of a range of FE teachers on graded observations. It aims to reflect the strength of emotions teachers go through when faced with a grade after being observed, the impact that has on practice and their suggestions for a way forward.

## Key Findings

Teachers have long decried the graded observation. There has been an unhealthy attitude towards teachers, amongst management and even other fellow teachers, as they become defined by the grade awarded after a single observation.

The impact that teacher observation grades have had on teachers over the years cannot be underestimated. It has had a lasting impact that will take time to heal even after grades are withdrawn from the process. O’Leary (2020) has been arguing for many years that effective teacher observation eliminates a grade and focuses on the professional discourse. As we would want our students to feel – challenged, but safe.

All of the participants in this research agreed that grading observations had, in many cases, been detrimental to the overall experience of teaching. Whilst being awarded a high grade was seen as a wonderful thing, even in these cases, the stress and anxiety leading to the observation itself had, it appears, significant mental and physical effects on teachers. Being awarded a low grade was even more detrimental and long-lasting.

Only now as the zeitgeist is towards ungraded, developmental observations, are teachers voicing their views confidently. This research aims to hear the voices of some of the teachers that have gone through years of observation judgement and to listen to their recommendations for the future.

## Methods

Case studies of teachers will pull together questionnaire responses and semi-structured interviews in an effort to elicit a candid response from all participants.

## Recommendations

- Grading of teacher observations is stopped in all educational settings
- Observations are used as tools for teacher development and are egalitarian in principle and not hierarchical
- These teachers’ voices are heard by senior leaders and other teachers, within and without my college.

## Key literature

- BERA (2004) *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research*, Nottingham, BERA.
- Coe, R (2013) *Improving Education. A Triumph of Hope Over Experience*, CEM, Durham University.
- Ofsted (2019) *Education Inspection Framework, Education inspection framework (EIF) - GOV.UK* ([www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk))
- O’Leary, M. (2020) *Classroom Observation. A Guide to Effective Observation of Teaching and Learning (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed)*, Routledge, Abingdon.
- William, D. (2020) *Teacher Quality and Student Achievement, presentation* ResearchEd 2020.