

Teacherless Observations: Supporting Student Agency

Paul Magnuson

Nicola Cosgrove

Keri Porter

Marc Ott

[Leysin American School Educational Research](#)

[Agile Research Consortium for Schools](#)



Correspondence should be addressed to Paul Magnuson at [pmagnuson@las.ch](mailto:pmagnuson@las.ch) or Nicola Cosgrove at [ncosgrove@las.ch](mailto:ncosgrove@las.ch).

### **Abstract**

Leysin American School, which has focused on developing greater student agency for several years, recently trialled a different sort of classroom observation, called Teacherless Observations. Teachers volunteered *not* to be in the classroom during an observation by one of the researchers. The researchers documented the student interaction of the teacherless classroom using running records. Teachers were allowed to prepare their students in any manner they found appropriate, from no preparation at all to assigning specific roles and leaving a specific lesson plan to follow. The observers report on their own experience and the shared experience of the teachers. The discussion includes the interesting variants of preparation, observation, and student behavior during these teacherless observations, and suggests why such observations might be an interesting addition to professional development programs focused on developing student agency.

*Keywords: Student agency, self-regulation, agile, K-12, international schools, professional development, professional learning*

Teacherless Observations at Leysin American School (LAS) developed in the middle schools (ages 12-14), which at the time was using visible displays of student workflow in the form of simple kanban boards (essentially columns of To Do, Doing, and Done). Seeing one of these boards in an English class, a substitute teacher suggested to the students that he merely observe how well they were able to run the lesson instead of taking the reins himself. He wrote notes for the teacher that captured minute by minute what the students were doing, in running record style, and later piloted the process in other classes (Magnuson and Cosgrove, 2018; Magnuson, Tihen, Cosgrove, and Patton, 2018).

Interest in student agency, triggered by the use of kanban boards in middle school, spread across other grades, as did interest in teacherless observation as a possible method to observe how able students are to manage classroom learning by themselves. Therefore, four faculty members formed as a team of observers to take notes in ten different classes to learn more about the teacherless observation and how this form of observation might inform the observers, the teachers, and the students about the current state of student agency in the school.

## **Background**

LAS is an international boarding school with just under 300 students from forty or more countries. Students are age 12 to 19, in US grades 7 to 12. The curriculum through grade 10 would be familiar to any US educator; in grades 11 and 12 students can also choose to study for the International Baccalaureate diploma.

Unique to the school is a research center dedicated to teacher and student self-regulation. The research center organizes professional learning activities for the entire teaching faculty. It also facilitates teacher and student demonstrations, presentations, interviews, academic writing, and outreach to other schools and organizations. A central leitmotif guiding the research center's efforts to learn about and support student agency is found in the relatively new paradigm for innovative teaching and learning called agile. Agile is a family

of practices and beliefs about work largely associated with the software industry, but increasingly present in education. For a historical overview, see Salza, Musmarra and Ferrucci (2018). The most well known programmed version of agile in education eduScrum (see for example Wijnands, 2020). LAS has not created or adopted a particular agile methodology, but instead focuses on developing a mindset, mostly in instructional practices, but also in some areas of curriculum assessment, and professional development.

Schools, including LAS, are generally not structured to emphasize soft skills such as personal agency, however (see the Mastery Transcript Consortium for an important effort to change that). For example, classroom observations are often focused on how the teacher is teaching and not how the students are learning, though of course not exclusively. One could probably argue that teacher training and certification programs have an historical bias to a focus on teaching how to teach, meaning focusing on what the teacher does, and to a lesser extent on what the students are doing.

Therefore, in order to gauge where the students are in their ability to self-manage their own learning - their level of personal agency - it may be helpful to shift some of our practices to a focus that is much more on student learning, specifically self-directed learning. Teacherless observations may be one of those tools.

## **Method**

We are interested in knowing whether or not to pursue teacherless observations. Thus our research questions focus not only on the educational value of a teacherless class hour, but also on the possible systemic outcomes of conducting teacherless observations on a more regular basis.

## ***Research questions***

- How do our students use class time when they do not receive assistance from a teacher?

- Are teacherless observations an effective method to promote self-regulation at our school and possibly other schools?

### ***Participants***

Three of us from the school's Educational Research Center and the head of school scheduled class observations with some of our teaching faculty. Two of the four of us had previous experience with teacherless observations and two of us were new to the process. One of us was also observed for this study by a second member of our four person team. Three of us observed two classes each and one of us observed four classes, for a total of ten observations. Each class was taught by a different teacher, so 10 teachers were involved, nine of whom were recruited through a faculty-wide appeal via email and one of whom agreed to participate because he needed a substitute, and one of us conducting this study was able to fill that role for him by observing class.

Students may have been in more than one teacherless observation if they happened to be in more than one class that had a teacherless observation. They became participants by virtue of their teacher volunteering to participate.

### ***Procedure***

The main goal of the school's research center is to explore and understand self-regulation better. Three of us work directly in the research center. Therefore, this study might be best characterized as participatory action research from the point of view of the four authors. Our participation was limited to the role of the observer except for one classroom observation in which one of us was also the teacher of an observed class.

Over a three-week period we observed ten teacherless class hours and debriefed the lessons with teachers afterwards either face to face or through email. After the observations were completed we surveyed ourselves and the teacher participants (see Appendix A). We also surveyed student participants, but because so few students responded to the survey, we did not include data from those surveys in the study.

Participating teachers were asked to prepare their class however they liked, as long as they were *not* present during the class observation. Observers were asked not to interfere or help the class. Their role - our role as researchers observing the class - was to take a running record (see Appendix B for a sample) of the class hour, recording how the students act, what they work on (or not), and if they seem to be making progress in the content area. Some teachers found it difficult not to be present, at least at the beginning of class. One teacher was present at the beginning and end of the observation and watched the class through the window of a neighboring classroom. Most teachers told their students in advance that a teacherless observation was scheduled, although two teachers did not warn their students, feeling that would be a better test of self-regulation.

## **Results / Discussion**

We will discuss what the four of us as observers experienced, including (1) our own behavior in the classrooms, (2) what we noticed about student interaction and learning, and (3) how lessons were debriefed by us and the teacher participants. Then we will turn our attention to what teachers reported about their experience. Finally, we will conclude with thoughts about the possible growth and utility of teacherless observations and why they might be worth introducing into a professional development program focused on student agency.

### **Our own behavior in the classroom**

As observers, we all thought that being “a fly on the wall” was best so that students were not overly influenced by us. We did however still feel as observers that it was within our scope to make some small talk and to ask some questions when appropriate. All of us, without a former agreement, avoided the teacher chair and desk and sat either at the back of the room or in a student chair. All notes were taken on a laptop or phone and entered into a Google document. One teacher participant noted that taking notes on the phone was something to avoid in future observations, since students might think that the observer was using the phone for personal messages and not very engaged with the observation. All teachers received the

running records after the lessons, and a few of them were invited to view the notes during the lesson, allowing them to ask the observer questions about the class while it was in progress.

Very few of us circulated the room frequently, either remaining in one spot or moving through the classroom once or twice. On a few occasions we stepped out of the room, either to see how the class would react with no adult in the room or in one case for an unavoidable work phone call. Some students asked us as observers about the teacherless observation or even about where their teacher was, depending on how much their teacher had prepped them about the observation in advance. When students asked if they could use the bathroom, we generally chose to shrug our shoulders or not give any particular indication of what they could or couldn't do. In other words, we were observing, but neither teachers nor authority figures.

### **What we noticed about student interaction and learning**

It's important to note that the teacher action before the observation took place affected how the students worked during the observation. Some teachers prepped the students quite a bit, explaining what a teacherless observation was and giving the students a schedule, tasks, and perhaps putting certain students in charge of specific parts of the class. Others mentioned that there would be an observation without the teacher in the room, and perhaps who was visiting and why. Still others didn't inform students that they would not be present.

In classes where students were prepped there was usually some sort of task either written on the board, sent out via Google Classroom, or announced in the class prior to the observation. In these lessons there were often student "teachers" or leaders of the lesson. In some classes this meant the student stood at the front of the room and explained what students would do during the class, in others the student or students played the role of a supervisor who circulated in the room and made sure the other students were on task.

In classes with multiple student leaders there may have been more peer to peer interactions. Students asked each other for help, gave each other feedback, and worked as a team to complete their work. In one English class clear leaders emerged for the activity the

teacher had left for them, a debate. When all else failed, students sometimes fell back to reaching out to the teacher via email with questions, or in some cases, waited out the rest of the class.

Several of the observed classes were led by a teacher who had been working on student agency or had students in the class who had been in the school's middle school or in classes specifically focused on practicing student agency, all prior to the observation. In the most intentional of these classes focused on student agency - art, engineering, and physical education - students generally were able to get right to work on projects that were already underway. In a sense they had regular experience with teacherless observations, not because the teacher is not present in their classes, but because the teacher has more often than not adopted a resource role instead of a traditional teacher-fronted classroom leader role. These students were also more likely to stay after class was over because they were still working.

The students in a math class were quite diligent about doing their work, though they found they couldn't complete the work without their teacher, so they proceeded to email their questions to him. They then returned to the easier work assigned during the class, ostensibly to feel they were staying on task, even while failing to complete the more difficult assigned work. Interestingly, they did not seem particularly adept at finding a path to a solution online, even though they were motivated to complete the assignment.

Other students fared better with prepared teacher work, working during the lesson and supporting each other, and following the script the teacher had left by collecting work toward the end of class. In one class the students spent the last ten minutes of the hour - and more, since they stayed after the class was over - discussing problems from a math test they had taken in the class preceding the one in which they were observed. They could be said to be off task if one only thought about the English class they were in, but wonderfully on task if one thought about their learning in school as a whole. Would they have debriefed the math test during the



English class if the English teacher had been present? What role does the flexibility for students to discuss what they are interested in play in their general motivation for school?

Students in one class went directly to their seats when the observer opened the classroom door and for the most part stayed at their desks until the end of the 90-minute lesson. The teacher had left instructions on the board and on Google Classroom. One student took the lead, going to the front of the classroom to explain to the others what should be done during the class. Some students were productive and shared their work, per the instructions, with their peers. Other students did not engage with the work at all and chatted with friends for most of the class period. For the scheduled break, no students left the classroom and only one stood up. In other words, while the teacher preparation helped some classes navigate the teacherless class, this was obviously not always the case.

In a physical education class, a few students adopted leadership positions, though not assigned by the teacher. These student leaders encouraged the class to begin a warm up before the class put on flags to play flag football. They made four teams, two of which played while the other two teams watched. Play went on quite well with little discussions about calls and time on the floor was split fairly evenly between the two pairs of teams on. Near the end of the lessons they called for the last play and then went to change clothes. Several students stayed in the gym, either throwing footballs or shooting baskets. By the time the lesson ended all the balls were picked up and all students had gone to change.

### **How lessons were debriefed by us and the teacher participants**

The debriefing sessions between the observer and teacher varied. At a minimum the teacher was able to access the running records the observer had written, via Google documents. On the other end of the spectrum were more in depth conversations immediately following the observation or later that day, including discussing the lesson over lunch. Between these two extremes, the debriefing was usually about ten to twenty minutes.

Observers used different conventions in the running notes. For example, some observers did not specifically name the students in the notes, so the teachers had to guess which student did what. “I can pretty much identify the kids by what you wrote about them,” said two of the teachers. The length and detail of the notes also varied, as well as the observer’s main focus.

Conversations directly or close after each lesson were seen as more meaningful by the observers. The observers and teacher participants were able to engage in informal conversations regarding each class and this led to interesting discussions as to what the students were actually doing at the time and how strategies could be implemented in the future. In hindsight, allowing some time to pass could have been factored in to allow for processing of information or to continue to build upon thoughts going forward. However, there is an understanding that this is an ideal situation and not always practical. One teacher in particular was somewhat frustrated with the outcome of his observation, and after some time and discussions in more informal settings, the teacher was able to accept that the student behaviour wasn’t all that unusual given the circumstances.

There were varying methods regarding how and when the debrief was shared. All notes were shared electronically and some observers allowed the teacher participants to see the notes and follow along during the class. Some notes were shared with teachers after the observed lesson but before the debriefing session and some notes were shared at the debriefing session itself. Perhaps most interesting for future consideration was the model in which the teacher was on the Google doc as the observer was writing notes, allowing an ongoing conversation about what was happening in the classroom.

### **Survey responses**

#### ***Observers***

We used two surveys, one with ourselves (n=4) and one with the teachers (n=10; see Appendix A). As observers writing to our own survey prompts, we mostly mentioned the

structure of the instruction in the class, our perceptions about the quality of the learning, the degree to which students were on task, and how we felt ourselves, sometimes including a comment about our own learning. We also mentioned a few anecdotes that were interesting conversation starters for our discussion about the utility of teacherless observations.

In general, we enjoyed observing students and how they worked together (or not) and how students sometimes demonstrated leadership and maturity differently in one class from another. Our reports generally mentioned that students were on task, but not universally. One class in particular demonstrated a high level of distraction with devices and other manners of distracting oneself or others, and some reports in other classes mentioned distractions by using smartphones.

We found that teachers set up their students for the teacherless experience in different ways. Two teachers intentionally said nothing about their upcoming absence. The majority of teachers, however, let students know that a teacherless observation was coming up and they prepared their students by assigning roles (e.g. leaders, presenters, collectors of student work) and perhaps guidance on timing in class. One teacher found it very difficult not to be with her class, both at the beginning and end, with some concern about student safety during a science lab.

Several anecdotes are worth expanding on. These are stories of frustration, hints at learning and self-regulation, and successes of individuals and classes demonstrating student agency to some degree.

One teacher was frustrated with the class after the observation and had to take some time to process the information before debriefing the students. It was hard for him to learn that some of his students were not on task, as normal as that might be. He continued to debrief the experience with other faculty members over the course of several days, either at lunch or other various breaks in the school day. One big takeaway is that this is normal and there will be many

classes that do the exact same things. If anything, his experience gives a real insight into what you need to do next in your class and how you adjust to suit those students who are in need.

We noticed that a quiet student in one class adopted a leadership role in another class. We noticed that even students who worked very conscientiously may have a “lack of ability to give that final push to solve the problem,” as one of us worded it. Because we were observing students instead of the teacher, we were presented with opportunities to learn more about the students. One teacher told the observer that the difference in student agency was due to practice and experience - her first year students in the IB Programme weren't as good at self-regulation as the second year students, a remark echoed by another observer, noting that age is an important variable in student agency. One observer, a few days after the observation, complemented a student who had demonstrated good work habits. She surprised him by saying those habits were compensatory skills she used to offset her ADHD.

A ninth grade student, who had participated the previous year in our school's program specifically designed to practice student agency (and who struggled to direct his own learning all the way into February of that school year), adopted a caretaker role with the unruliest student in the class. He repeatedly helped his friend refocus on the work, and at one point commented to the observer that he knew how important it was to develop the ability to work independently and keep yourself on track.

A notable success among the teachers is the continued work between one observer and teacher. After debriefing the teacherless observation for this study, the pair decided to continue observing each other's classes. They have continued to work with each other after the observations and set their own schedule for example if both teachers taught at the same time, they would then switch classes and become an observer. Likewise, another teacher participant has since observed a teacherless class and is interested in others observing his class again, in the same manner.

### ***Teachers***

Teachers were interested in participating in the study to see how their students would do, as well as expressing a general interest in improving their practice. One teacher felt this is the way her classes already ran. She saw participation in the study as a chance to get more classes to adopt a similar, more self-regulated style. Some teachers did nothing at all to prepare their students, not even informing the students of their upcoming absence and the observation. Other teachers provided some minimal guidance, like notes on the board or advice to continue work in progress that students were already familiar with. A few teachers assigned students specific roles. One teacher wrote a “relatively detailed outline” and another even included the time when the break should start and end.

Some teachers expressed mild surprise at how much students veered off task, others expressed surprise about individual students who were on task and in one case, about a student who unexpectedly took on a leadership role. One teacher thought that with a little training the class could get much better at self-regulation; other teachers wondered to what extent the observer was keeping students on task simply by being there in the room.

Teachers also commented on the format of the observation. One felt observers should take notes without devices because it looked to the students like the observers themselves were off task. Another teacher expressed concerns about the research model itself, wondering if it didn't bias toward reports of off-task behavior. She also suggested student interviews about their experience would add strength to the study.

The teachers thought that the students, if asked about their on-task behavior, would report that they were on task during the teacherless observation “about the same” (7) or “less” (3). Teachers who later asked their students about the experience reported that students expressed some confusion, with one class even using the word “chaos” to describe the lesson. One class suggested that they weren't ready to handle the particular task alone, and another class thought that, although they like working alone, it would have been helpful to have the teacher available for questions.

Interestingly, one teacher reported that the students “thought it was strange but they enjoyed having some freedom. This then started a conversation about how they wanted some different rules and routines in the class which was interesting and allowed us to make changes right away.” Another teacher commented that, “This is how we always work ...” because she regularly runs individual conferences with students while everyone else does independent work.

Teachers received the running record from the observers and in all cases debriefed the lesson, though a few debriefing sessions were quite short - less than five minutes - and in one case the entire exchange was by email. Some teachers may have wanted to see more than just running records, hoping to get more feedback from the observer. Much of the conversation was, understandably, whether or not the students were on task, and which ones were more on task than others.

One teacher-observer pair modified the observation in an interesting way. The observer shared the Google document with the teacher at the beginning of the lesson and the teacher watched the lesson unfold through the comments in the document and an online conversation with the observer. He wrote about the experience: “I was thrilled that my observer kept a live-feed document with observations/notes of the course, down to the minute. I was able to see (via the Google Doc) what my students were doing/saying. It was quite interesting and entertaining.” Together they discussed the students apparent inability to find information on their own. Their googling skills, it seemed to the observer and the teacher, were less than proficient, and the students got stuck as a class because of it.

Teachers gave feedback on the process of the teacherless observation. There was concern that students might think the observer is off task if using a device to type the running records. One teacher mentioned that students noted when an observer had to leave for a phone call. More thorough critiques included suggestions to contextualize the observations, by, for example, providing the teachers more information about the purpose and the procedure, preparing the observer better with pictures and names of students, presumably to make the

running records more specific, and more written information given to the teacher so it doesn't feel like the class period is lost.

One comment in particular is worth highlighting, in which a teacher reflected on the context for teacherless observations:

"I do not think this is something you can just leap into, it requires scaffolding of process and the students to develop an innate understanding of an iterative process in order to be successful. If it's just an exercise in prompting a class how to work without you for 1 day without any prior learning it is a waste of time. The valuable part is when students really understand how to take charge of their own learning on a long term basis and can apply this to any situation they find themselves in."

We certainly aren't looking to create a situation that is a waste of time and we wonder to what degree a single observation like in this study might lead to students truly adopting greater personal agency for their learning. We asked teachers if they would support an entire day of teacherless classes, as a schoolwide gut check about the status of student agency. Four teachers responded "absolutely," four "probably," and two "probably not." It certainly is interesting to imagine what a school day without teachers might look like.

### **What is the future for the teacherless observation?**

Teacherless observations came about mostly by chance, but not entirely so. The first teacherless observation was in a classroom with visible kanban boards - a manner of making the classroom work and workflow visible. Because it was obvious to the substitute teacher that the class was already working on greater self-regulation, the substitute teacher felt empowered to test the extent to which students could run the class themselves. The test that emerged is surprisingly simple - an observer simply observes a class while the students conduct themselves as they are able during the classroom hour. Teacher (and hopefully observer) reflection is aided by the observer's running records of what the students actually do while the

teacher is absent. To help “sell” the experience to teachers, it doesn’t hurt that the teacher actually gains some planning or down time, since the teacher cannot be in the class.

So is there a future for teacherless observations?

We think so. When we proposed teacherless observations to our faculty, about 20 percent of them volunteered to participate in the study - and this during the uncertainty of COVID when the faculty taught in both physical and remote classrooms simultaneously without knowing from one day to the next what the impact of the pandemic would be. Participants who did participate were mostly positive, even responding that a whole day “teacherless” event was worth supporting. Discussions that followed the observations, whether between the observer and the teacher or among many colleagues over lunch, seemed to provide a novel way of thinking about teaching and learning in order to reflect on both individual classes and how we do school as a whole.

It is the experience and reflection combined where deeper learning - or even transformation - can take place. While we were quite focused on observing the classroom interaction during the teacherless class, not all of us were as diligent about following through with teacher reflection afterwards, nor were we very intentional about how we could support teacher reflection on the process. This is a missed opportunity, because the ongoing reflection is much of the value of staging the teacherless observation in the first place. Be that as it may, good conversations did arise from the observations, some of them quite extended. For a school like ours interested in supporting self-directed learning, creating a culture in which conversation and reflection about self-directed learning is more likely to happen is a satisfactory step. Faculty members first need to be aware of the school goal, after all, and second they need to engage in the conversation about how to bring that goal about.

Teacher reflection about the observation after it is completed is a great professional development opportunity for the teacher, but by no means the only one. Because the intent of the observation is known to the teachers in advance, and because there are few rules other



than “not to be present” during the observation, teachers begin reflecting about the observation in advance. Some of the teachers in the study overtly prepared their students by assigning specific roles or letting them know the class plan in advance. Other teachers in the study enjoyed the possibility of simply not being there and seeing to what extent the students could carry on. Either approach can exert a bit of pressure to be thinking about how independent the students are and how the curriculum, instruction, assessment, physical classroom, and classroom routines influence student agency.

Specifically, we asked ourselves how students use class time when they do not receive assistance from the teacher. With the exception of many students in one class and some individual students in other classes, we observed students who were able to focus on the tasks left for them by the teacher, assist each other in appropriate ways by for example clarifying a task or working together or sharing materials with each other. We observed a certain degree of off-task behavior and distraction by, among other things, phones and their other devices. We also observed students who helped manage the class, either by taking on a leadership role given to them by the teacher in preparation for the teacherless observation or by assuming a leadership role on the spot to help the class navigate without the teacher.

We are aware, of course, that the students were not left completely alone and that the presence of an observer scanning the room and typing notes (although we did our best to appear nonchalant) has an effect on classroom behavior. We cannot claim the class would run the same in the complete absence of the teacher. While we could imagine that we, or another school, might like to test this scenario as well, for the purpose of supporting reflection on how students work the observed class model works fine, in particular because the observer provides notes about the classroom. Perhaps an expanded model of teacherless observations could include classes with no adult at all; a teacherless class instead of a teacherless observation. We actually do have a version of teacherless class already in our school - every evening during study hall in the dorms. If we are content to let them work alone or with roommates and dorm

mates then, why wouldn't we be during the academic day? Perhaps some experimentation with teacherless observations can raise questions about other teaching and learning practices, in this case study hall, which sometimes go overlooked.

The classrooms we observed ran differently, which caused us to reflect on the number of variables which combine to create a classroom culture. Some teachers tend to give their students freedom to practice self-regulation, some run a teacher-fronted tight ship that allows for little self-directed "practice." Not only are teachers' styles different, but so too are their personalities, their mastery of the content, their background, their culture, their training, their comfort level at the school ... the list of factors that affect classroom culture is long. Perhaps teacherless observations are a safe way for teachers to engage in dialog about the classroom culture they develop and the factors they think contribute to it. We observed, for example, a student in one class that seemed unengaged and anything but self-directed, who then surprised us in another class by taking on a leadership role to support the lesson. What if teacherless observations were conducted in such a manner that helped teachers observe each others' classes? Teachers would have a chance of observing students they know from their own classroom, and about whom they've inevitably formed opinions, in another context. If self-regulation is the goal of the school and a teacher notices a non-self-regulated student - at least in their previous opinion - display great self-regulation in another class, the teacher might be convinced that part of that student's unwillingness or inability to take charge is the responsibility of the teacher.

Will Richardson, founder of Modern Classrooms and more recently the Think Big Institute, presented in a 2016 TEDx (and regularly tweeted in the fall of 2020 that "schools are not built for learning" (TEDx, 2016). This is a provocative claim, of course, and would take considerable unpacking. We think that a teacherless observation can play a similar, but more modest (and more politically acceptable) provocative role, asking us to think about how we have set up learning by turning the classroom a bit on its head, even if only for one class period and

with a supervising adult taking notes in the corner. In fact, we think that an exercise like the teacherless observation is a small enough event that it can be adopted in a traditional school with little risk to students and faculty in order to have an experience which truly questions the way we do school. We do not have to say that schools are not about learning, but we can make a point with a teacherless observation that there are different ways to go about learning - and that the ensuing conversation is worth having.

Finally, it was interesting for us to see that some teachers who took part in the teacherless observation left a script for the students to follow, which in one case included the schedule time for a break. While doing so was completely legitimate in the instructions we gave teachers, the perception that high school students need that much guidance (which could be true in this particular case) also provides for real experience to inform the conversation about what students should be expected to handle and what they are able to handle. If teacherless observations were done at several points during the year, the conversation might be all the richer. Can students handle taking a break at time that makes sense based on the work they are doing or the mental or physical need they have for a break? Or should it be scripted for them? And what are they learning when working in those two types of environments?

Teacherless observations may then be an effective method to promote self-regulation at our school, particularly because we have been discussing, observing, and theorizing about self-regulation for quite a few years. But would it work in other environments?

While our data do not say anything directly about how teacherless observations might contribute to another school's efforts to support self-regulation, we suspect that the nature of the observation as a single event in a class (or a series of events, see below) with a single class that has an adult in the room, is neither a difficult procedure for most schools nor a practice that would be ill-received by parents. Because it is simple to do, and because it even grants a teacher a free class hour, the barrier to experimenting with this format is very low.

A planned series of teacherless observations, say one observation a month, might provide some interesting benchmarks for a teacher and the students of a particular class. Improvement in the ability to self-direct across classes may go through similar stages, which then might be insightful for constructing more student-centered, self-regulated learning. Improvements to - or any changes in - the ability of a class to function when the teacher is not present could also serve to keep the conversation going between teachers and students, effectively reminding them that the school has a goal of improved self-regulated learning behavior. Regular observations would also bring to light the classes that are generally more successful, identifying in turn teachers who have constructed classrooms that tend to be better able to handle greater student self-regulation. Those teachers could be the ones chosen to work with others, to be observed, to observe others, and ultimately leaned on to help the school move toward its goal of greater student agency.

### **Conclusion**

If we want students to be self-directed learners we have to give them time to practice being self-directed learners. We need to demonstrate that we are serious about them becoming self-directed learners. We also need to keep the conversation about self-regulated learning current among teachers, based on real experiences. Teacherless observations provide a start, since they afford students classroom time that is significantly less teacher-directed, show that teachers would like them to be productive independent learners, and provide us with some information about the extent to which students exhibit personal agency. Teacherless observations also set the stage for discussion and reflection about our assumptions about schooling, including the role of the teacher, the role of the students, and the nature of learning and interacting in the classroom. It is with the continual reflection on real experience, whether as a teacher or an observer, that we continue the conversation about student self-regulation, what our students learn, and how much value we have given to our students by the way we imagine school.



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**APPENDIX A**

We created surveys for ourselves as observers, for the teachers, and for the students in the teachers' classes. The surveys were as parallel as possible, as shown in the table below.

Student questions are not shown because after repeated attempts the number of responses was so low we excluded their responses from our data entirely.

Survey set up and prompts.

Researcher (n=4)	Teacher (n=10)
Which TEACHER did you observe? (provide the name)	
	Why did you volunteer to be part of this study?
	Describe what you did to prepare your students for the teacherless observation.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Describe your experience as an OBSERVER in JUST THIS TEACHER'S CLASS. (You will be asked to submit an additional survey for the second class you observed).</li> </ul>	
Were you surprised by any aspect of the visit?	Were you surprised by any aspect of the visit?
How do you think the STUDENTS would respond to this question: Compared to a	How do you think the STUDENTS would respond to this question: Compared to a

<p>regular class when your teacher is present in the classroom, was the "teacherless" class ....</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Less on task?</li> <li>● About the same on task?</li> <li>● More on task?</li> </ul>	<p>regular class when your teacher is present in the classroom, was the "teacherless" class ....</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Less on task?</li> <li>● About the same on task?</li> <li>● More on task?</li> </ul>
	<p>What did the students tell you about their experience of the teacherless observation?</p>
<p>If you as the OBSERVER debriefed your teacherless observation with the TEACHER, please describe your conversation.</p>	<p>If you debriefed with the observer, describe your conversation.</p>
<p>As a campus event, would you support an entire day of teacherless classes?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● No</li> <li>● Probably not</li> <li>● Most likely</li> <li>● Absolutely</li> </ul>	<p>As a campus event, would you support an entire day of teacherless classes?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● No</li> <li>● Probably not</li> <li>● Most likely</li> <li>● Absolutely</li> </ul>
<p>Please share any additional comments.</p>	<p>Please share any additional comments.</p>



**APPENDIX B**

Fifteen minute excerpt of the running records from an observation of a science class. Student names have been substituted by letters.

1:10 I arrived early just to see what was happening! A and S in the room then they left, I think maybe they were worried what was happening!

1:11 A and X in the room on their laptops, X informs me that he is the 'teacher' for today along with K.

1:13 Students arriving and staring weirdly at me - ha ha!

1:14 Some chatter when they arrive, X and K at the front and waiting for quiet.

1:15 Register taken. X introduces the 'do now' and gives a 5 minute time limit. B is doing some work on his iPad - looks like homework.

1:17 M asks for a charger from X. N asks X for clarification and he helps. B and D are talking about the task and commenting on other people' actions. Some of them think that they are being graded on this. D is working on his phone as he forgot his laptop, he says he is just as productive.

1:19 K checking on B. X asks if they need extra time for this task. D showing everyone his phone and work.

1:22 D asks if they have to submit the work, the answer is no so D asks 'Why are we doing it?' X asks for F to be distant or wear his mask. All are working on the task, D is complete, L and S working together on one laptop.

1:24 X is checking for answers. S answers, B asks for the slide with answers. F answers the next question from X. And then asks N for the next answer, N deflects because she doesn't know but M takes over and answers. I answers and is corrected by X.