



CAPE Alumni Internet Connection: English Teacher Talk

CAPE Internet Talk was started as part of CAPE follow-up activities to continue ties with CAPE alumni and those who are interested in professional development in English teaching. It is hoped that this would increase our bond and aloha among former participants, and that the information in the TALK would help our alumni and friends/members review what they know and deepen their understanding of issues and interest in the ESL field.

Observation and Teacher Development

Richard R. Day

Introduction

Many teachers do not want to be observed as they teach. This is because observation is generally used to evaluate, to judge, teachers. For example, the director of a school might observe a teacher to see if the teacher should be given or new contract or dismissed. However, if used differently, observation can be an effective tool in teacher development.

The purpose of this article is to discuss using observation for teacher development in the English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom. In a second article, I will present and discuss several observation activities that EFL teachers can use to gain insights into their teaching.

Teacher development as I use in this article refers to practicing teachers, not students who are studying to be EFL teachers, who want to gain insights into their teaching in order to become more effective and skillful teachers. I also want to point out that observation is only one form of EFL teacher development.

Types of Observation

There are two types of observation in the EFL classroom, self-observation and peer observation. Peer observation can be very helpful because the classroom is a busy, complex and complicated environment. Teachers do not have the time to be aware of everything that takes place. They are involved in teaching, and are generally not able to observe themselves in the act of teaching.

In my work with EFL teachers, I have found that inviting a colleague whom you trust and respect to observe you works best. That way, you can focus on your teaching, and not worry about being observed.

In order for peer observation to be a helpful and positive experience, and not a negative one, the purpose has to be for gathering information about the teacher, and not for evaluation.

The second type, self-observation, involves using some form of recording equipment. Most of us think immediately of video recording. Video-taping yourself teaching is an excellent way to gather data that you can look at on your own later. There are some disadvantages, however. The first is that the equipment is somewhat intrusive. A more serious disadvantage is that the video camera is fixed, and cannot follow you as you move around the classroom. Of course, the camera can be operated by a colleague.

Another type of self-observation is audio-recording. The teacher brings a tape recorder to class, and makes a tape recording of what she says while she is teaching. Audio-taping is a useful way of gathering data about the teacher's verbal behavior.

Peer Observation

When you use a trusted and respected colleague to observe, you should begin with a meeting before the observation in order to discuss what aspects of your teaching you want your



peer to observe. You may have some concerns or questions about your teaching. Talk with your colleague about how to gather the data.

After the class ends, you should set up a time to have your colleague show you what she observed. This post-observation discussion should be held as soon as possible after the actual observation. Ideally, your colleague simply presents or shows you what she found. You, the teacher, should be the one to interpret what it means.

Conclusion

Observation has the potential for being a helpful and insightful tool in EFL teacher development. When engaging in peer observation, bear in mind that your colleague's task should be limited to gathering information, and not in evaluating your teaching.

Please take the time to give us the addresses of anyone else you think might be interested in receiving this newsletter of the CAPE Internet Connection: English Teacher Talk. And don't forget to write us with any comments you might have. Mahalo!

Contributor: Dr. Richard Day, Professor of ESL, University of Hawaii
Jai-Ho Yoo, CAPE President