

No. 47b Author: Danielle Rappan

Mirror, mirror, on the wall...

Classroom observation

At a glance

Objective:

- Observing other teachers
- Being observed

as part of a continuous learning experience

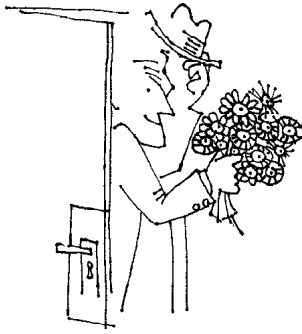
Material: Observation sheets

Observation may be general and cover a variety of issues, or it may focus on only one aspect of teaching. More and more teachers, teacher trainers and school directors have chosen observation as a tool to learn what is happening in the classroom. They are not interested in judging whether a lesson is good or bad, but rather offer the teacher a mirror of what is happening.

The aim of observing is to learn more about learning and teaching. A few examples:

- An observer may focus on a teacher's eye contact with his learners and discover that he is not looking at everyone. He could then decide that he, as a teacher, will make eye contact with all the learners.
- The observer could also note that the teacher deals with a specific aspect of teaching more easily or that they behave in a similar way. In both cases the observer develops an awareness of a behaviour found in the classroom and this awareness can generate appropriate changes.

We are making here no reference to assessment or inspection. An observation using a form, done on a collaborative basis must focus on facts and not impressions, and establishes objective data concerning what goes on in a classroom. Ideally before any observation takes place there should be a short discussion on the lesson aims, the learners, the context and any other relevant information for the observer. After the lesson the teacher should tell the observer about his job, his behaviour as a teacher and his priorities. Only then should they compare the observation notes and the teacher's feelings and explanations.



May I come in?

You need or you feel like observing a particular group of learners or a colleague. How are you going to approach the teacher?

What?	Why?
Why you want to observe his class	Teacher training Personal development New course Experienced teacher
When you wish to observe	Clarify your mutual needs
What you want to observe (level, instruction giving, non-verbal language, etc...)	Put the teacher's mind at ease Teacher can give observer valuable information
How long you want to stay (first 15 min., whole lesson, etc...)	Eliminate surprises and worries on the teacher's part and on the learners' part too
Whether you want to meet him after the lesson (where, when and how long)	Clarify purpose
Where you should sit during the observation	According to your observation focus (teacher or learners) Ensure there is an extra chair for you Put the teacher's mind at ease
Clarify your role (participant or observer)	Useful for teacher Useful for learners
What observation sheet you will use	Put the teacher's mind at ease, especially when he sees you writing

The observation sheet

You can of course choose together the focus of the observation and draw your own personal observation sheet. You can also adapt or use the following observation sheets.

Up to you! However the first part of the form could remain the same:

Class	Number of learners	Age of learners
Length of lesson	Level	Teacher

Draw a sketch of the classroom and the group. How are tables and chairs arranged? Where is any equipment lo-

cated? Where is the teacher most of the time? You can simplify your notes if you number the learners.

Observation sheet: Managing a class

Aims:

- To observe how a teacher manages with a class
- To assess who is speaking and what is the group's main language
- To try to feel the classroom atmosphere

What?	Comments
Material and equipment	
Aim of the lesson	
Teacher's talking time Vs. learners' talking time	
Learners' uses of L1&L2	
Learners' spontaneous participation	
Teacher's encouragement	
Correcting	
Other...	

A few questions...

1. Apart from the course book has the teacher used any material you don't usually use?
2. Were the aims of the lesson clearly formulated and communicated?
3. In your opinion the classroom atmosphere was due to
 - the aims and the contents of this lesson?
 - the teacher's personality?
 - the learners' personalities?
4. What have you learnt from this observation?

Observation sheet: Teaching listening

Aims:

- To observe listening activities
- To reflect on it

Listening might be the most disturbing skill for learners, especially the least visual ones. Speakers talk too fast with impossible accents on terrible background noises. From

the teacher's side the situation is sometimes hardly better: some are afraid of machines, some hate seeing their learners lost. However most course books offer listening exercises and some teachers can make a pleasant experience out of them, especially when they anticipate difficulties.

Kind of preparation	Time spent on preparation	Type of text, topic and length	No. of times passage heard

A few questions...

1. Has the teacher introduced the topic for each listening text?
2. Were these introductory tasks in the course book?
3. Were they varied?
4. In your opinion did they facilitate the listening text?
5. Do you use such preparation?
6. Did the teacher offer follow up activities?
7. What were they?
8. What have you learnt from this observation?

Observation sheet: Spoken errors

Aims:

- To observe who deals with spoken errors and how
- To reflect on it

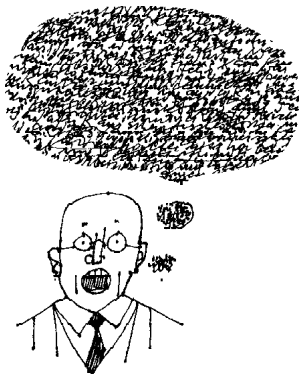
Errors are part of learning and thus considered as positive: a learner making an error is moving toward correctness but

hasn't reached his goal yet. Correcting mistakes can be a significant help in the learning process. The lesson will need to involve some speaking and the more you know the target language the more you will understand the meaning and relevance of the correction.

Error	Was it corrected?	How?	Remarks

A few questions...

1. What kind of errors were corrected (a grammatical error, a vocabulary error, a pronunciation error...)?
2. Would you have acted the same way?
3. Were there errors you thought should have been corrected but which were not?
4. Were there errors that were corrected but which, in your opinion, should not necessarily have been corrected?
5. What have you learnt from this observation?



Observation sheet: Eliciting

Aims:

- To observe eliciting techniques
- To reflect on it

There are some effective eliciting techniques. Which ones is the observed teacher using?

What is elicited	What teacher says	Learner's response	Teacher's reaction

A few questions...

1. Were the techniques used by the teacher varied?
2. Do they reflect the teacher's personality?
3. Which technique was the most effective one?
4. Do you use it?
5. Would you be ready to use it?
6. What have you learnt from this observation?

Bibliography:

WALLACE, M.J. (1998): *Action Research for Language Teachers*, Cambridge University Press.
 TANNER, R. / GREEN, C. (1998): *Tasks for Teacher Education*, Addison Wesley Longman.