

PEER OBSERVATION SCHEME FOR TEACHER SELF-DEVELOPMENT

FINAL REPORT

2017-2018

Summary of scheme experience

Aims. At the beginning of the school year we decided to carry out a peer observation scheme for developmental purposes. The general aim of the project was to foster ‘a process of active self-development through reflection, and self-awareness’ (Cosh, 1999), while the specific aims were as follows (Farrell, 2007):

- to collect information about teaching, (language) learning and classroom practices
- to examine classroom events in details
- to have a chance to see how other teachers teach and learn from other teachers
- to have an opportunity to get feedback on one’s teaching.

Principles. All observation activities were developmental rather than evaluative in nature, and they were the result of a collaborative effort.

Allocated time: The scheme was discussed with the headmaster who agreed on the proposed 16-hour schedule. A detailed timetable is attached to this report.

Planning. We spent the preliminary stages of the project conducting a literature review, focusing in particular on scholars who pioneered the idea of non-evaluative peer observation carried out as a developmental activity (see references). We then identified the aims of the project and the classes involved, and arranged a schedule for the observations. The choice of classes was dictated by practical reasons, *in primis* availability of each teacher, so as to avoid the need for them to be substituted from their own classes. These classes identified were IV A, IV B, IV C and V B.

Being our first experience of this kind, we decided not to concentrate on specific aspects of our teaching practice but to simply gather information about the lesson which otherwise a teacher might not be able to collect. However, it was agreed to observe literature, not language classes because we wanted to learn from each other effective teaching strategies in this specific area. We found useful guidelines to implement our peer observation scheme in Cosh (1999) and Richards et al. (2005).

Procedures. After weighing the pros and cons of several observation tools, including written narratives and checklists, we decided to use field notes as a means to record information about the

IstitutodelleArti

“A. Vittoria” - Trento

observation, mainly owing to its flexibility.

Each teacher took turns at teaching and observing. Due to time constraints, no pre-observation sessions were planned, but each teacher received lesson materials beforehand, while the overall teachers' approaches to teaching literature, the kind of students in the class, and any problems expected were discussed during the preliminary phase.

Immediately after each observation session, a meeting was planned with the observer reporting on the information collected, which were discussed with the teacher. During these meetings great attention was paid to use objective and precise language and avoid any form of evaluation (Richards et al., 2005). At the same time, for the observation to be more effective, it was decided to also avoid mutual back-patting and to trigger instances of challenging discussion when needed. To this aim, we set up a critical friendship dyad (see Farrell, 2007, for details on critical friendships) meant to encourage and extend reflection and thinking.

Outcome and insights.

We both agreed on the positive outcome of this project. Engaging in classroom peer observation has given us the opportunity to 'construct, reconstruct, and revise our own teaching' (Fanselow, 1998). By revealing detailed information about our teaching, particularly in terms of teaching strategies, time management, students' engagement and performance, it made us both more aware and thoughtful about our own practice, thus improving our ability to reflect on action and in action. Over time, we noticed tangible improvements at various levels, including materials preparation, time-efficiency, quality of classroom interaction, quality of classroom language, teaching efficiency. What is more, peer observation proved to be an excellent means not only to share ideas but also to build collegiality.

For these reasons, we believe that peer observation is worth implementing in our school by teachers who wish to engage in self-development.

REFERENCES:

Cosh, J. (1999). Peer observation: a reflective model. *ELT Journal*, 53(1), 22-27.

Fanselow, J.F. (1998). "Let's See": Contrasting Conversations about Teaching. *TESOL Quarterly*, 22(1), 113-130.

Farrell, T.S.C. (2007). *Reflective Language Teaching. From Research to Practice*. London: Continuum.

Hockley, A. (2014). Classroom Observations – Moving from Evaluation to Development. *SPELT Quarterly*, 29(3), 2-10.

Richards, J.C. and Farrell, T.S.C. (2005). *Professional Development for Language Teachers*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

IstitutodelleArti

“A. Vittoria” - Trento

ANNEX

TIMETABLE OF ACTIVITIES

PERIOD	ACTIVITY	TIME SPENT
September / October 2018	Literature Review; Identification of aims; Draft planning	3 hours
January 9th 2018 8.50-9.40 am 9.40- 10.25am 10.40-11.00 am	First observation: Class 4A: Teacher A observes Teacher B Class 4B: Teacher B observes Teacher A Feedback	3 hours
January 11th 2018 10.40- 11.30 am	Second observation: Class 4C: Teacher B observes Teacher A	1 hour
January 13th, 2018 10.40- 11.30 am 11.30-12.30 am	Third observation: Class 5B: Teacher A observes Teacher B Feedback on second and third observations	2 hours
January 16th 2018 8.50-9.40 am 9.40- 10.25am 10.40-11.00 am	Fourth observation: Class 4A: Teacher A observes Teacher B Class 4B: Teacher B observes Teacher A Feedback	3 hours
January 18th 2018 10.40- 11.30 am	Fifth observation: Class 4C: Teacher B observes Teacher A	1 hour
February 13th, 2018 10.40- 11.30 am 11.30-13.30 am	Sixth observation: Class 5B: Teacher A observes Teacher B Feedback on fifth and sixth observations; feedback on the whole Observation experience	3 hours
		TOTAL: 16 HOURS