

PEER OBSERVATION FOR DEVELOPMENT: 'IF YOU DON'T HAVE THE RIGHT INGREDIENTS, YOU CAN'T COOK THE DISH'

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Introduction

Most, if not all, teachers will, at some point in their careers, find themselves being observed by teacher educators, management or other superior staff members for assessment purposes. It is a procedure that, since the 1970's, has become increasingly widespread in education (Wragg 1994: 2). Yet, what it means to observe is open to a range of interpretations. At one end of the spectrum, it is simply the act of 'watching' or 'monitoring', while at the other end of the spectrum, it can be 'examining' or 'scrutinising' practice. Furthermore, it may be conducted by teachers, colleagues, faculty or superiors. In short, observations can be conducted by different people in order to serve a number of purposes.

A wide variety of models of observation exist. However, most in-service teachers are familiar with and envisage traditional models of observation, which serve assessment and/ or appraisal purposes. Less widely known is observation for teacher development, which as a non-judgemental 'freestanding procedure', enables teachers to research areas of their choice (Mann 2005). While there is a plethora of frameworks and guidelines on peer observation (PO) in the literature, and many have documented the perceptions of teachers involved in PO schemes, most research has been founded on schemes set up for assessment and/ or appraisal purposes. As such, the schemes are premised on the idea that the observed can be developed by the suggestions of the observer and consequently they may not genuinely promote teacher development (Cosh 1999: 25; Hamilton 2013: 47). Furthermore, to my knowledge, there are no studies that investigate the talk between peers participating in a PO scheme.

This study thus investigates the talk and perceptions of four peers involved in a small-scale and context-specific PO scheme for teacher development. It utilises two sources of data: (1) recordings from the pre-and-post-observation meetings held between peers, (2) recordings from one-to-one interviews. The findings focus on highlighting whether the observations promoted reflection and reduced evaluation. The paper concludes with a set of recommendations, which

can be utilised by those implementing PO schemes for the purpose of teacher development.

The Different Models of Observation

There are a wide variety of models of observation, all of which have been well documented in the literature. These can be grouped into two broad categories, in relation to the purpose of observation. In the first category the models of observation typically serve assessment or appraisal purposes. In the second category, observation is used as means for development.

Observation for Assessment/Appraisal

When teachers are being observed for assessment or appraisal purposes, the observer plays an evaluative and/ or judgemental role and thus there is a hierarchical relationship between the observer and the observed (Freeman 1982: 22; Cosh 1999: 23; Gosling 2002: 2). The observer is positioned as 'expert' and is likely to control the agenda of the meeting and dominate the discussion. They are responsible for commenting on their teaching ability of the observed and suggesting improvements. The observed, on the other hand, usually plays a more passive role (Freeman 1982: 22; Cosh 1999: 23; Gosling 2002: 2). In such circumstances, suggestions, advice and criticisms from the observer are expected. Yet, these speech acts have the potential to threaten the face of the observed (Vasquez 2004: 35). As highlighted by Chang and Haugh (2011: 2949), whether a speech act is face threatening 'depends on the evaluations and responses of participants in particular interactions'. In other words, some teachers who are observed may accept the suggestions, advice and criticisms of the observer, while others may resist them and, as a result, become uncomfortable, defensive and frustrated (Gosling 2005: 15). Considering the aforementioned, it is unsurprising that many reject these forms of observation. It is argued that they are threatening, judgemental (Richards & Nunan 1990; Cosh 1999; Gosling 2005) and 'coloured with factors not related to learning' (Wajnryb 1992: 2). Moreover, it is claimed that they foster an environment in which trainees learn to rely on supervisors and experts for advice, which can hinder their progress

in becoming autonomous teachers (Gebhard 1984). However, there are advocates of this approach. For example, Freeman (1982: 27), who reasons that if a teacher is at the beginning of their career and needs to know 'what to teach' then this is the most appropriate approach because of its clear criteria.

Observation for Development

Observation for development is often initiated by teachers themselves or set up by the school as a support programme (Wajnryb 1994: 2). It tends to be carried out by colleagues of equal status, however the observed may choose to be observed by other educators in higher positions or by supervisors. In such circumstances, it is paramount that the observed sets the terms, focus and criteria. Developmental models of observation are often premised on the foundations of reflective practice. Reflective practice as described by Schön (1983: 31) is 'a dialogue of thinking and doing through which [teachers] become more skilful'. Through reflective practice teachers are able to identify their own strengths and weaknesses and thus improve their practice (Mann & Walsh 2017). Thus, observation, when serving the purposes of reflection/ development, is a tool for learning (Desimone 2011).

Several models of observation for development have been outlined by Freeman (1982), Cosh (1999) and Gosling (2015). In the non-directives approach detailed by Freeman (1982: 24), the observer seeks to understand the teacher's position and, later, offer another perspective, while the observed becomes engaged in a process of reflection and self-evaluation. In the reflective models described by Cosh (1998: 173), the observer, instead of focusing on what the other teacher is doing, or perhaps not doing, uses the observation to generate new ideas and reflect on their own teaching. In Gosling's collaborative model (2015: 22), importance is placed on parity and reciprocity of learning and, instead of self-reflection, the peers engage in mutual reflection. Teachers who engage in observations under these conditions are thus viewed as professionals, who have control over their own development. They choose their own focus (Freeman 1982: 24) and research their own problems or puzzles (Gosling 2005: 34; Cosh 1999: 26), which increases their sense of agency and empowerment. Although these models have their limitations, factors that are considered detrimental, such as resistance to observation, can be mitigated. Moreover, if both the observer and observed have clear guidelines and take on joint responsibility to keep the

feedback developmental, the possibility of the observer being evaluative can be reduced, which, in turn, can lessen the risk of the observed feeling threatened.

The Relationship between Peers

PO for the purpose of development affords the opportunity for teachers, who might not normally have the chance to interact, to come together and share ideas and knowledge and discuss problems and concerns (Richards & Farrell 2005: 86). However, the power and status differences between peers can significantly impact the dynamics of their relationships, the discourse they share and, in turn, affect the success of the process (Gosling 2002: 2). As previously mentioned, in schemes underpinned by assessment/ appraisal models there is a hierarchical relationship between the observed and the observer and thus an obvious imbalance of power. Yet, even in developmental schemes, with near or equal peers, negotiating power can be a challenge. If one teacher perceives themselves as more experienced than the other and takes on an 'expert' role during the feedback, the other teacher may feel threatened. To ensure that observation does not become evaluative and does serve developmental purposes, researchers agree that there should be mutual trust and respect between peers (Gosling 2002; Wang & Day 2002; P'Rayan 2013; Ahmed 2018). Furthermore, it is considered vital for peers to choose their partners (Carroll & O'Loughlin 2013: 449).

The Model Adopted for This Study

In order to learn more about the dialogue that peers engage in when observing for development, four teachers, who were studying a masters in English Language Teaching at a large university in the UK, were recruited to partake in this study. The teachers were asked to observe and be observed by each other. In other words, both teachers played the role of the observer and the observed. This decision was made to ensure that the observations were mutually beneficial and to emphasise equitable power. The teachers followed a three-stage framework of (1) pre-observation of teaching, (2) observation of teaching and (3) post-observation of teaching, as this is considered paramount for the observations to be conducive to development (Wang & Day 2002: 12). A developmental model was adopted for the observation of teaching. This model was akin to the reflective model detailed by Cosh (1999: 26) in that the teachers chose an area of their own practice they would like to develop and then

observed their peer teacher in order to generate new ideas and reflect on their practice. This is considered highly beneficial for the reason that,

Those of us who have observed in this spirit know that there is a great deal to be learnt by reassessing our teaching in the light of other teaching styles. It stimulates awareness, reflection, and a questioning approach, and it encourages experiment (Cosh 1999: 25).

Methodology

The Background of The Participants

Two of the four teachers, referred to as Ivan and Sandra, chose to work together and have an established relationship. The other participants, Anne and Michelle, were paired by me and have a relationship best described as collegial. The four teachers all had experience working in their home countries and were students. Thus, they were of a similar status and as such it was considered that they had symmetrical power relationships. All have been observed, however this was for evaluative and assessment purposes. Sandra, Ivan and Michelle were observed by senior members of staff, while Anne was observed during her initial teaching training course. Sandra and Ivan have played the role of the observer, in evaluative situations, but Anne and Michelle have not. The peers, therefore, had varying levels of experience with traditional forms of observation but no experience of observation for teacher development.

The Research Questions

The study began with the broad research question: what kind of talk do peers engage in? After the data was analysed and the participants interviewed, in a reflexive and iterative manner, the focus of the study was narrowed to several themes (these themes are discussed further in the Data Analysis section below). This paper is based on two of the themes: evaluation and reflection and thus it addresses the questions:

1. To what extent are the peers reflective/evaluative in the post-observation meetings and how do they manage their talk?
2. How do the peers feel about being reflective/evaluative?
3. What do the peers think can be done to promote reflection and reduce evaluation?

Data Types and Collection

The approach to the research was qualitative, which, as highlighted by Richards, (2003: 8), is good in narrowly defined circumstances (such as this one) because it offers the best source of illumination. Since it was not my goal to measure or use statistical analysis to explain the phenomenon, but to understand the experiences and perspectives of the participants (Creswell 2003), various sources of data were collected. This comprised:

- the pre-observation meetings
- the post-observation meetings
- one-to-one interviews

Data Analysis

Transcribed data from the pre and post observation meetings were coded on a line by line basis. Focused coding was then applied in order to synthesise and explain larger segments of data (Charmaz 2006: 57). This involved searching for the relationships between the initial codes, making connections among them and identifying emerging themes. For example, the initial codes, 'describing what the teacher did', 'Describing what the teacher didn't do', 'Explaining what the teacher said' and 'Telling the teacher what they would do differently' were amalgamated into the theme 'Evaluative Comments', after focused coding was applied. Through the iterative process of going back and forth between the data, codes, my memos and comparing my findings to the literature (Charmaz 2015: 404), six core themes were identified. Although all of these themes were interesting, I was aware that I would not be able to focus on them all due to the constraints of the study. Therefore, I listened to the recordings once more and reread articles and chapters on peer observation in order to see what issues researchers were stressing as important. I decided to focus on the three themes: (1) relationships, (2) evaluative talk and (3) reflective talk, as they were the most significant. The present paper focuses on two themes, evaluative talk and reflective talk, due to word limitations. In order to demonstrate how the participants were managing their talk in relation to the aforesaid themes, the analytical tools of conversation analysis (CA) were applied. Participants were interviewed to enrich my analyses and illuminate their perspectives. This combination of methods provided different takes on the topic and enabled me to see things from

multiple perspectives (Chamberlain et al. 2011: 184).

Findings and Discussions

This section presents a microanalysis of four extracts, relating to the themes of evaluation and reflection. Each extract is followed by a discussion that utilises data from the one-to-one interviews. At the end, a summary of the findings is presented.

Extract 1 - 'How it impacted me'

Extract 1 begins at the start of the post-observation meeting held between Sandra and Ivan, which lasted 35 minutes. Prior to the extract, the peers decided to observe each other's use of referential questions. In addition, they reconfirmed the purpose of the meeting; to reflect on their practice. The talk is led by Sandra, who has been invited by Ivan to begin commenting on what she observed.

Analysis

Sandra begins by describing what Ivan did. In Line (henceforth L) 3, she shifts from 'you' to 'we'. This accomplishes a change in 'footing', which refers to the 'alignment we [the speaker] take up to ourselves and the others present' (Goffman 1981: L28). In this case, 'we' strengthens Sandra's alignment with Ivan, signalling that she holds herself (and Ivan) responsible for the task, even though she was not teaching. Sandra continues to explain what Ivan did (L4/6/8). She then evaluates what Ivan did and performs a potentially face threatening act (FTA), by criticising Ivan and saying, 'it was kind of teacher talk' (Domenici & Littlejohn 2006: 73). In the classroom context, too much teacher talk is a negative attribute because it is generally believed to hinder students' communication skills (Nunan 1999: 209). This is followed by silence (L14), which is not attributable to either of the speakers (Liddicoat 2011: 80), that perhaps signals that Ivan was threatened by Sandra's previous comment. In L15/16, Ivan and Sandra begin to talk at the same time. Ivan with a neutral '[mm]', that can be heard not as agreeing with Sandra's negative comment but as merely doing receipt of it (Gardner 2001) and Sandra with 'you were kinda pushing the information for them to download'. This statement, which is mitigated with 'kinda' and a short pause, is also face threatening because it is critical (Brown & Levinson 1987: 314). Ivan interrupts with 'yeah', laughs; perhaps in an attempt to make light of the situation, and starts to explain herself. Sandra interrupts with 'so', which is often used to 'pursue some pending interactional agenda' (Bolden 2009:

982). Perhaps in acknowledgement of her previous FTA, she then rephrases her comment, much of which contains mitigation ('seemed, more of, just, you know'), which softens her utterances and thus downplays the threat (Zhang 2015: 135). Immediately after 'you know', Ivan begins to laugh (L20) and shows understanding with 'yeah' and 'ok'. In L23, Sandra repeats 'I think' twice, distancing herself from the evaluative comment 'fine'. This 'fine' is received unproblematically with 'mm'. Sandra then begins to reflect on what she learnt. However, her pause, 'erm' and 'ers' suggest that this was not easy. Furthermore, she returns to continue evaluating what Ivan did by stating that it was 'fine' because of the 'nature of the lesson' (L30). She then explains why it was fine and shifts her footing once more from 'I' to 'we', to imply shared understanding. This is followed by 'how do I say this', perhaps signalling she is finding it difficult to reflect on herself and not to evaluate Ivan. Within this long turn there is also self-repair and long pauses, indicating that she is not convinced of what she is saying, and three uses of 'you know', which serves to highlight mutual understanding (Vasquez 2004: 45).

Discussion

As highlighted in the analysis above, Sandra was predominately evaluative and occasionally reflective. Her evaluative comments were, at times, critical of Ivan. Thus, it could be argued that they were face threatening (Brown & Levinson 1987). However, Sandra used mitigation and alignment to soften her comments and Ivan laughed, which showed understanding. Thus, instead of threatening Ivan's face, the participants negotiated face as the interaction unfolded (Copland 2011: 3833). At the end of the extract, Sandra reflected on her practice. However, it is evident from the pauses and self-repair that this was a challenge. The fact that Sandra found this difficult supports Mann and Walsh's (2017: 174) belief that reflection can be difficult to get used to.

When Sandra talked about being evaluative and reflective she stated that the former was natural whilst the latter was 'unnatural':

I found myself talking a lot about how she can improve hers rather than how I can improve mine even though I knew that wasn't was I was supposed to do I found it difficult to get out of that habit... It didn't really click until I had to talk to Ivan about it then it hit me I really need to think about my own practice... I had to bring it back to me, so that's why I put in that phase how it impacted me... it took me quite a while to really get into the mind-set of what [Ivan did] and how that impacts me... it was unnatural.

- 1 **Sandra** Umm yeah ok so what i observed was that there seem more (.) display questions in
2 the first half [because
3 **Ivan** [mm↓
4 **Sandra** (.) er when we were doing the quiz
5 **Ivan** mm
6 **Sandra** you were asking them about true false
7 **Ivan** mm
8 **Sandra** And then asking them about the video and things like that
9 **Ivan** mmm↑
10 **Sandra** And then actually the second half when you were giving the phrases I felt that it
11 was (..) er they weren't actually (..) I-I I only record one question which said
12 >what are some other phrases< (1) and (.) er after that a lot of it was kind of
13 teacher talk
14 (1)
15 **Sandra** [yo]u were kinda (.) pushing the information for them to [download
16 **Ivan** [mm] >[Yeh huhh]i [try]<
17 **Sandra** [So] i
18 didn't i didn't catch actually erm (.) questions (..) it seemed more of (..) like
19 you were just telling them ok you know [these are the phrases]
20 **Ivan** [Hnh yeah ok.]
21 **Sandra** =and these are the situations in which you can use these phrases
22 **Ivan** mm
23 **Sandra** Yeah so um (..) so i think >i think that< er i which was which was fine (.)
24 **Ivan** mm↓
25 **Sandra** (.) and then erm how it er impacted me because is that i realised that it a lot
26 of teacher fronted (1.1) teacher centred (.) er sort of um (1.2) er er questions
27 that you were asking that it was all teacher student interaction
28 **Ivan** mm
29 **Sandra** (.) yeah um (..) which is you know which is fine i guess because (.) er i guess
30 with the nature of the lesson (.) you know and and the way that um (1) the lesson
31 is being set up because these are speakers of you know other languages i mean
32 other languages foreign languages so (..) i-we (.) cannot really expect them to
33 (1.9) i don't know er what am i even saying like erm (1.1) how do i say this (..)
34 **Ivan** Wh
35 **Sandra** Yeah i mean i thought that it was it was um it was ok like it was normal for this
36 kind of pattern this kind of questioning pattern to come up

Extract 1

Sandra's comment above dovetails with my analysis, in that she agrees she was evaluative and found it a challenge to reflect on her practice. Although Sandra acknowledged that it was typical in this situation to evaluate, she reasoned that it can be risky:

Because it is unexpected it could be taken negatively. It was supposed to be set up to be a reflection on me so in that sense it could be taken negatively. And then it also depends on the relationship between the two if the two have an understanding I think me and Ivan are close enough it won't I hope she didn't take offensively at least she didn't look like she was taking offence.

Her belief that evaluation can be perceived negatively is widely supported in the literature, with many asserting that it can cause resistance to observation. Moreover, in extreme cases, it can hinder staff relationships and cause hostility in the workplace (Gosling 2015: 16). As revealed in the comment above, Sandra believed that her close relationship with Ivan reduced the risk of it being perceived negatively. In order to reduce evaluation and promote reflection Sandra recommended

having more observation sessions to familiarise oneself with this format. Furthermore, she felt it may have been easier to reflect had she been teaching regularly:

It could be that if there was another lesson the next day then I could be more conscious about remembering these are the thing I have do or not do so it might help me be more reflective in that sense.

Extract 2 - 'Am I a very mean teacher'

Prior to the extract, Sandra states to Ivan that after the lesson she thought, 'shucks did I miss out on the opportunities to ask them more reflexive (reflective) questions?'. Ivan takes control of the floor and tells Sandra she marked down the questions Sandra asked and then begins to describe what she saw.

Analysis

Ivan begins by reporting that the students said that Sandra talks too fast. In the classroom context where speaking too fast can hinder understanding this is a criticism. Thus, in Brown and Levinson's

- 1 **Ivan** and then (..) they immediately said oh you you speak too ~ fast~ [hihhuh]
 2 **Sandra** [Huhhnh] yeah
 3 **Ivan** ((inaudible this)) And and (..) at that time you started to change your questions into
 4 (..)those (1) that would (..) address their problems like (..) er which part you need more
 5 help
 6 **Sandra** mm↑
 7 **Ivan** or any difficult words you do[n't] (..) er you don't understand?
 8 **Sandra** [mm] mm
 9 **Ivan** any other things you would like me to discuss?
 10 **Sandra** mm↑
 11 **Ivan** any other words you want me to (..) er er explain mo:re?
 12 **Sandra** mm↑
 13 **Ivan** somethin something er like that s[o] most of them are addressing their needs
 14 **Sandra** [mm] mm
 15 **Ivan** and then (..) I think I think you you may hihh you may hihh realise that erm (1.7) in
 16 terms of the expectations of the students=
 17 **Sandra** =yeah
 18 **Ivan** (..) erm (..) you and I are actually very different=because if I were doing the same
 19 reading passage=
 20 **Sandra** =yeah=
 21 **Ivan** =I know it would be very difficult for ((student name))[and and]((student name))
 22 **Sandra** [ah::] okay
 23 **Ivan** I know it would also be challenging for the rest of them
 24 **Sandra** mhmm
 25 **Ivan** Er especially (students name)
 26 (..)
 27 **Sandra** mm.
 28 **Ivan** I don't think they will understand (..) it very very well
 29 **Sandra** mhmm
 30 **Ivan** But (1.4) I would not give them a lot of time to read it
 31 **Sandra** Ah: [okay]
 32 **Ivan** [so](1) instead of erm giving them more time to rea:d once or twice or >try to
 33 get the idea of it< I would just let them (..) kind of flip through (1) the whole
 34 article
 35 **Sandra** mhmm
 36 (..)
 37 **Ivan** and then (..) being confused but that's ok I'm going to break it down (..) er with them
 38 **Sandra** yeah
 39 **Ivan** that's my that's my approach
 40 **Sandra** mm
 41 **Ivan** and then (..) what you've done I act-actually thought (1) .hhh mmmm. am I a very mean
 42 teacher↑=
 43 **Sandra** =Huhihh=

Extract 2

(1987: 314) terms, this act threatens Sandra's face. However, this is an oversimplified analysis. Sandra and Ivan have spoken previously about the speed of Sandra's talk and Sandra has self-proclaimed to have this problem. Thus, Ivan's comment aligns with Sandra's belief. Moreover, Ivan's turn finishes with '~fast~' said in a laughing tone, which results in joint laughter. This shows shared understanding and highlights that it was not perceived as a threat. Ivan then goes on to quote some of the questions that Sandra asked in the class (L4 to L11). Sandra responds with the continuer 'mm' (L6/10/12), which has a rise in intonation and is thus 'designed to elicit more talk' (Gardner 2001: 125). Ivan then states that these questions were intended to help address the students' needs thus providing a positive evaluation of Sandra's use of questioning. In L15 to L19, Ivan states that she and Sandra have different expectations of the students. This is said with mitigation ('I think'), laughter and pauses. This indicates Ivan is uneasy with

producing this comment, which could potentially be face threatening. It is also framed to be knowledge that Sandra understands ('you may realise') which, as a positive politeness strategy, functions to align the speakers and soften the threat (Brown & Levinson 1987: 322). Sandra cooperates with 'yeah', which simultaneously shows understanding and signals for Ivan to continue. Ivan then uses her background experience with the class to justify why their expectations differ (L21). Sandra responds with 'Ah::', which suggests she has received some new information that she acknowledges as understood and informative (Aston 1987: 128). Ivan continues to state that she knows it would be difficult for the students and states what she would do differently: 'not give them a lot of time to read it'. This is again potentially face threatening but is met with 'Ah:' and then 'okay' (L31) from Sandra, which shows understanding and legitimises Ivan's reasoning. Ivan continues to explain what she

would do differently in Sandra's situation and then reflects on her own approach and negatively self-evaluates (L42). Within this self-evaluation, Ivan uses the intensifier 'very' to exaggerate and says 'very mean teacher' in a tone that sounds like she is smiling, which downplays the seriousness. This invites laughter which is accepted by Sandra.

Discussion

As illustrated in the extract above, Ivan was both evaluative and reflective. Although some of her evaluative comments were critical and therefore can be considered FTA's (Domenici and Littlejohn 2006: 73), she used a variety of linguistic strategies, such as hedges, alignment and laughter, to downplay their threat (Vasquez 2004). Sandra showed understanding, agreement and signalled for her to continue, suggesting that she received the evaluative comments unproblematically. The fact that Ivan reflected on her practice, suggests that this was not a challenge. In Schön's (1983) terms, she reflected-on-action by thinking back to what she would usually do in Sandra's position, analysing it and then reflecting on her approach.

Like Sandra, Ivan felt that she did not have to be careful when delivering evaluative comments because of the closeness of their relationship:

Even though I was not criticising her [if it wasn't Sandra] then I would probably be more careful about what to say... I didn't have to be so careful I basically just said what I wanted to say.

Similarly, teachers, in Carroll and O'Loughlin's (2013: 449) study, who observed close peers reported that because of their relationship they could cope with the evaluative elements of feedback. However, when probed further, Ivan acknowledged that being evaluative could have a negative impact on their relationship:

We have a very good relationship but maybe this experience can be something that makes our relationship turn sour or something because this happens among some teachers some people used to be really good friends and then they work together and then after working together they are no longer friends.

Her comment aligns with Sandra's position and those that posit when PO is evaluative it may be detrimental to staff relationships. I have suggested that Ivan's talk indicated that reflecting was not a challenge for her. When asked about this, Ivan expressed that she found it neither easy nor difficult to reflect:

I wouldn't say it is difficult or easy it is somewhere in the middle - because this is a new experience and I have never done something like this before. I've always observed other people but then give them suggestions or evaluative

feedback rather than observing other people teaching and then reflecting on my own practice.

Although Ivan was able to reflect, her comment suggests that it was not entirely natural. Furthermore, her comment aligns with Sandra's belief that it may get easier the more peers do it because she relates the level of difficulty to the fact that she had not done it before. In order to facilitate reflection and reduce evaluation, Ivan stated that using stimulated recall would be beneficial as she would not have to rely on her memory:

I think it will be easier if I get the video clip of us teaching and then I can just go through it bit by bit and stop time to time and discuss Sandra I think that way will be easier.

Ivan's view that this would make reflection easier is shared by Walsh and Mann (2015). They posit that stimulated recall is a 'useful data-led tool' that can be utilised by teachers to inform their reflections (Walsh and Mann 2015: 361). Ivan also suggested that it would be helpful to have a workshop on making observation notes before the observation, on the basis that,

If [teachers] have jotted down notes focused on how their partner teaches they are commenting on their partner... then it is difficult for them to reflect in the discussion because they don't have the right things to talk about it - it is like if you don't have the right ingredients you can't cook the dish.

Extract 3 - 'I think this is very helpful'

Extract 3 begins at the start of the post-observation meeting held between Anne and Michelle. The discussion is led by Michelle, who is giving feedback to Anne about what Anne did in the lesson. She focuses on; time management, the teacher's use of materials, and teacher student interaction, as these were the features she had decided on in the pre-observation meeting

Analysis

Michelle begins by making the evaluative comment 'I think you did a very good job'. Anne responds with 'mhmm', which, as a 'classic continuer', is used to tell the speaker of the turn to continue (Schegloff 1982). Michelle then reports on what Anne did in the lesson (L3 to L21). During this, Anne responds with the acknowledgement tokens - 'mhmm', which signals to the speaker to carry on, and 'yeah', which acknowledges agreement (Gardner 1998: 220). Michelle then provides positive evaluation again by expressing that she thinks what Anne did was 'helpful' (L22 and again in L31). In L30, Anne responds with 'mm' followed by 'yeah', Gardner

- 1 **Michelle** (1) Yes um (0.5) I think you: did a very good job um first of all you briefly
2 introduced the lesson=
3 **Anne** =Mhmm=
4 **Michelle** =To all the students and you introduced me you-you introduced yourself
5 **Anne** mhmm
6 **Michelle** And introduced me
7 **Anne** mhmm
8 **Michelle** you mentioned how many sessions the lesson had and (1.5) who would teach the lesson
9
10 **Anne** Yeah
11 **Michelle** Yeah er you said that we were the teachers of the night of that session=
12 **Anne** mhmm
13 **Michelle** =at night and you briefly introduced the theme of th of the lesson
14 **Anne** Yeah mhmm
15 **Michelle** (1) Yes=
16 **Anne** =mhmm=
17 **Michelle** =And you you also wrote down the questions that you wanted the learners to discuss
18 on the whiteboard
19 **Anne** Yeah
20 **Michelle** (1) Yes=
21 **Anne** =mhmm
22 **Michelle** (.) I think this is very helpful because m this can help the teacher to remember
23 [what] she wants to talk about
24 **Anne** [mm] yeah
25 **Michelle** And umm can also help (1) can also helps remind (1) the learners
26 **Anne** Yeah yeah
27 **Michelle** of the questions they have [to discuss]
28 **Anne** [yeah] because we can easily forget right
29 **Michelle** Yes [yes]
30 **Anne** [Yeah] we can easily forget
31 **Michelle** yeah so that (.) that was very helpful for both the teachers and the learners
32 **Anne** mhmm (.) hmm
33 **Michelle** yes umm and you also pay attention to the language the students used yes you lean
34 forward to their umm
35 **Anne** m
36 **Michelle** you lean forward to listen to their dialogues their conversations
37 **Anne** yeah
38 **Michelle** and you corrected their mistakes
39 **Anne** yeah
40 **Michelle** patiently and carefully↓
41 **Anne** mhmm
42 **Michelle** (1.3) [Yes]
43 **Anne** [Did] do you think it was erm overall a positive experience in observing-what
44 what do you think you could you could gain from that that experience as a teacher.
45 by observing another teacher you know teaching (1.5) not specifically me but umm in
46 this case it was me but (1) y-you know what do you think it um was positive about
47 this this experience
48 **Michelle** (1.5) Umm i- i think its a good experience and the last point i want to mention
49 [um]m is that you were very aware of the time you used yes
50 **Anne** [mm] Yeah
57 **Michelle** You were very aware of the class time we had and you had a good control of the time
58
59 **Anne** Oh good to know heh he hnh↓

Extract 3

(1998: 220) states that ‘mm’ indicates that the speaker ‘doesn’t have anything substantial to say about the talk in the turn to which it is oriented’. In L32 to L41 Michelle reiteratively reports on what Anne did in the lesson and Anne again responds with acknowledgement tokens. The last of these in L42 is met with a significant silence of 1.3 seconds, which can be considered ‘heard’ because of ‘who is not talking (Michelle) and what is not being said (a response) (Schegloff 2007: 20). Anne asks, ‘what do you think you could you could gain from that that experience as a teacher’. This, along with the previous ‘yeah’s’, ‘mhmm’s’ and ‘m’s’ which have encouraged Michelle to continue, indicate that she is trying to encourage Michelle to reflect on her practice. Michelle takes a

long time to respond and instead of answering Anne’s questions returns once more to report on what Anne did (L48). This is met with the minimal acknowledgement token ‘mm’, signalling that Anne has nothing to add (Gardner (1997: 135). Michelle compliments Anne on her time keeping. Anne responds with ‘good to know’ and then laughs. As acknowledged by Locher (2004: 168), laughter serves many functions, such as expressing enjoyment or unease, easing growing tension and creating unity. In this case, the laughter token enables the recipient (Anne) to achieve modesty (Pomerantz 1978: 110). Perhaps, it is also indicative of the awkwardness felt by Anne, as Michelle has yet to reflect on her own practice.

Discussion

As highlighted above, Michelle was evaluative, but not reflective. When delivering her evaluative comments, she was always positive. Since acquaintances typically avoid face threatening behaviour (Cassell et al. 2007: 42), it is reasonable to suggest that even if she had critical comments to make she would not have voiced them. Moreover, as highlighted by Cosh (1998: 172), peers often resort to delivering positive feedback in order to avoid offending the observed. Although Anne welcomed and invited Michelle's evaluative comments, with her acknowledgment tokens and continuers, she did attempt to change the agenda and prompt Michelle to reflect on what she learnt. However, Michelle did not do so, perhaps for the reason that she is not used to articulating her reflections.

Michelle expressed that in this situation she felt it was 'normal' to evaluate Anne's practice. Moreover, she said that she expected to be evaluated by Anne:

It is normal. I was looking forward to it as she is experienced. I would like to see whether I taught the lesson well or not because I haven't taught the class very long ... I also wanted to get some feedback to see whether I did well or not.

This view was shared by the teachers in Allen's (2002) study, who reported that they valued feedback from their colleagues and felt that it could help with developing their practice. Michelle also spoke about her previous observation experience, which was for evaluative purposes, and explained that,

When I was working as a teacher we had this kind of observation by colleagues, supervisors and administrators... and they will write down suggestions and improvements... they will write down their comments and give you a grade.

From this and her previous comment, it is reasonable to argue that during the observation Michelle assumed the observer role she is most familiar with and envisions. Although there is no evidence of reflection from Michelle in the post-observation meeting, Michelle stated that observing and planning the lesson with Anne did help her to reflect on her practice - 'I learnt about using Google docs, IT and technology [from Anne] ... seeing Anne check the clock made me realise I need to do that more often'. Thus, although Michelle did not reflect on her practice during the meeting, she did so after. This finding corresponds with Boud's (1985: 19) belief that reflection may take place in isolation. In order to reduce evaluation and encourage participants to reflect on their own practice, Michelle

recommended that 'this should be emphasised before the observations'. This suggests that it could have been made clearer that reflection was the purpose during the pre-observation meeting.

Extract 4- 'That was really interesting'

In extract 4, Anne and Michelle have reversed roles and Anne is now talking about the observation from her perspective. Anne had decided in the pre-observation meeting to observe how Michelle presented new vocabulary.

Analysis

After Michelle finishes talking Anne latches on to her utterance and takes control of the floor and changes agenda to focus on her observation. She begins with a positive evaluation of Michelle's teaching 'that was very interesting ... you were very confident' (L3). Anne then states what she was focusing on, but this contains many short pauses and 'er, ums and erms', indicating that she is having trouble articulating what she wants to say. Delivering feedback, even when positive, can be potentially face threatening, for the reason that it can embarrass or cause the hearer discomfort (Goffman 1967). Anne continues to state what she saw. After 50 seconds Michelle responds with 'yes'. This puts her in alignment with Anne's comment that teacher talking time is linked to feedback and signals for Anne to continue. In L9, Anne repeats that it was 'interesting' to observe Michelle before going on to state what Michelle did in the lesson. This is then evaluated positively with 'good'. In L14, Anne refers back to something she and Michelle discussed in the pre-observation meeting and states that she thought Michelle's use of body language was engaging for the learners, again providing a positive evaluation of Michelle's teaching approach. Anne then describes what the students were doing, and Michelle responds with 'yes' to show agreement. In L20, Anne uses the adjective 'interesting' once more to describe her feeling about the way Michelle taught. This is the third time she uses the word 'interesting' which can have both positive and negative connotations. This, perhaps, signals that Anne wishes to remain neutral and is consciously trying to avoid evaluating Michelle. However, in each of the three instances interesting is used with the intensifiers 'very and really', suggesting positive evaluation. Anne then reflects on her own teaching and states she would not have thought of using body language like Michelle did. She provides a positive evaluation by stating that the students 'were really engaged' and having

- 1 **Anne** =Good erm: (.) .hhh for me that-was that was very interesting to (..) because er
 2 when you led the second the second part of the (..) the lesson i I thought you were
 3 very confident and er (1) um I initially wanted to observe: <thee the way you gave
 4 feedback> yeah the way h-how to give feedback to students erm and explain (.) yeah
 5 i think it was to explain erm Th to use teacher talking time you know to a minimum
 6 (.)not (.) <to spend too> much time explaining and thats you know that's about
 7 feedback as well (..) erm
 8 **Michelle** Yes
 9 **Anne** I thought you it was very interesting[↑] to see you (.) erm you usually elicit from
 10 them (..) erm some some questions and you- you ask them if any of them knew the
 11 meaning of such a word (.) er which is ni:ce but you also when you saw that nobody
 12 knew how to explain or they were not very sure you provided the answer yourself
 13 which is good er (.) which er is a good way to go about=and also erm >as you
 14 mentioned before< you used er erm a lot of body language when you introduced the
 15 other activity where they has to: to perform an action about the the country I
 16 thought they were really engaged and erm (1) yeah they had to perform the action so
 17 the- their peers had to guess which which country they were (.) they were erm
 18 mimicking[↑] and=
 19 **Michelle** =Yes=
 20 **Anne** =Ermm I thought they were that was really interesting I wouldn't have thought of
 21 ~that~ erm it's a good way of using the you know the body and erm body language to
 22 erm to the classroom I thought they were er really engaged and they were having fun
 23 erm yeah so i think[↑] er for me the the positive experience is erm would be using
 24 more erm (.) more erm body language to erm perform more erm not (.) rely so much on
 25 the writing and the speaking but also er the doing the doing part you know the
 26 acting out

Extract 4

fun'. With a rise in intonation after 'I think', which signals she is about to make an important point, she reflects on her own teaching once more, stating that she would like to use more body language.

Discussion

As illustrated above, Anne was evaluative and reflective. Perhaps, for the same reason as Michelle (being polite), her evaluative comments were always positive. Her turns were lengthy and descriptive, which correspond to Copland's (2011: 3835) belief that when peers give detailed feedback this tends to be of a descriptive nature. Although Michelle did not contribute to the talk often, her 'yes's' signalled for Anne to continue and her lack of participation, perhaps, suggested she did not have a problem with Anne's evaluative comments. Anne reflected-on-action. She talked about her practice in light of her new discovery (what Michelle did), stating that she would like to use body language more in the future. Thus, she showed no signs of finding it difficult to reflect on her practice.

When asked about evaluating what Michelle did, Anne stated 'I think she was expecting that or just we took it for granted that it had to be done that way'. This highlights that she felt it was appropriate and expected in their situation. Anne has been observed for assessment purposes, therefore, like Sandra and Ivan, it may have been natural for her to evaluate because this is what she has experienced. Similar to Michelle, Anne stated that she was open to receiving feedback even if it was critical. Yet, at the same time, she

acknowledged that it would be hard to deliver critical feedback:

It is interesting to see yourself through someone's else. It is revealing. I am quite open to even negative feedback even though she didn't give any I am quite open to it I don't feel uncomfortable. But if I didn't like it I would have to really choose the words carefully not to offend.

Similarly, participants in Blackmore's (2005) study asserted that they were open to receiving constructive feedback but felt reluctant when delivering it. Furthermore, apprehension to giving critical feedback was also reported by participants in Hammersley-Fletcher and Orsmond's (2005: 222) study. Anne stated that she did not find it a challenge to reflect on her practice:

Yeah it was [easy] because as I said before even during the planning meeting she came up with different ideas that I wouldn't have done myself... it was interesting to explore that because she does drama she has acting skills more salient, so it was interesting to see.

In order to encourage participants to reflect on their own practice, Anne recommended exposing peers to reflective dialogue before engaging in the observations: 'Maybe you could, or the manager/trainer could have a meeting to explain and give more examples - more real example of how they can reflect'. Her view that it would be useful for teachers to participant in a meeting is shared by Copland et al. (2009: 20). Although their recommendation was aimed at trainee teachers, they advocate that teachers should partake in workshops on reflection and dealing with post-observation feedback. Anne also recommended

having a 'mediator' in the session to monitor the discussion and encourage reflection.

Summary

All four participants were evaluative of one another to varying degrees. This was predominately positive or descriptive, which corresponds to Copland's (2010: 3838) study in which she found peer feedback consisted of a good deal of description and positive evaluation. Although the literature suggests that peers may be threatened by evaluative feedback, in this case it did not cause any breakdown in communication. Moreover, when potentially face threatening, their feedback was negotiated by the participants and subsequently mitigated or downplayed. The interviews revealed that the peers did not perceive evaluative feedback as threatening or judgemental. Anne and Michelle shared similar views on giving/receiving evaluative feedback, agreeing it felt 'natural'. Sandra and Ivan agreed that because of the closeness of their relationship they were able to handle evaluative feedback. However, they did acknowledge that it could have a negative impact on their relationship.

Although Sandra, Ivan and Anne were reflective, Michelle was not, and Sandra found this a challenge. This is not entirely surprising, in retrospect, since reflecting on one's practice in light of someone else's is not something teachers typically do. Contrary to Anne who found it easy to reflect, Sandra, Ivan and Michelle acknowledged during the interviews that this was a challenge. Moreover, the peers all agree that the observations could be modified in order to promote reflection and reduce evaluation. They suggested having regular observation sessions, utilising stimulated recall, making it clearer this was the purpose and exposing participants to reflective dialogue.

Recommendations for implementation and further research

Although the observations did promote reflection among the participants, they did not do this as effectively as anticipated. Moreover, the participants were still evaluative of one another. In hindsight, since the most widespread use of observation is for the purpose of evaluation (Malderez 2003: 181), this is hardly surprising. However, it is believed that the framework and model could be adapted in a number of ways to ensure that the observations foster reflection and reduce evaluation. The following recommendations are considered broad enough not only as a guide for my own practice but also to

be of interest to anyone seeking to organise a PO scheme for the purpose of teacher development. They are founded partly on direct suggestions from respondents and partly in relation to my observations and the literature.

1. Teachers should discuss the type of talk that is desired (or not desired) in feedback events and attend a workshop prior to the observation to explore how best to take observation notes.
2. The purpose of the observation, with examples of how teacher development schemes differ from evaluative schemes, should be explored with the participants to ensure full understanding of what is desired.
3. Teachers should be given the opportunity to engage in discussion that exposes them to 'what reflection is and how it might be enhanced for maximum effect' (Hammersley-Fletcher & Orsmond 2005: 222).
4. The procedure of stimulated recall, whereby audio recordings of the participants in action are shown to them and used as a prompt to get them to reflect, should be utilised in the feedback event. This will encourage reflection that is data-led (Walsh & Mann, 2015: 362).

The findings from this study are based on a small data set within a particular context. It is, therefore, unlikely that similar results would be found in another context, which precludes generalising the results. In order to corroborate findings and clarify whether, after engaging in a series of observations, peers become less evaluative and more focused on reflecting on their practice, a longitudinal study that recruits participants from a range of contexts would need to be conducted. This would also help to ascertain what, if any, benefits arise from PO, which, since the fundamental goal for peers involved in PO for development, is to, ultimately, see improvements in their teaching, would be extremely beneficial.

Conclusion

Peer observation affords the opportunity for teachers, who might not normally have the chance to interact, to come together and share ideas and knowledge and discuss problems and concerns (Richards & Farrell 2005: 86). The recommendations in this paper have the potential to create a scheme which encourages reflection and, in turn, localised learning that is interactive

and social (Desimone 2011). If successful this would facilitate teachers, in their own contexts, to learn from one another in a setting where there do not feel judged or threatened.

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