



## CLASSROOM OBSERVATION- A POWERFUL TOOL FOR CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT (CPD)

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**Abstract.** *For making teaching and learning more visible, classroom observation plays a central role. It provides teachers with constructive critical feedback in order to improve their classroom management and instructional techniques. For teachers it is important to observe the interaction between teacher-learner within the classroom because it can determine the learning opportunities that students get. Not only that, classroom observation encourages colleagues to collaborate to improve teacher practice and student learning. Feedback from classroom observations is an effective way for providing teachers with the information they need about their classroom behavior, and it can help them in their continuous professional development (CPD). This paper is based upon a practical approach to professional development among teachers through classroom observation. Since we, as teachers, are not born with innate teaching abilities, in fact, we learn and develop gradually with the help of some practical approaches, and classroom observation is a well-known powerful practical approach in primary and higher education to help teachers improve their teaching quality. This article mainly highlights the importance of classroom observation and its guidelines adapted from Observing Classes-CETaL. Further, it emphasizes the limitations of classroom observation, and suggests the ways to carry it out effectively based upon Observing Classes CETaL Model.*

**Key Words:** Classroom Observation, Constructive Feedback, Instructor Growth, Professional Development, Guidelines

### INTRODUCTION

Teaching is lifelong learning. One of the joys of teaching is the opportunity to explore new ideas and new ways of teaching as we try to meet the needs of an ever-changing group of learners<sup>1</sup>. But the bitter truth is that teachers are not perfect though they have good intentions and try their best to do the jobs that they can, they make

mistakes. It is never too late to change the way we, as teachers, teach in the classroom. We must honestly look at our own teaching for areas in which we may be responding less than ideally. We can ask a friend, colleague and fellow teacher to point out areas in our teaching in which we need to grow and develop. In this context comes the necessity of classroom observation or peer observation.

To the EFL/ESL teachers, classroom observation is not a new phenomenon, but how often do the teachers welcome classroom observation or peer observation? Generally speaking, classroom observations are typically meant to improve instructional quality and teaching effectiveness. It creates an opportunity to see real- life teachers in real life teaching situations. This article is going to shed some lights on the following points:

1. Necessity of classroom observation
2. Guidelines for classroom observation
3. Limitations of classroom observation and
4. Suggestions for carrying out an effective classroom observation

The most effective professional development begins with a teacher's concerns for his/her classroom. Teachers are forever reflecting and making decisions, so classroom observation can make teachers reflect on their own teaching practices. Some experts have observed that ' teachers have little experience collecting and presenting evidence about their teaching', so observations of classroom behavior are meant for reviewing the teaching process and its possible relationship to learning. The focus is generally on verbal and non-verbal behaviors of both the teachers and the learners in the classroom.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Classroom observation describes the practice of sitting in another teacher's class to observe, learn and reflect. Classroom observation is also defined as a method of evaluating and recording specific information about what is going on within a classroom.' Classroom observation often helps expose teachers to new methods of teaching that might not have occurred to them beforehand. Therefore, observation is important at every stage of a teacher's career. Besides, many teachers, even experienced ones, are not always aware of the nature of their interactions with individual students. One of the most important purposes of classroom observation is to improve teachers'

classroom instruction. Through feedback, teachers can become aware of how their classroom functions and bring about changes they want. Teachers also understand their own strengths and weaknesses, and try to improve their instruction.

## **METHODOLOGY**

One of the main challenges for observation is to know what to look for. Some teacher education programs offer checklists for observation but it is often difficult to find specific checklists for subject areas, such as second language teaching. 'The process of observation and evaluation require a very high degree of professional ethics and objectivity and training in observational and analytical skills'. However, some specific things that one can look for observing include the following:

- Does the teacher have a Lesson Plan?
- How does the teacher open class? What tone does this set?
- What interaction or relationship does the teacher establish with the students? How does this affect the learning environment or opportunities for learning?
- Are students engaged? At what level and in what ways? Is the engagement sustained?
- How has the teacher prepared for this learning occasion? What tools are used, towards what end, and does the teacher apply them effectively? Note: Tools include humor, visuals, small group work, writing exercises, guided class discussion, quizzes, clear lecture, etc.
- How does the teacher structure an activity? Are the instructions given in English or the learners' L1?
- How does the teacher know if class is going "as planned"? Are there clues to how the teacher maintains or adjusts this course when unexpected events happen?
- How does the teacher close class? How does this affect what students think or learn? What evidence shows that students clearly understand the content and context for what is learned by the end of class?
- Overall, what does the class tell you about the teacher's philosophy and educational goals?

### **Limitations of classroom observation**

There are some criticisms and cautions related to the use of observation techniques. Most of the time, it is found that the observers are not often provided with training because of the lack of institutional support, time and interest. The following are the drawbacks of classroom observation:

1. Observers generally focus on isolated behaviors, without concern for the preceding and subsequent behaviors that they feel provide the context and meaning of the behavior. It's a risky thing to have your professional practice scrutinized by colleagues, ' said Sparks.
2. Observer effects may occur because teachers and students are aware that their behaviors are being observed. The presence of an observer may change teacher or student behaviors.
3. Teacher anxiety or teachers performing less well than usual can interfere with the drawing of valid inferences about what normally occurs in the classroom. On the other hand, there is also some evidence that indicates that teachers' instruction may be slightly better than usual when they are being observed. That is, teachers have also been known to dramatically alter their instruction when observers are present in the classroom.
4. The misuse of classroom observation data: Classroom observations can be very useful as a formative evaluation procedure, but should not be used to provide summative decisions, such as those regarding a teacher's dismissal or rehiring. Similarly, classroom observations should not be tied to summative decisions like salary increases.

Although classroom observations have criticisms and limitations, it will only benefit teachers and their students in the end.

### **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

There is no single approach to teacher observation. It is most successful when the teacher and observer work together and reflect on the teaching behavior. Trained and experienced faculty are generally competent in observation techniques or in observing and offering feedback to faculty<sup>1</sup>. Institutes must train and prepare the reviewers in a

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<sup>1</sup> Centra, J. (1993). *Reflective faulty evaluation*. San Francisco: Jossey-bass.

department peer review program by allowing them to practice the reviewing skills they will need, discuss the criteria they should apply, and review the forms of checklist they will use.

Training or 'norming' of reviewers is an essential step to ensure that all reviewers understand the types of information they should gather and the criteria they should use to evaluate that information. Providing peer reviewers with a common understanding of the process and identical standards to apply can also increase the validity reliability of reviews.

To train reviewers, you may want to schedule a training session in which participants:

1. Get an overview of the review
2. View a videotaped class session and then discuss what to attend to in a class observation
3. Review as a group some examples of course materials, to arrive at shared standards for evaluating them
4. Review any checklists or forms to be used in evaluating course materials or conducting class observations.
5. Discuss how to provide useful, practical feedback to instructors. There must be a guideline for pre-observation meeting, and a post observation meeting. The following pre- observation questions could be asked to the teacher whose class is to be observed:

1. How can I be of help to you?
2. What specifically do you wish me to look for and know?
3. Is there a particular student you would like me to watch?
4. What are your objectives and expectations for the lesson?
5. How long would you like me to observe?
6. When can we get together after the lesson? Post Observation Questions
  1. How do you think the lesson went?
  2. Can you recall what the students were doing that made you feel this way?
  3. What do you remember about what you did or the strategies you used?
  4. How does this compare with what you expected would happen?

## Classroom Observation- A Powerful Tool For Continuous Professional Development (CPD)

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5 What could be some reasons it happened this way?

6. Would you like me to share what I observed?

Several guidelines should be followed to ensure that the classroom evidence is valid.

- First, individual classes may not be representative. If classes vary in style, a single observation will fail to capture a broad range of teaching skills. Good sampling technique should be followed here. It is good to combine information from at least three classes. Teachers should invite multiple observations to demonstrate the range of their skills.
- Individual evaluators (especially if not skilled at classroom observation) bring perspectives that bias their observations, favoring teachers with styles similar to their own. Two or three observers may be appropriate for observing the same class or similar classes (especially where doubts or controversy may exist).
- Individual courses may not be representative--or, again, represent the range of teaching skills (from large lecture courses to graduate seminars). Again, multiple views and balance is important.
- Developing a departmental policy regarding whether the date of a class observation should be known in advance to the instructor being reviewed or whether it can be unannounced. Unannounced observations may seem desirable because they can show an instructor's typical teaching style, and they can identify instructors who are unprepared for class. However, they have some important disadvantages.

### CONCLUSION

Teaching is the heart of what educational institutions are for and as professionals we should always be looking to make improvements to what we do. Teachers are responsible for their own growth and development, and classroom observation helps to improve the quality of education that your institutions offer. Some scholars argue that the definition and measurement of effective teaching are ambiguous and subjective. Others believe that once goals, expectations and criteria are clearly identified and established, the evaluation of effective teaching is possible.

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