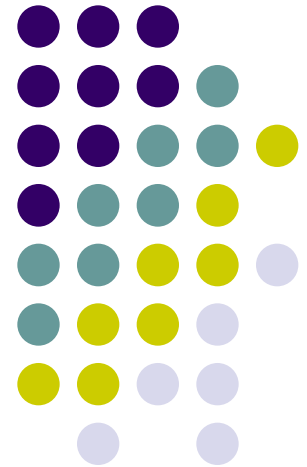


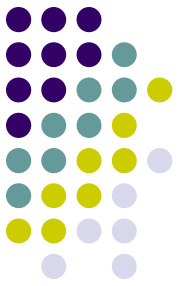
Surveillance and normalised practice: the use and impact of graded lesson observations in further education colleges

LSRN Conference: 25th November 2010

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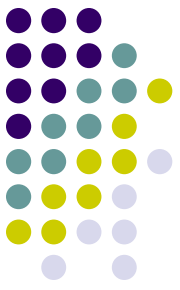
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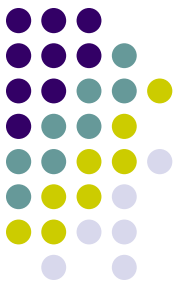
Aims of presentation

- To outline the research focus
- To explain the rationale for the research
- To provide a synopsis of the research design
- To present some of the key findings of the study



Research focus

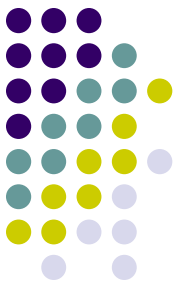
- To explore how FE tutors' professional identities and practices were being shaped and changed by the use of a particular intervention i.e. OTL
- To explore and explain how OTL was contextualised in FE by describing existing models and investigating their perceived purposes and effects from the perspectives of the FE workforce



Rationale for the research

- Undeveloped research topic + sector – lack of empirical studies in FE into perceptions of in-service tutors (e.g. James & Biesta, 2007; Jephcote & Salisbury, 2009)
- Extant research restricted to schools + focus on *practice* of OTL (e.g. Marriott, 2001; Montgomery, 2002; Wragg, 1999)
- Need for synthesis between practice & context
- Timeliness of research – OTL has ‘become an increasingly common flash point in colleges, triggering local negotiations, and in some places industrial disputes’ (UCU, 2009: p. 1)

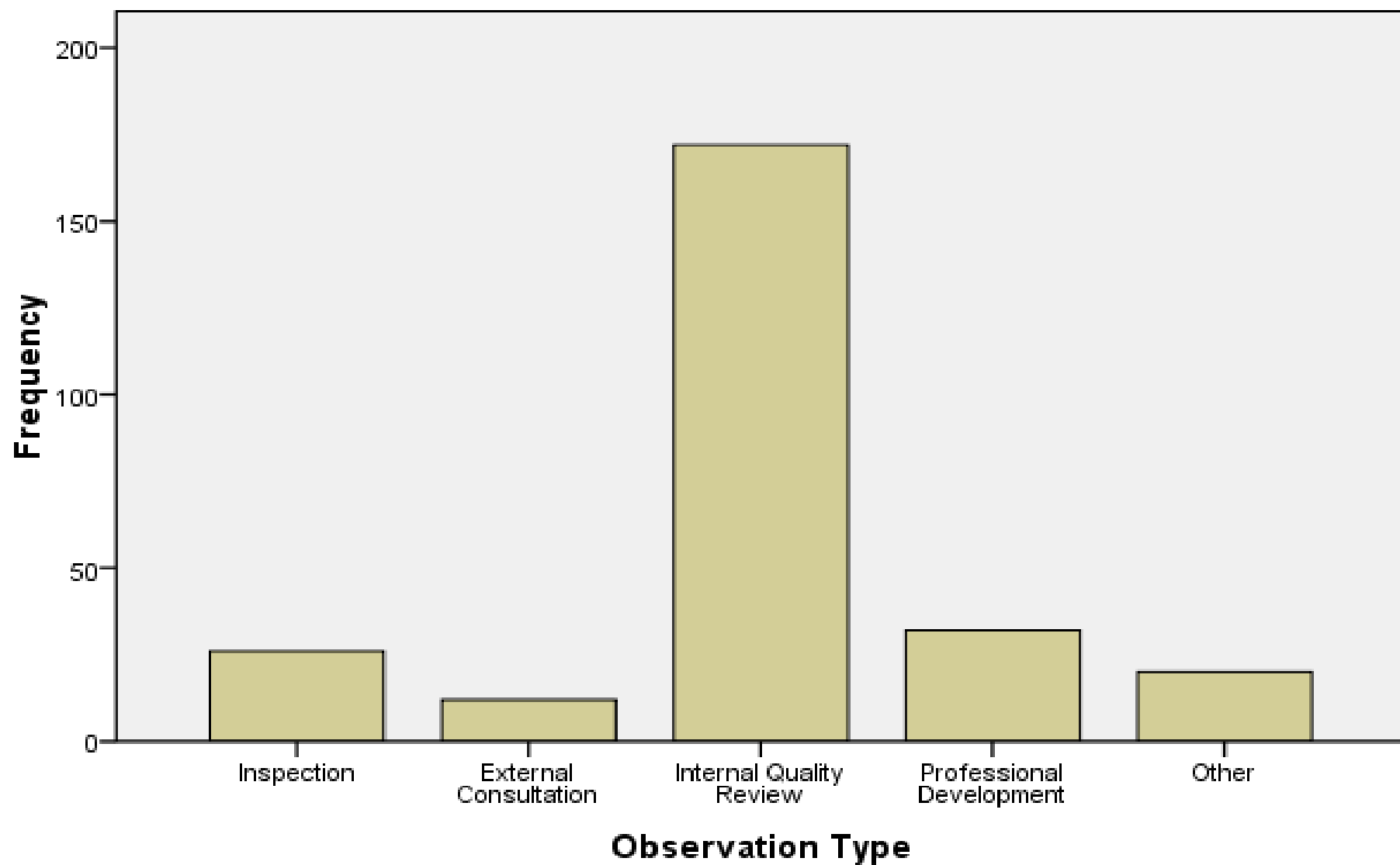
Synopsis of research design



- Mixed-methods study
- Sample of 10 colleges across West Midlands
- 50 participants per college (total n = 500) for 'Phase 1' (questionnaires)
- Participants – tutors, middle & senior managers, categorised into 3 groups: 1) observees; 2) observers and 3) SMT
- 21 interviewees from 3 colleges (9 from groups 1 & 2; 3 from group 3)
- Data analysis: SPSS & NVivo 8

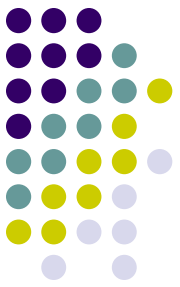


Observation Type

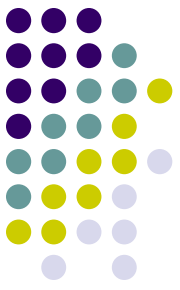




Random sample of responses to main function of OTL

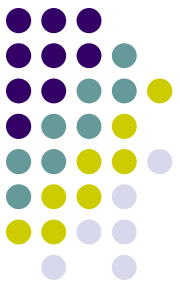


- Graham (SMT): ‘It’s to improve standards, to help improve learner experience, success rates, etc.’
- Cyril (observer): ‘I think observations first and foremost are for ensuring that quality is maintained and to ensure our learners are getting the best possible deal.’
- Brian (observee): ‘Well, one of the reasons is because we’ve got to have them. It’s part of all these quality claims, you know, ensuring standards and improving quality.’



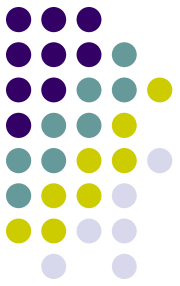
Summary of key findings

- Main function of OTL = link to QA (Quality Assurance) & performance management systems
- Main driver of hegemony of QA graded OTL = agenda of continuous improvement driven by central government (e.g. DfES, 2004) & associated agencies i.e. Ofsted, LSC, QIA (e.g. Ofsted, 2008a; QIA, 2007)'
- Reliance on quantitative performance indicators for 'lesson observation profile' (i.e. how many grade 1s, 2s, etc) & 'collecting evidence for Ofsted inspections'



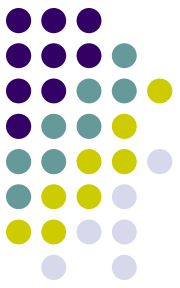
Summary of key findings

- OTL as ‘part of the furniture’ has resulted in:
 1. the standardisation of college systems & processes (e.g. documentation, ways of ‘doing’ OTL)
 2. the normalisation of tutors’ classroom practice i.e. tutors consciously shaping what they did in the classroom during OTL in order to fit in with prescribed notions of ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’ practice as outlined by agencies such as Ofsted and LLUK (e.g. Ofsted, 2008b; LLUK, 2006)



In whose interests?

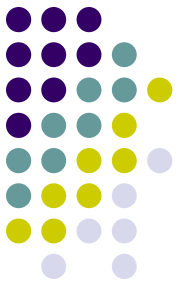
- ‘Observations seem to be done with Ofsted in mind not members of staff and their development. It seems that managers need to “tick off” this requirement of them and then staff are ignored for the rest of the year. It’s just a form-filling exercise that has nothing to do with staff development. I think these observations are a waste of time and only serve to upset staff’ (SC09).



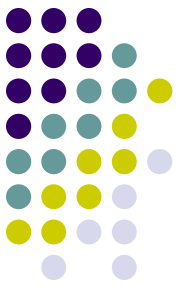
Summary of key findings

- Combining QA & QI (Quality Improvement) purposes: a union of incompatibles?
- College QA requirements take priority over QI needs of individual tutors
- Does feedback help to improve practice?
Inconclusive findings from both qualitative and quantitative data, although conflicting accounts

Punishment & reprieve

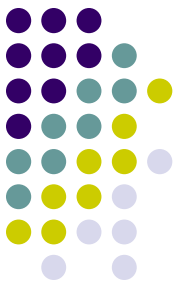


- ‘Our policy is that every teacher will be observed twice in the academic year. The second observation is waived if the teacher achieves a grade one or grade two in the first observation, so you get your one or two and you’re done for the year, you can breathe a sigh of relief. The big tension is with the threes because the three gets you, “Oh no, not one of those mentors!” They get a grade three and they get allocated a mentor so it’s almost like the mentor has become the punishment and this worries me.’
(Graham, QA Director)



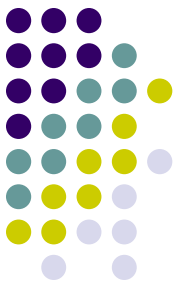
Summary of key findings

- Graded OTL used as a performative tool: punishment & reprove:
 1. Grade 3 or 4 = punitive consequences (e.g. withhold salary increment, subject to greater surveillance)
 2. Pressure on mentors to ‘turn someone around’ in a matter of weeks (i.e. raise at least one grade)
 3. Tutors who are awarded a grade 1 or 2 are ‘left alone’, but the grade 1 tutors are sent people to observe them as examples of ‘outstanding practice’



Summary of key findings

- Impact of graded OTL on tutors' professional identities & notions of self:
 1. Implicit & explicit labelling of performance
 2. Effects on morale & motivation
 3. Increased levels of stress & anxiety due to 'high stakes' nature of assessment
 4. Can lead to 'unhealthy competition' & 'divisiveness' among staff



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