PROTOCOL FOR DEVELOPMENTAL OBSERVATION OF ONLINE TEACHING – (DOOT)

Pre-Observation Guide

For all guides and forms of the DOOT Protocol, refer to https://flora.education/doot.

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This guide is created with the person who observes the teaching – you – in mind. You may be an educational developer, a peer observer, a teaching mentor, or in other roles that aim to facilitate development of online teaching expertise of the educator you observe.

Terms and Definitions

Educator: For the purposes of this document, educator is anyone who teaches. The DOOT protocol is designed for post-secondary educators. Depending on their organizational culture and their rank and level of experience, they may be called professor, lecturer, instructor, etc.

Educational developer: Educational developers are a group of professionals in higher education who provide a variety of services, such as training and support for educators and curriculum development, aimed at enhancing the quality of education for the learners (McDonald & Stockley, 2008; Shay, 2012). Given the right tools and expertise, a peer educator could take on the role of educational developers.

LMS: A Learning Management System (LMS) comprises of a set of tools to enable sharing of content, discussion and discourse among student, submission of student work and communication among students as well as with the teacher.

Pre-Observation Overview

Educators may contact you or your team (e.g. teaching and learning center), and request to be observed in their online teaching. Once they make the initial request, you can lead the observation process based on their needs and availability. Establish the best channel of communication with them (e.g. email or phone) and, if needed, start by introducing yourself and sending them The DOOT Guide for Educators document to orientate them to the process.

Ask for any information that helps you with planning and execution of the observation. For example, find out if they have any timeframe in mind and where they are physically located. Are they available for face-to-face meetings or do they prefer online meetings?

Based on the information that you have received from the educator schedule the pre-observation meeting. Depending on their availability this meeting can be conducted face-to-face or online using synchronous communication tools, such as MS Teams, Zoom, etc.. Emphasize that they need to review the Guide for educators and have a course and focus area for observation in mind when coming to the pre-observation meeting.

The pre-observation meeting is a 30- to 40-minute session and has four main objectives. As part of your facilitation role, it is important to allocate enough time to achieve these objectives as best as possible.

- First purpose of the meeting is to build trust and rapport with the educator, which is a pre-requisite to the effectiveness of the observation. Building rapport is a process that has started with your initial communication with them prior to this meeting; however, the pre-observation meeting is an important interaction in establishing a mutually professional and trusting relationship, especially if you and the educator have not met in person or worked together in the past.

- Second purpose of the meeting is to provide an overview of the objective and process of the DOOT protocol to the instructor.

- Third purpose of the meeting is to agree on the course, and the focus area of the observation.

- And last part of the meeting is the conclusion and should be allocated to planning the next steps and clarifying any uncertain matter.

Following sections provide detailed description of the four components of the meeting: building rapport, the objective of the DOOT, observation focus areas, and meeting conclusion.

Building Rapport

A trusting relationship between educator and educational developer, who is observing their teaching, is of paramount importance when the goal of observation is professional growth of the educator. A developmental observation depends on the educator letting the observer into their class, and then letting them into their reflective thoughts and accepting their feedback. In order to do this they need to be able to respect and trust the observer's expertise and confidentiality. Further, the two parties involved need to have coordination and clear, mutual understanding of different steps of the process and their purpose. The pre-observation meeting is critical in building this rapport – respectful, trusting mutual relationship – and coordination.

Rapport is a concept that is discussed in different fields such as business, communication and the helping professions such as nursing and education. Here I will go over some key points of rapport within the context of educational development, using the literature from Educational Developers Caucus of Canada.

While knowing the theory will expand your informational growth, building rapport is a capacity that takes intentional and reflective professional development over time (Timmermans & Hoessler, 2017). According to Hoessler and West (2017),

> **Rapport** is the process or experience by which individuals or teams of EDs and instructors build a mutually positive connection, relationship, or shared understanding with one another in an atmosphere that is conducive to reciprocal trust, empathy, respect, openness, growth, and change. (p. 21)

The core facets of rapport as per this definition are trust, empathy, and mutual respect. **Trust** is an important requirement of effective educational relationships, and having **empathy** is about relating to someone in a respectful, caring way, without judgment. Listening, asking lots of open-ended questions, and being open to everything that an educator may say contributes to both trust and empathy. **Mutual respect** is "the recognition of the expertise and knowledge that all parties bring" (Hoessler & West, 2017, p. 24). Educators usually come with pedagogical and disciplinary knowledge, and educational developers come with teaching and learning knowledge and expertise. **Confidentiality** is another important factor contributing to trust (Hoessler & West, 2017). Building personal and professional **connections** with an educator through finding common experiences or backgrounds contributes to development of rapport (Hoessler & West, 2017).

Looking at rapport through a more practical lens, Beaudoin (2017, p. 50) identified the five moments of building rapport during an educational development consultation as "1) preparing for the meeting, 2) welcoming the instructor, 3) exploring challenges, needs for change, and solutions, 4) concluding the session, 5) wrapping up the meeting". A pre-observation meeting is a form of educational development consultation, which is the beginning of a process and will be followed

by more meetings and developmental activities. Adopting Beaudoin's guidelines to this specific type of consultation, I have come up with some suggestions to develop and strengthen rapport during the pre-observation meeting.

1) Preparation: Once you receive a request for observation, get in touch with the educator promptly and introduce yourself. Provide them with the Guide for Educators, which includes information on the purpose and process of the observation. Discuss their availability for meeting then organize the meeting and confirm the time, modality, location, and any other relevant logistical details.

2) Welcome: At the pre-observation meeting, introduce yourself in more details, and ask them to introduce themselves. Take advantage of any commonalities in your personal or professional lives that contribute to making connections. Make sure they are comfortable in the space and are aware that your conversations will remain confidential. Re-iterate and clarify the purpose of the pre-observation meeting, and the developmental purpose of the observation.

3) Exploration: Discuss the functional focus area that the instructor wishes to be observed on. Ask open questions and listen attentively to understand what they are sharing about their course topic and learner group (context), experiences, and challenges and what they are hoping to achieve by going through the observation process. You may need to guide them to choose a different focus area for observation. If so, do it respectfully and without judgment or criticism. Show that you are open to what they are saying; paraphrase, pause, reflect, clarify, refocus and guide the conversation.

4) Conclusion: Summarize what you have agreed upon as next steps and book the time of the next meeting, which would be the post-observation meeting. Bring interactions to close.

5) Wrapping-up: If during the meeting you introduced a resource or committed to any communication before the post-observation meeting, be sure to fulfill your promise. Take time to reflect on the pre-observation meeting and any interaction or event that was not to your expectation. Think of how you could facilitate a more effective post-observation meeting now that you know more about the educator and their context.

Rapport is context- and culture-dependent, and your philosophy and personality will influence it too; therefore, rapport varies and may never look the same from one relationship to another. You could read more on the topic and intentionally strive to develop your rapport-building competence.

I conclude with a quote from West, Bennetch, and Ewert-Bauer (2017) to summarize this short excerpt on rapport in educational development:

> There are several reasons why developing rapport with an instructor promotes reflection, learning, risk-taking, and transformation. Viewing the consultation holistically, we work with the instructor as a person, rather than working only with the instructor's issue. By engaging in actions such as making connections, being empathetic, assuming a 'not-knowing' stance, developing trust, and employing active listening, we best position the instructor for change, because the positive emotions that these practices generate significantly enhance the learning potential. (p. 38)

Objective of the DOOT

Educators may be used to receiving direct feedback from educational developers and may have entered the DOOT process with the same expectation. It is important to manage their expectations by clarifying the goal of the DOOT and how you will work to achieve this goal. Also, reiterating the goal and format of the DOOT is a reminder of your role and the mindset you need to facilitate this process. You can adopt the framed text below to explicitly clarify the objective of the DOOT protocol.
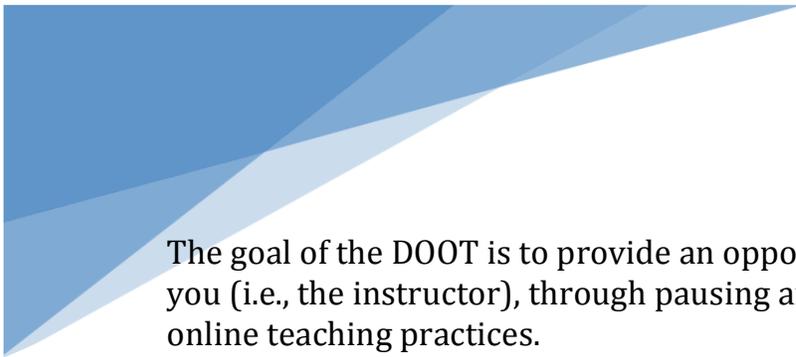
The goal of the DOOT is to provide an opportunity for growth for you (i.e., the instructor), through pausing and reflecting on your online teaching practices.

As a result of reflection, you will be able to identify gaps in your skills and knowledge that you need to address.

In this protocol, role of the educational developer (i.e., my role) is to facilitate the reflection based on what I observe and assist in planning the follow up activities to address the knowledge and skill gaps you identify.

My role, in this protocol, is *not* evaluating and providing feedback.

Focus Areas

Based on research conducted in designing the Protocol, three main categories of roles and responsibility for online instructors are identified as:

- Organizing course and guiding learners (Course Organization and Guidance)
- Administering assessments and providing feedback (Assessment and Feedback)
- Facilitating discussions (Discussion Facilitation)

Each of these categories constitutes a functional area that educator can choose to be the focus of an observation. If educator wants to be observed in more than one focus area, recommend to them to go through separate observations for each area. Limiting observations to one area at a time provides the focus required for critical reflection on that area, and manageable feedback and follow up plans. From a practical perspective, observation of all areas of online teaching may prove to be too cumbersome and lengthy to sustain for an institution with limited number of educational developers who are knowledgeable and practitioners in supporting online education.

The DOOT Guide for Educators include a description of these focus areas and educators are advised to consider which area they would want to be observed on prior to coming to the pre-observation meeting. You may need to help them in choosing the right focus area for the course that they are teaching. For example, courses that relate to human issues and current affairs such as Family Law could lend themselves well to meaningful discourse and be a good fit for observation of Discussion Facilitation. On the other hand, in a more procedural course such as Legal Document Processing, where learners need to learn how to create legal documents based on a set of rules and standards, having multiple formative assessments and providing regular continuous feedback could be more effective in facilitating learning. Such courses are better fit for observation of Assessment and Feedback, or Course Organization and Guidance focus areas.

At this meeting you may also need to discuss the scope of observation. The goal of the DOOT Protocol is to keep the observations manageable within 1-2 hours, and have a relatively focused post-observation reflective session. There may be cases where one focus area is too large to cover in one observation and you may have to narrow it further to specific sections within that focus area. For example in a course with 40 learners and five discussion topics, you may choose two of the discussion topics that are already completed for observation of Discussion Facilitation.

A course on the LMS needs to be a coherent environment where teaching functions flow and continue from one area of the course to the other. Though we specify functional focus areas and identify tools and pages in the course setup in the LMS to correspond to each area, these areas are interlinked and an educator may use the same tool in the LMS for two or more functional focus areas.

Clarifying educators' understanding of each focus area, what they entail, and what would its observation include within their specific course(s) will be an important part of your pre-observation meeting.

Meeting Conclusion

Before concluding the pre-observation meeting, make sure that you and the educator are clear about the next steps in the process.

- Show a copy of the Observation Form to the instructor. Explain that you willl use this form to guide your observation and you will give a copy of your notes to the instructor at the post-observation meeting.

- Re-iterate the confidentiality of the observation process. You may keep an electronic version of the observation notes on your secure network drive for future reference as you continue supporting their professional development.

- In the LMS, you will need to request access to the course that you will observe for the duration of observation. Make sure the educator is aware of this arrangement.

- You should be able to complete the observation in 1-2 hours within a 1-week time frame. As much as possible, try to schedule the post-observation meeting based on this timeline and clarify the modality (online or face-to-face).

- Agree on how you will stay in touch during the observation process if a need arises; most common ways are via email or telephone.

- Allow time for the educator to ask questions or voice any concerns they may have.

Summary

Your roles and responsibilities at this step of the process

- Read three DOOT guides on pre-observation, observation, and post-observation thoroughly and note considerations for:
  - Building rapport,
  - Setting expectations,
  - Developing Follow up Plans, and
  - Logistics of the process.

  These guides and other required documents are available from https://flora.education/doot.

- Send the DOOT Guide for Educators document to the educator who has requested observation.

- Arrange an appointment for pre-observation meeting.

- Conduct the pre-observation meeting with 4 main goals of:
  - Building rapport,
  - Setting expectations for the observation process,
  - Agreeing on the course and the focus area to be observed, and
  - Planning the next steps and answering any questions the instructor may have.

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