


CONDUCTING A CLASSROOM OBSERVATION

RESOURCES

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ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

This resource is designed to help you with organising and conducting a series of classroom observations. It draws on ideas from O’Leary (2020), as well as my experience teaching in a number of university-based courses where teachers were required to engage in classroom observations for the purposes of their professional development. This means that, for our purposes here, classroom observation is primarily viewed as a collaborative activity, among peers, with a view to supporting professional growth (as opposed to, e.g., assessment of teacher effectiveness or educational research).

This resource consists of five parts, as follows:

1. The classroom observation framework and focusing questions
2. Advice on organising an introductory meeting
3. A classroom observation planner
4. A template for field notes
5. A template for post-observation reflection

This resource has been developed for use, primarily, by teachers in a short-term teaching placement. Some examples of such placements include classroom visits as part of coursework in professional development programmes, teacher exchanges, or induction to a new school. However, it can be readily modified for use in collaborative professional development, e.g., in projects where small groups of teachers visit each other’s classrooms and collaboratively reflect on what they have observed. Parts of the resource could also be used, with appropriate adjustment, to facilitate observation of video-recorded lessons. and as a frame for scaffolding reflection on ones’ own professional practice.

This resource is a work in progress. Feedback is welcome, and it can be addressed to the author (achilleas [at] kostoulas [dot] com). The material is shared under a **Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial** license (**CC BY-NC**). This means that you are welcome to use this resource for non-commercial projects, provided attribution is given to the materials creator, Dr Achilleas Kostoulas (www.achilleaskostoulas.com). You are also free to adapt the materials for your own (non-commercial) use, provided that any changes are clearly marked as such in derivative works.

THE CLASSROOM OBSERVATION FRAMEWORK

This framework has been designed to help you familiarise yourself with a new teaching and learning context. Some situations where it might be useful include orientation (when you are new at a school), or temporary teaching placements (e.g., as part of a practicum).

The structure of the framework draws loosely on the first chapters of Nation and Macalister (2010), but it has been modified in the following ways:

- There is additional emphasis on identifying what learners can do (their strengths). This helps to guide users of the framework away from deficit conceptualisations of the learners.
- There is an explicit move away from methods-based teaching towards post-method pedagogy (Kumaravadivelu, 2001). This brings the framework in line with more recent theoretical work and practice in language education.
- There is also an explicit move towards critical pedagogy. This is particularly relevant when working with vulnerable populations.
- The section on 'needs' has been significantly expanded. This helps users of the framework to reflect on various ways a syllabus might be structured (see also Graves, 2000), and it provides more guidance to less experienced teachers.
- The questions that Nation and Macalister (2010) use to exemplify their model have been replaced with focusing questions that are better suited to short-term teaching placements, as opposed to large-scale curriculum design.

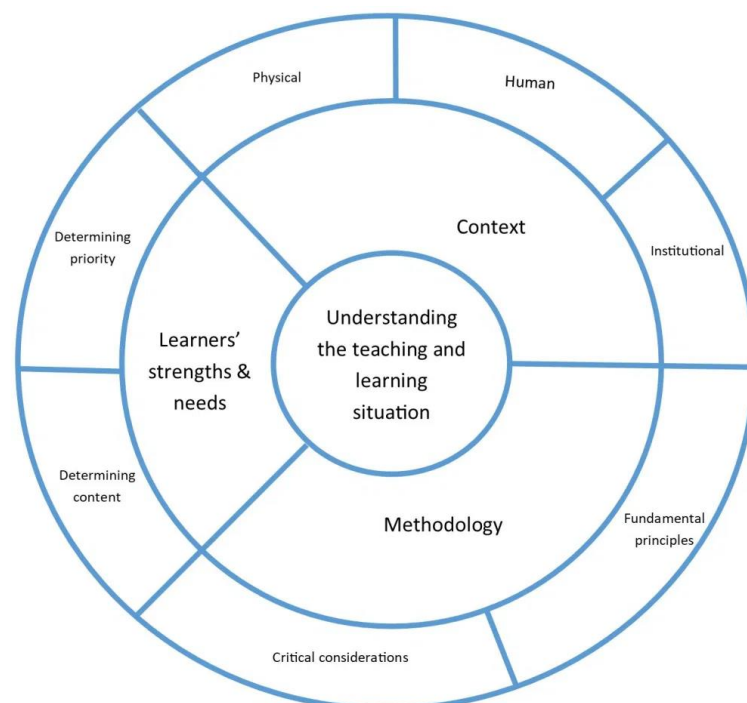


FIGURE 1 THE CLASSROOM OBSERVATION FRAMEWORK

OVERVIEW

This framework is intended to assist you in generating an understanding of a teaching and learning situation. As shown in Figure 1, this situation is conceptualised as a whole, consisting of three connected intellectual activities. The first one involves understanding the context where teaching and learning takes place. A second one is about understanding the learners' strengths and needs. The third one involves understanding the methodological choices that underpin teaching and learning in the setting. These are presented in more detail in the following sections.

UNDERSTANDING THE LEARNING CONTEXT

One way to understand the new language situation is as a setting with three aspects, the **physical**, the **institutional**, and the **human**.

PHYSICAL ASPECTS OF THE CONTEXT

The physical aspects of the learning setting refer to the space, time, and resources that are available for learning. The physical aspects of the classroom constrain teaching and learning activity, and at the same time they create teaching and learning opportunities (or affordances). For example, a classroom where desks are placed in rows facing the board makes group-work harder, and therefore constrains activity to teacher-fronted instruction. Similarly, having access to a coursebook creates affordances for teaching according to the syllabus of the coursebook designers.

Some focussing questions that can help us to understand the physical aspects of the classroom include the following:

- What is the classroom/learning space like?
- What kinds of activities are possible / hard to implement? Why?
- What aspects of the learning space can change?
- What resources are learners expected to provide on their own?
- What resources are provided to the learners?
- What resources are teachers expected to bring with them?
- What resources are available in the classroom/learning space?
- What resources are available in the vicinity of the classroom/learning space?
- Who can use these resources? If permission/authorisation is required, what is the process of obtaining one?

INSTITUTIONAL ASPECTS OF THE CONTEXT

The institutional aspects of the learning setting refer to the rules, norms, and expectations associated with teaching and learning in this classroom. The institutional aspect regulates the interactions of teachers and learners. Some examples of such considerations include the rules of the school about tardiness, placement and exit tests that learners are expected to sit, classroom routines such as greeting each other or taking turns speaking.

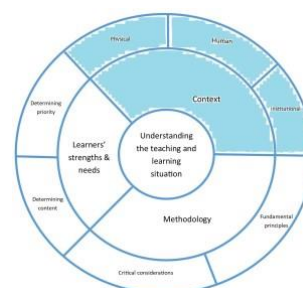


FIGURE 2 FOCUS ON CONTEXT

Some focussing questions that can help us to understand the institutional aspects of the context include the following:

- What are the rules of the school / organisation?
- What are the established norms of this learning group?
- Do learners tend to arrive late or leave early?
- How regular is attendance?
- Who (if anyone) is responsible for recording attendance?
- What are the aims of the syllabus for this learning group?
- Are there any immediate goals to be met (e.g., assessment)?
- How often does the class/learning group meet? For how long?

HUMAN ASPECTS OF THE CONTEXT

The human aspect of the learning setting refers to the diverse types of linguistic and cultural capital that people bring to class, their feelings and preferences, and the interpersonal dynamics that develop among them. I was deliberately vague when using the term 'people': I believe that this should also include the teacher and the observer, especially if one is doing participant-observation; however, in the context of observing a class in advance of teaching, the focus is on the learners.

Some questions that can help us to better understand the human aspects of a learning setting include the following:

- How old are the learners?
- What is the gender distribution like?
- What is their origin and cultural background?
- What is their academic background / literacy level?
- How proficient are they in the target language?
- What linguistic skills can they draw upon from other languages they know?
- What language can they fall back to if they face difficulties in the target language?
- Are there any interpersonal issues you need to be aware of?
- What are the classroom dynamics like?

UNDERSTANDING THE LEARNERS' STRENGTHS AND NEEDS

Understanding the learners' needs and strengths involves determining two things: the **content of the strengths and needs**, which tells us what the learners are confident with and what must be taught, and the **type of need** which determines their relative priority.

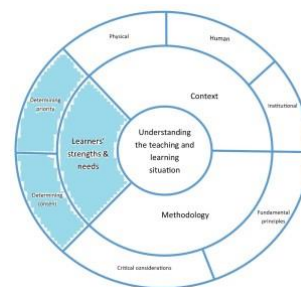


FIGURE 3 FOCUS ON STRENGTHS & NEEDS

OBSERVING A CLASSROOM TO DETERMINE LEARNING CONTENT

Depending on our perspective, and on factors such as the school's curriculum and the syllabus of the class, we can conceptualise the content of the learners' strengths and needs in various ways. It is therefore important to find which frames of reference are more helpful for understanding how their classroom works, and use the focusing questions to identify the learners' strengths and needs.

Communicative perspective If we take a communicative perspective (Canale & Swain, 1980), strengths and needs are defined as a function of how effectively, appropriately, and confidently learners can communicate. Some of the things we need to find out are:

- To what extent can learners solve communication problems? What strategies do they deploy? (strategic competence)
- To what extent can learners produce coherent and cohesive speech / text? What, if any, amount of preparation / scaffolding do they need? (discourse competence)
- How aware are learners of communication norms for the setting, role, type of interaction? To what extent can learners produce speech / text that is appropriate to the context? (sociolinguistic awareness & competence)
- To what extent can learners produce speech / text that is grammatically accurate? To what extent do mistakes impede communication? (grammatical competence)

Skills perspective If we adopt a skills perspective, we will need to determine how well learners can cope with listening, speaking, reading, and writing tasks. Some questions that can help us understand this are the following:

- What types of texts do the learners engage with in class?
- What types of texts do the learners engage with outside class?
- How fluent are the learners?
- How accurate is their output?
- How confident do they appear?
- How balanced is their oral and written proficiency?
- How balanced are their receptive and productive skills?

Forms perspective If we adopt a form-focussed perspective, we need to determine the extent to which the learners can use aspects of the language system in order to communicate with accuracy. Some questions that we can use to focus our observation are:

- How comprehensible is the learners' pronunciation? In what ways is it different from that of native speakers? Are there any sounds or sound patterns that learners' have difficulty with? (*phonology*)
- What can the learners already do with writing? Are the learners facing any challenges (e.g., the alphabet, spelling difficult words)? (*orthography*)
- What aspects of grammar are the learners already familiar with? Are they facing any difficulties with using the most appropriate form of the words they need? (*morphology*)
- What aspects of syntax have already been taught? Are the learners facing challenges with word order? (*syntax*)
- How familiar are the learners with the conventions of various text genres with which they are engaging? (*discourse*)

Topics perspective If we adopt a topics-oriented perspective, we need to find out what topics and themes with which the learners can confidently work, and what topics they still find challenging. Some focussing questions include the following:

- What themes and topics do the learners engage with / have the learners engaged with in class?
- What themes and topics seem most relevant to their everyday life?
- What themes and topics are likely to appeal to them?
- Are there any themes and topics that are likely to offend sensitivities?
- Are there any themes and topics that will generate tension among learners or trigger emotional responses?

OBSERVING A CLASSROOM TO DETERMINING LEARNING PRIORITIES

Nation and Macalister (2010: 24-36) distinguish between three types of needs that drive learning: necessities, lacks and wants. This typology helps users of the classroom observation framework to prioritise goals and teaching opportunities.

Necessities These are future-oriented, urgent needs, usually posed by the institutional context. For example, a learner may have to pass a language examination in order to get a job or get residence rights.

Lacks These urgent needs refer to skills or knowledge that learners have not acquired, and which hinder their academic progress or their ability to live out their lives. For instance, a learner might lack the ability to engage with written texts with fluency and confidence.

Wants These non-urgent (but not unimportant!) needs refer to the personal preferences of the learners.

UNDERSTANDING METHODOLOGICAL CHOICES

There are many ways to think about the methodological choices that underpin a language lesson. One of them is to try to classify the lesson in one of several pre-defined lessons: e.g., we could say that the lessons in the class are informed by communicative methods, or that they follow task-based pedagogy, or that they conform to grammar-translation methodology. I find this approach somewhat limited, because these labels are rather abstract, and because in my experience few teachers ever stick rigidly to a particular methodological paradigm.

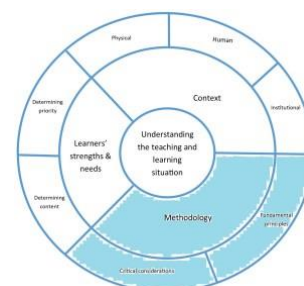


FIGURE 4 FOCUS ON METHODS

USING CLASSROOM OBSERVATION TO THINK ABOUT METHODOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES

An alternative approach is to try to tease out, from the language activities that are used in the class, what the fundamental methodological principles are, which underpin the lesson. The aim of this activity is not to record methodological practices, but rather to understand the principles and rationales guiding them. The guiding questions in this section draw on Kumaravadivelu's (2001) postmethod framework to guide my questions, although I would encourage you to read these as examples only, and to adapt these to your own needs.

- What does the teacher do to **maximise learning opportunities**?
- In what ways does **negotiated interaction** take place in the class?
- What attempts are made to promote the learners' **autonomy**?
- In what ways does the teacher try to foster **language awareness**?
- How does the teacher / do the materials **contextualise linguistic input**?
- In what ways are **language skills practiced** in class?
- How is the **social relevance** of the lesson ensured?
- In what ways does the lesson build the participants' (learners' AND teacher's!) **cultural consciousness**?

ADDING A CRITICAL DIMENSION TO THE CLASSROOM OBSERVATION

A special consideration, when working with learners who belong to vulnerable populations, is to ensure that our pedagogical choices help to empower them. For this reason, we want participants to have a heightened sensitivity to aspects of critical pedagogy, i.e., teaching that aims to improve the conditions of subaltern populations. Some focussing questions that can help users of the classroom observation framework to think about these pedagogical aspects are the following:

- Does teaching and learning **discourage essentialism**? How does the teacher/do the materials ensure that learners are not reduced to stereotypes?
- Does teaching and learning **highlight individual identities**? In what ways does the teaching methodology help learners to showcase their hybrid identities?
- Is teaching and learning **participatory and collaborative**? To what extent and in what ways do the methodological choices encourage shared decision-making?

- Is teaching and learning **locally situated and socially mediated**? To what extent has the particularity of the context been taken into account in the way the class functions? What evidence can we find of this?
- Is teaching and learning **transformative**? To what extent and in what ways do the learning activities encourage learners to think about their status quo? What attempts are made to prompt social change?

INTRODUCTORY MEETING

The first contact you will make with the school that will host your observation is the introductory meeting(s). This is an opportunity for you to learn about the school and for the school to learn about you. This is also the opportunity to make sure that both you and the school have similar expectations regarding your classroom observation. Another purpose of this meeting is to address any outstanding ethical and administrative issues connected to your classroom observation. Finally, this is a chance to familiarise yourself with the school premises. We will look at all this information in the sections that follow.

INTRODUCTIONS

During your initial meeting(s), you will have the chance to get to know the key people with whom you will have to work during your classroom observation. While every school has a different structure and policy, these are likely to be (a) the school head, (b) the classroom teacher(s), and (c) administrators.

You can use the initial meeting(s) to introduce yourself to these people and to explain to them the purpose of your observation. In the context of this discussion, you can find out what their expectations are, and you should also help them to understand what your needs are. The school might have hosted teachers such as you in the past, so they might have some pre-conceptions about what your role is; or you might be their first visitor. Either way, it is important to go over these details, to ensure that there are no misunderstandings.

You should also make sure that you know how to contact the school and the classroom teachers: this involves finding out their contact details, whether they prefer to be contacted by telephone or email, and how far in advance they need to be contacted for various situations. Conversely, you also need to ensure that they know how to get in touch with you: again, this involves letting them know your contact and availability details.

ESTABLISHING EXPECTATIONS

The school might have hosted teachers such as you in the past, so they might have some pre-conceptions about what your role is; or you might be their first visitor. Either way, it is important to go over these details, to ensure that there are no misunderstandings.

One set of expectations that can be helpfully clarified from the outset pertains to the time and information that you want from the school. For example, you might need to have lesson plans for every lesson you are observing in advance of the lesson; or you might want to spend some time with the teacher for debriefing after each lesson. It is helpful to remember that such requests are not self-evident, and many teachers might find it hard to accommodate them because of their busy schedule. But on the other hand, it is also likely that they will be happy to provide you with such information, if they know that it is useful to you.

A second set of expectations to be clarified involves your role in the classroom. Depending on the course programme in which you are involved, you might be expected to take on a non-participant or more participating observer role. This means that you could spend your time in

class observing the lesson in an inobtrusive way, or you could act as a teaching assistant; you might help the teacher with task such as marking papers, proctoring an exam, facilitating a lesson, or acting as a resource / conversation participant. There is nothing to prevent you from taking on these roles, if they are helpful for your own development; however, it is useful to clarify any such expectations before the beginning of the classroom observation.

ETHICAL ISSUES

When visiting a classroom, your presence will have an effect on the lesson, whether you notice it or not, and whether you want it or not. From an ethical standpoint, this creates a requirement that everybody affected needs (a) to be aware of what is happening and why; and (b) to have no objections. Together, these two requirements form the principle of *informed consent*.

It is good practice to have a written record of informed consent, and many schools have a formal procedure for doing so. Typically, this procedure begins with communicating the purpose of your observation (why are you visiting the classroom?), the procedures of the observation (will you be using notes, audio or video recordings), and issues connected to data use (how will the data be stored and reported?). You can use the initial meeting to deliver this information orally to the head teacher and teacher(s) whose class you will be observing; you could also ask them to deliver an info-sheet to the learners. The second step involves getting a written statement from the teacher(s) and learners that they are satisfied with the information you have given them and have no objections to your presence. Different schools will have different ways of dealing with this, and you should use the introductory visit to find out what the policy of your school is.

FAMILIARISING YOURSELF WITH THE SCHOOL

A school is both a physical space and an institution. One last thing you should therefore do during your introductory meeting is to familiarise yourself with both.

If possible, arrange for a brief orientation in the school premises. You will want to find out where the classrooms are, and how to get there from the teachers' lounge. You will also want to find out where the supply room and the staff toilets are, and who has the keys to them. You could also find out what equipment is available in the classroom, and how to use it. You may also have access to additional equipment, and you should find out what the procedure is for checking it out and returning it.

An introductory meeting is also a good opportunity to learn more about the school's policies. Some of the information you could find out include when lessons start and finish, when breaks take place, and whether there is a school policy on tardiness. You could find out whether there are any special policies, e.g., a dress code, or rules about socialising with students.

You might spend weeks in a school before you know much about how it *really* works, so there is no expectation that you learn everything during an introductory meeting. However, it is never too early to start.

Introductory Meeting Checklist

This is a list of things to remember during your introductory meeting:

- Introduce yourself; make sure that the school has your contact details, and that they know when the best times to contact you are
- Find out the names and contact information of the head teacher, classroom teacher and administrators with whom you will be working
- Explain the purpose of your classroom observation visits to the school head, teachers and other relevant stakeholders
- Discuss any ethical implications of the classroom observation; find out what the school's policy is on visitors. If appropriate, find out what procedures are in place to obtain informed consent (from teachers, students, and parents)
- Find out about relevant rules (e.g., dress code), and procedures (e.g., what time do teachers arrive)
- Find out where to get resources, and how to use any equipment (e.g., computers, projectors, photocopiers)
- Ask for an orientation tour the school premises; find out where the classrooms, toilets, teachers' lounge, and the head teachers' office are.

PLANNING YOUR CLASSROOM OBSERVATION

A classroom is an environment that is very dense in information. This means that it will prove overwhelming if you try to notice everything during your classroom visits. You will probably find it easier to focus on specific aspects during each visit.

You can use the classroom observation planner (overleaf) as an aid to help you plan an observation strategy. Read through the classroom observation framework at the beginning of this resource, and decide what information is most useful for you. Then, use the classroom observation planner to set two or three goals (e.g., “*understand how each language is used in class*”) for each classroom visit. You will want to make sure that your plan has adequate coverage (i.e., that you get some information about all the aspects of the framework). It is also prudent to build some redundancy in your plan: this means that you should aim to observe important aspects of the framework more than once.

It is good practice to share this planner with the teacher of the class you are visiting. This will help them understand your role; sometimes this helps to take pressure off them, by reassuring them that you are not focussing on their teaching competence.

Classroom Observation Planner

Section 1: General information

Visiting teacher	
School	
Timeframe	

Section 2: Overall Aims of the observation

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Section 3: Detailed Planning

	Date	Aims: What do I want to find out in this visit?	Signature
Visit 1*			
Visit 2			
Visit 3			
Visit 4			
Visit 5			
Visit 6			
Visit 7			
Visit 8			
Visit 9			
Visit 10			

.....
(visiting teacher)

.....
(class teacher)

Instructions

Section 1

Complete this section after discussing your classroom observation plans with your supervisor, mentor, or whoever is in charge of your professional development.

- ✓ **Visiting teacher:** write your name
- ✓ **School:** write the name of the school where the classroom observations will take place
- ✓ **Timeframe:** write the start and end date of the observations

Section 2

Complete this section after discussing your classroom observation plans with your supervisor, mentor, or whoever is in charge of your professional development.

- ✓ **Overall aims of observation:** write down one or two overarching aims of the observation (why are you conducting this observation?). Com

Section 3

Ideally, most this section should be completed before you start your classroom observation visits. In some cases, this might not be possible; however, make sure that you specify the aims of every classroom observation visit **before** the visit takes place.

- ✓ **Date:** the date when you plan to visit a classroom
- ✓ **Aims:** what (two or three) aspects of the framework will be the focus of this observation visit?
- ✓ **Signature:** A signature from the classroom teacher, to be recorded after the classroom observation visit has been completed
- ✓ **Visit 1*:** This is the introductory meeting with the class teacher/head teacher.

Additional Information

This document is to be signed by the visiting and classroom teachers before the classroom observations take place.

CONDUCTING A CLASSROOM OBSERVATION VISIT

A classroom observation visit ideally consists of three stages: (a) preparing for the observation, (b) the actual observation visit, and (c) retrospective reflection.

BEFORE THE OBSERVATION VISIT

On the day before the visit, you will want to invest some time thinking about its purpose. Try to express this purpose in the form of two or three **observation questions** (e.g., “*How appropriate is the coursebook for this group of learners?*”). You can use your planner and the classroom observation framework to focus your thinking. You will also want to visualise the kinds of behaviours that are associated with your observation questions (e.g., “*If the learners find the lesson topic uninteresting, they will probably spend a lot of groupwork time in off-task discussion*”).

If possible, you should try to arrange a pre-observation meeting, or **briefing**, with the class teacher, to discuss the lesson plan and materials. You can use this meeting to ask probing questions about the rationale of the lesson (e.g., “*Why do you think that this speaking task should come before reading the text?*”). This will give you some insights into the learner’s strengths and needs, and about the materials. You should also use the pre-observation briefing as an opportunity to ask where the teacher would like you to be during the observation, and if they have any special requirements from you.

DURING THE OBSERVATION VISIT

What you do during the observation visit will depend a lot on factors such as whether you are a participant or non-participant observer, and what you are trying to find out.

Some teachers feel more comfortable if they can treat the observer like a student. Others prefer to use the observer as a back-up resource ... Still others prefer the observer to be a quiet friendly presence. The observer should be sensitive to the teacher’s style, perhaps asking beforehand what the teacher prefers. (Richards & Farrell, 2011, p. 99)

SETTLING IN THE CLASSROOM

The place from where you will conduct your observation will generally be decided by the teacher whose class you are visiting. However, it is best practice to choose a good vantage point somewhere unobtrusive, ideally at the back of the classroom. This will help you see everything

that is happening, without distracting the learners. Some experienced observers recommend sitting sideways, so that you can see the students’ faces rather than the backs of their heads – whether you take this advice or not depends a lot on the preferences of the class teacher and the layout of the classroom.

INTERACTING WITH LEARNERS

Learners are likely to be curious about you. It may be a good idea to make yourself available before the lesson, and talk to them about your role, as long as the school and visiting teacher are happy with this. If learners try to engage you in conversation during the lesson, be polite,

but defer answering their questions. Do not be secretive about your notes, as this might trigger further curiosity, but try to be discreet.

Unless previously agreed with the teacher, you should avoid getting up, walking around, and interacting with individual students. This also applies to situations when students ask for your help, are engaging in off-task behaviour, or being disruptive.

If the teacher is happy for you to walk around and observe individual groups of learners, try to do so as a passive, unobtrusive observer, rather than as a participant. This will help to preserve the group dynamics; otherwise, learners will want to interact mainly with you. When visiting groups, respect the students' privacy; do not look at their notes and classwork. If it is important to do so, ask for their permission to read these notes after the lesson.

OBSERVING AND TAKING NOTES

- One way to record your notes is to write down brief key words and phrases that summarise the lesson (e.g., *"Listening: ss using mobile devices to listen to podcast & take notes; teacher working individually with one learner"*).
- Be especially attentive of the following points in a lesson: beginnings, transitions, critical incidents, and endings. Also, take particular note of any instance where the lesson is deviating from the lesson plan. Record what seems to have triggered the deviation, and what is happening instead.
- At this stage it is probably best if you limit yourself to 'low inference' observations: this means recording *what* is happening, *who* is doing it, and *how* it is being done, but not attempting to guess *why*. It is also best to avoid any evaluative comments.

Low-inference notes	High-inference notes
T. addresses student A by name. No response; teacher repeats question in L1, says name again & points to student. Student corrects pronunciation of his name, answers question. T. acknowledges answer, repeats name correctly, louder voice.	Teacher asks student whose name she has forgotten (?). The student corrects the teacher and answers the question correctly. The teacher is annoyed but acknowledges his answer, repeating his name angrily.
As T. the text, students interrupt her frequently asking what various words mean. Much whispering among them as they suggest various translations in their L1.	The text is too hard, and the students are confused.

- If you find something puzzling, make a note (e.g., a question mark or an asterisk) on the margins of your observation, but do not let this divert your attention from the lesson you are observing.
- Try to alternate your attention between the observation questions that you have defined (focused observation) and between periods with a broader focus.

AFTER THE OBSERVATION VISIT

THE POST-OBSERVATION DEBRIEFING

If possible, arrange for a post-observation **debriefing** with the class teacher. One way to structure the debriefing is to give the teacher a short account of the lesson based on your notes, and to ask them to add any remarks of their own. Some other questions that you could ask include:

- *How do you feel about this lesson?*
- *Was this a typical lesson for this class? Was the student's behaviour different? How so?*

You can also use the debriefing to discuss any critical incidents that happened during the lesson. This is something that requires a certain degree of sensitivity: however well-intentioned, *why* questions can make teachers defensive. One way to approach this is to phrase your questions as requests for advice:

- ✘ *Why did you ignore those students in the back row who kept talking?*
- ✓ *What should I do if students are talking during the lesson?*

If the teacher asks for feedback on aspects of the lesson, you can give them an honest, but constructive opinion. Focus on what aspects of the lesson went best, and to encourage them to think about alternatives for aspects of the lesson that were not very successful. Limit your feedback to those aspects of the lesson that are easiest to improve, and respect the methodological frame that the teacher has chosen to work within.

RECONSTRUCTING THE LESSON

After the classroom visit, you will also need to invest some time reflecting on the lesson. One common way of approaching this task involves two steps. First, re-read the lesson plan and your field-notes. As you do, make a note of how these might answer your observation questions, and what aspects of your questions remain un-answered. Look for patterns in your notes, sometimes spanning more than one lesson. As a second step, use your notes to re-construct the lesson as a narrative. As you do so, you should gradually move towards higher-inference remarks, i.e., attempt to address the *whys* of the lesson you observed.

Field notes	Lesson reconstruction
<p>T. addresses student A by name. No response; teacher repeats question in L1, says name again & points to student. Student corrects pronunciation of his name, answers question. T. acknowledges answer, repeats name correctly, louder voice.</p> <p>...</p> <p>T. nominates student A to read text. She repeats his name in a markedly louder voice, making eye contact. Student reads text; interrupted by t. ("thank you, (NAME)")</p>	<p>Something interesting happened when the teacher was checking homework. While nominating students, she mispronounced a student's name; the student initially ignored her and then corrected her – I am not sure whether this was an act of defiance. For the rest of the lesson, the teacher kept asking him questions, always making sure she pronounced his name in a marked way. At the time it seemed like bullying, but she later (debriefing) said that she felt embarrassed and was trying to learn his name.</p>

It's a thoughtful touch to send the teacher a thank you note after the

Classroom Observation Field Notes

Section I: Observation Information

Class:		Students:	
Teacher:		Objectives:	
Date / Time:			

Section II: Pre-Observation Notes

What am I trying to learn through this observation?	
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Section III: Observation Notes

Description of lesson	Remarks
	<i>Context</i>
	<i>Strengths & Needs</i>
	<i>Methods</i>

Section IV: Post-Observation Notes

Did the teacher make any additional comments?	
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What insights did I gain through this observation?	
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What was the effect of my presence in the classroom?	
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Section V: Emerging Questions

What new questions do I now have based on this observation?	
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Section I: Observation Information

Use a pencil to complete this section with information elicited by the class teacher when arranging a classroom observation. Use a pen to complete this section after the meeting is confirmed.

- Complete the left-hand column by recording the **class** which is being observed, the name of the **teacher** and the **date** and **time** of observation.
- Complete the right-hand column (**students, objectives**) only if a lesson plan is not provided. If a copy of the lesson plan has been provided, attach it to the field notes and indicate this by writing 'see attached' in the **Students** and **Objectives** fields

Section II: Pre-Observation Notes

Complete this section on the day of the observation, preferably shortly before entering the class. This should correspond to notes in the planner

Section III: Observation Notes

Use the left-hand column to record a running commentary of the lesson. Use the right-hand column to make notes regarding the three main areas of the framework, i.e., context, strengths and needs, and methods. **Do not record names of individual students.** Bear in mind that this part of the document will be shown to the teacher after the lesson, so do not make comments that are open to misinterpretation.

Section IV: Post-Observation Notes

Complete this section immediately after the post-observation discussion (debriefing) with the class teacher.

- Use the first box to record any comments they made which help to interpret events that happened in the classroom.
- Use the second box to make an immediate record of initial insights. This is intended as an aide-memoire rather than a comprehensive theoretical memo.
- Use the third box to record any comments regarding reactivity in the class setting. Indicate your interpretation of events and the reasoning behind the interpretation.

Section V: Emerging Questions

Use this section to make an immediate record of unresolved questions that were prompted by the observed events.

REFLECTING ON YOUR OBSERVATION

By the end of your observation, you will have multiple pages of notes and considerable experiential insights about the classes you visited. The new challenge that you will now face will be how to translate all this information into actionable insights about your own teaching.

You can use copies of the document overleaf to provide structure to this process. The document has been designed to focus on an individual aspect of the framework. This means that you will need at least three documents to record your emerging thinking about the context, the learners' strengths and needs, and the methods (or seven, if you have a lot of data and take a more granular approach). You can record the focus of each document (e.g., "methods") at the top of the page.

Completing the document itself is a three-step process. First, you record all the information that you have collected about this aspect of the framework under the heading entitled **Observation**. It is also helpful to cross-reference this information with your fieldnotes. You can do this by adding the date or number of the field notes sheet under **Date**. For each observation that you have recorded, you should add what the main implications are for your own teaching. You can record these under **Implications**.

Date	Observation	Implication(s)
21/9, 22/9, 25/9	Attendance of students is irregular. Several students absent or tardy.	✓ Ensure that there are many revision opportunities ✓ Extended group projects will be hard to implement

Once you have completed the table with information from all your fieldnotes, re-read the observations and implications and summarise this information in a short paragraph. What advice would you give to a teacher who was about to teach in this class?

Classroom Observation Matrix

Use this document to record, synthesise and reflect on what you have noticed during your observations.

Focus:

Date	Observation	Implication(s)

Summary:

REFERENCES

- Canale, M., & Swain, M. (1980). Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing. *Applied Linguistics*, 1, 1–47.
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- Kumaravadivelu, B. (2001). Toward a postmethod pedagogy. *TESOL Quarterly*, 35(4), 537-560.
- Macalister, J., & Nation, I. S. P. (2010). *Language curriculum design*. Routledge.
- O' Leary, M. (2020). *Classroom observation: A guide to the effective observation of teaching and learning* (2nd Edn.). Routledge.
- Richards, J. C., & Farrell, T. S. (2011). *Practice teaching: A reflective approach*. Cambridge University Press.