

A developmental and evidence-based model of observation

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Discussion:

1. Do you observe teachers? If so, what method of observation do you use?
2. Do you ever observe classes, give suggestions, and then find that not much changes when you observe the same teacher again?
3. As a teacher, how have you been observed? Has it always been useful?

Why are teachers observed?

- quality control
- as part of a job interview
- requirements of external bodies
- troubleshooting
- evaluation for future promotion
- to give ideas, and help teachers improve
- to stimulate development and reflection

Which type of observation to use?

- What's the aim of the observation?
- Experience of the teacher?
- Openness to feedback of the teacher?
- Are you trying to solve a problem?
- Are you more of an expert than the teacher?
- How many times have you observed that teacher?

Evaluative Observation

The standard model

- A pre-observation meeting?
- Priorities set by the teacher?
- Observer notes down what happens, and gives opinions on the teaching
- Teacher goes away and reflects
- Feedback

Comments I have made in observations

'..that was a really good warmer, but maybe a bit too long...'

'....if I were you, I'd up the pace a bit...'

'.....really good eliciting...perhaps you could nominate a bit more as well...'

'.....one tip is to pair a stronger student with a weaker one when you're checking answers..'

The feedback session:

1. The observer asks the teacher to say how it went.
2. Teacher says a few vague things while waiting for the verdict.
3. The observer gives teacher their opinion about good points, and points to work on.
4. The teacher nods in agreement, even if inside they don't agree.
5. The teacher is politely told to implement the suggestions made by the observer.
6. Follow-up observation?

Pros and Cons?

- What are the benefits of this type of observation?
- Are there any drawbacks?

Benefits

- If the observer is an expert, the teacher gets the benefit of their expertise (e.g. IELTS)
- Teacher gets suggestions
- Teacher has feedback
- Quality control for the school
- Fair to judge when pay/jobs at stake
- Some teachers like this kind of observation

Issues

- It's inevitably subjective
- The observer decides what to look for
- What if the observer and teacher disagree?
- Teaching to the observer's style

“When I first came to LSI and I knew you were going to observe me, I asked around the staffroom to find out what you liked, and they all said ‘collocations’, so I did a lesson full of collocations. You liked it, and so you left me alone. When observer X was due to watch me, I know he likes drilling, which I don’t really do, but I did loads of drilling, and he was happy.”

- Who knows more about the class?
- It's all about the result, not developing as a teacher
- Fear of 'failing'. A normal class?
- Experienced teachers?
- Same old observation suggestions
- Credibility of inexperienced observers?

Is there an
alternative way of
observing?

A developmental model of observation

How does it work?

Overview

- meet teacher in advance, and set focus together
- record and collect data about the class
- write open questions about each stage
- non-judgemental
- teacher talks through the lesson
- a meeting of equals

Step 1

The pre-observation meeting

- Meet the day before
- Set time aside
- Ask about the class
- Ask the teacher to set areas to focus on in the observation
- List of possible priorities

Possible areas for observation focus

- Pace: too fast/too slow?
- Balance of TTT/STT
- Clarity of instructions
- Grading of language in general
- Concept questions
- Board work
- Engagement of the students during the lesson
- Reactions to emerging language
- Error correction
- Contextualisation of language
- Any others?

Recording the areas chosen by the teacher

1. Write questions about the priorities on a piece of paper.
2. Have the sheet of paper in front of you during the observation, and make notes about what happens.
3. Give the questions to the teacher afterwards for reflection on these points
4. Discuss in the post-observation meeting

Observation Focus Areas

1. Were the instructions clear?
2. Did my concept questions work?
3. How was the board work?
4. What techniques were used for error correction?

Step 2

The in-class observation

Recording observable data

- Evidence based
- Non-threatening
- Helps teacher see what's going on
- Present to the teacher afterwards

What data can you record?

- Timings of each stage
- Balance of T-S/S-S/working individually
- What the teacher does (e.g. eliciting/correcting)
- Nomination/open questions
- How much each student speaks
- Authentic questions
- Praise

How do you do it?

1. Make a Seating Chart

- Record how often the teacher nominates each student
- Record each time the student contributes unprompted

Teacher

Student 1

Student 9

Student 2

Student 8

Student 3

Student 7

St. 4

St. 5

St. 6

You get something like this.....

Student	Nominated by T	Contribution from S
1	4	11
2	0	17
3	1	0
4	9	9
5	0	0
6	3	8
7	11	21
8	2	19
9	1	1

2. Record what the teacher does

- Each time the teacher speaks, tally what they're doing.
- Use a pre-made table
- Add your own categories if you like

This is the kind of thing you use...

Type of intervention	Number of times
Eliciting	
Concept Questions	
Giving answers	
Explaining things	
Corrections	
Instructions	
Praise	
Real questions	
Drilling pronunciation	

What would strike you about this lesson?

Type of intervention	Number of times
Eliciting	12
Concept Questions	1
Giving answers	17
Explaining things	20
Corrections	3
Instructions	7
Praise	1
Real questions	1
Drilling pronunciation	0

And this one?

Type of intervention	Number of times
Eliciting	27
Concept Questions	17
Giving answers	10
Explaining things	6
Corrections	0
Instructions	8
Praise	27
Real questions	33
Drilling pronunciation	0

3. Record balance between nomination and open questions

Nominations:	2
Open questions to the whole class:	44

What does the data show?

- balance of teacher-centered and student-centered activities
- who gets nominated and how often
- how often the teacher elicits/corrects, etc
- are some stages too long/short?
- which students participate more than others
- things the teacher doesn't do

Write up the data after the lesson

- A template chart
- Easy to do
- Quick once you get used to it
- Very revealing when you write it up

Step 3

Record what happens in the lesson

- Record the stages and interaction
- Don't write any judgement
- Easier than writing opinions
- Write open, neutral questions

For example...

Timings	Procedure	Interaction	Notes
3.22	Pictures of funerals in different countries	S-S	Tell me about this stage
3.30	Exchange ideas	T-class	Did you plan who to ask, or just do it spontaneously?
3.35	Students write a paragraph about typical funerals	Individual	Why did you choose to do writing at this point?
3.50	Students swap paragraphs and then discuss	S-S	How did this go?

Step 4

After the observation

Reflection sheet

- Give the teacher a self-reflection sheet to make notes on
- Include the priorities set before the class

Observation Reflection

1. Did you feel your instructions were clear?
2. Did you feel your concept questions worked?
3. How was your board work?
4. What techniques were used for error correction, and were they successful?
5. What do you feel went well in the lesson?
6. If you were to do the lesson again, is there anything you would change?
7. Do you want any suggestions about any part of the lesson?

Step 5

Post-lesson discussion

- Talk through the observation focus areas
- Talk about the data
- Talk the lesson through stage-by-stage

Talk about the observation focus areas

For example: teacher A asked me about these four things:

1. Were the instructions clear?
2. Did my concept questions work?
3. How was the board work?
4. What techniques were used for error correction?

2. Discuss the data

'What strikes you about the numbers?'

- Makes patterns clear
- Evidence rather than opinion
- Allows teacher to explain certain things as well (e.g. high TTT isn't always bad)

3. Discuss the lesson stage-by-stage

- Use the questions/comments on the feedback form as a basis for discussion
- Don't give an opinion – allow the teacher to talk it through
- Respond honestly if the teacher asks for your opinion/advice
- Chip in with alternatives if appropriate
- Do give praise – everyone likes it!

Typical Question Types for discussion

- Tell me about X
- How did stage X go?
- Do you always do it this way, or does it depend?
- What's the thinking behind X?
- Did you plan X in advance, or was it spontaneous?
- I'm really interested in why you did X – could you tell me about it

For example.....

Stage 1: Revision

“Tell me about this stage – it was 3 minutes. Do you normally do this type of revision for this long, or does it vary?”

Stage 2: Students have a discussion

“Did you plan the vocabulary that you taught here in advance, or was it what came up? Or a bit of both?”

Stage 3: Idioms

“What was your thinking behind the choice of these particular idioms for this lesson?”

What do you think so far?

Can you see any potential
problems?

Issues

1. How does the teacher get input?
2. Isn't it time-consuming?
3. What if the teacher wants reassurance and praise?
4. What if the teacher thinks the lesson was great, and you don't?
5. Keeping a record of the discussion?

1. How does the teacher get input?

- Tell them to ask for advice/suggestions at any point
- Discussion tends to leads to sharing of ideas
- About confirmation as well as input
- *“If you want to know the things I liked about it, ask me at the end”*

2. Isn't it time-consuming?

- Observing in class much easier
- Tally sheets are quick when you get used to them
- Does take a bit more time to write up and talk through – but you're worth it!

3. What if the teacher wants reassurance and praise?

- Give it to them!
- Focus on positives and tell them
- If they ask for your opinion, give it

4. What if the teacher thinks the lesson was great, and you don't?

- So be it!
- Issues will come up in discussion
- Asking a T to explain the thinking behind a stage often gets to the point
- Does it really matter? Evaluation is for another day

5. Keeping a record of the discussion?

- Summarise at the end of the discussion
- Mutually agree areas for development, and write them on the bottom of the observation sheet:

‘Areas discussed and action plan for further development’

Variations

- Skip the data recording part
- Video the lesson, and make notes afterwards
- Give the teacher a copy of your notes about what happened in advance of the post-lesson discussion

Why do I like it?

1. If you choose the focus areas yourself, it's more likely you'll implement change.
2. Ask for suggestions you actually want
3. Much more relaxed atmosphere, in and out of class.
4. More likely to give a 'normal' class
5. Observer gets access to thinking process of teacher
6. Development at $i + 1$

7. T much more likely to open up in feedback
8. Creates a feeling of equality
9. Shows academic managers genuinely value teachers' development
10. Lots of interesting insights
11. Positive feedback from almost everyone who has tried it

Views of teachers who've tried it

“I thought it was interesting because you get hard data. It’s more concrete than usual. Normally, observations can be subjective, but this isn’t. It was surprising, the data told me a few things that I didn’t realise...”

Views of teachers who've tried it

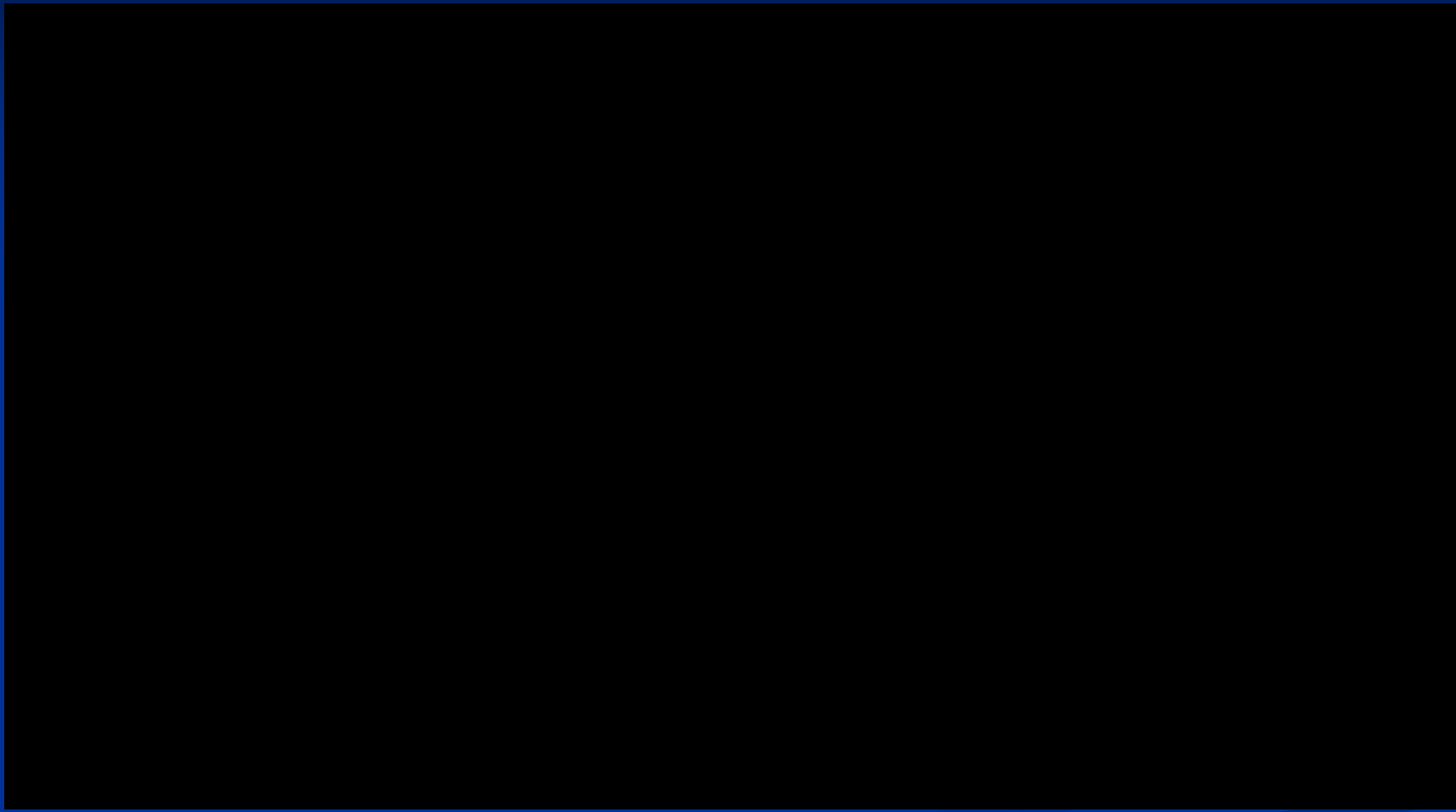
“If you're open to criticism or constructive feedback a normal observation is ok, but if you're a bit insecure about your teaching, it's not very comfortable...and sometimes I disagree with the observer, but he's in a superior position, so I don't say anything, but here I can...”

Views of teachers who've tried it

“Being asked to comment for myself I liked, it gave me credit for my intelligence, for my ability to reflect and understand what the data means, and how the lesson went. The traditional way perpetuates a notion that there is good and bad teaching, but what is the perfect lesson? It’s wholly subjective...”

Views of teachers who've tried it

“This style of observation means that you have to think more – you have to decide for yourself whether something you did was good or bad. It takes much longer, but it’s really nice to be able to discuss my class in more detail, and even explain my philosophy of teaching. In a sense, the observer gets double the input by listening to the teacher explaining their train of thought – the observer gets to not only see the class, but to understand the thinking behind it”



1. Do you think it's worth trying out?

2. Any suggestions for alterations or improvements?

References

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