

First steps in observation

Getting ready to observe

Christine Lechner

Classroom observation is a good way to start finding out more about what is going on in your classroom and can be less intimidating than recordings.

- * There are things that teachers can observe for themselves.
- * Observation through a colleague, a critical friend, can also be very helpful.

Observation is normally embedded in a research framework or question.

Before you start it is important to think about:

⇒ The purpose

- What do you want to find out?
- What is the overarching purpose?

⇒ The setting

- In which class and during which lesson?
- How long will the observation last?
- Will the whole lesson be observed or will there be a focus on a section?

⇒ The observer – Who will observe?

- Will you observe certain aspects of your lesson whilst teaching?
- Will you ask a colleague to observe?
- Will you ask a student teacher to observe? Is the student teacher on a short internship? During initial teacher education or already integrated in the school as a trainee?
- Is the observer a supervisor who might be asked to support by focusing on certain aspects of the lesson?
- How will you introduce the observer? Where will he/she sit?

⇒ Focusing

- Which aspects of the lesson will be focused?
- What do you want to find out and why?

Normally observation is part of a larger question frame.

* Self-observation

If you decide to observe aspects whilst teaching, remember that you are in the classroom to teach and research should not take over.

It is possible to observe and note, for example:

- Time taken for certain phases of the lesson compared to the lesson plan
- Interaction between learners e.g. during partner/ group-work. Which language are learners speaking?

* Collegial observation

When an observer enters a classroom, it is important to introduce the observer and explain the general purpose.

The more precise your instructions to the observer, the more you will find out.

When being observed it can put you at ease to know that the observer is focusing on aspects rather than looking at the whole.

Please look at and listen to:

- Transactional features: the balance of teacher - student interaction
- Interactional features: student - student interaction
- Discourse features, e.g. how a teacher formulates questions – types/ categories of student answers
- Instructions given before group work
- Teacher's body language, positioning and stance in the classroom
- Length of phases – compared to lesson plan

It is important that notes are taken, read and discussed following the observation.