



an **elt**knowledge download

www.eltknowledge.com



Pavilion Publishing and Media, Rayford House, School Road, Hove, East Sussex BN3 5HX
t: 0844 880 5061; e info@eltknowledge.com

© Pavilion Publishing and Media Ltd 2012

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission in writing of the publisher



Eye on the classroom

A regular series by **John Hughes**, with practical ideas for observing teachers in the classroom and an observation sheet to photocopy and use straight away.

2 Focused observation

We often assume that a classroom observation should involve watching and noting down comments on everything that happens. In fact, an observation is often more valuable when the focus is on only one aspect of the lesson. This means that any feedback you give to the teacher will be very precise and much clearer. It also means that you can observe for an area that you personally want to develop in your own teaching.

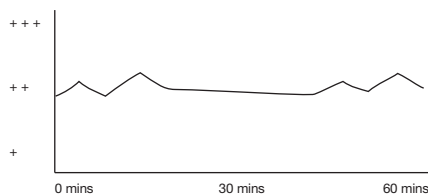
In this article, we'll look at a number of areas of teaching which you can focus on individually. There is an observation sheet on page 51 for you to photocopy and use. Unlike many of the observation sheets which we use for note-taking during classroom observation and reference afterwards, this one takes the form of a graph, which provides a very clear visual representation. The Y-axis represents the length of the lesson or length of the observation (in this case, a 60-minute lesson) and the X-axis, as we will see below, can represent a number of different aspects of classroom teaching.

● Pace

Pace is important in any lesson and it is sometimes mistakenly assumed that lessons must always be fast. In fact, many lessons benefit from regular changes of pace (especially with younger learners) so observing for this can be helpful. You can monitor the pace of a lesson with the observation sheet on page 51 by using the X-axis to represent a faster or slower pace. The observer draws a line during the course of the lesson which shows when the pace becomes faster or slower. A lesson with regular changes of pace might look like this:



On the other hand, a lesson with few changes of pace or difference in activity type might look like this:



In addition to drawing the trend line along the graph, the observer can also make notes about what caused a change of pace. For example, maybe the pace quickened when students stood up to do a roleplay or it slowed when they completed a controlled practice exercise in their books.

● One student

Sometimes we want to observe one student in particular, so we build a picture of how this individual is working within the whole class. This is also a useful exercise to remind us that a class is a group of different individuals, not a homogenous whole!

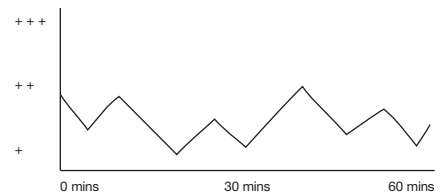
Choose a student to monitor, or perhaps the teacher will ask you to concentrate on a particular student they are concerned about. The X-axis on the graph represents the student's level of interest, motivation and involvement. As you draw the trend line, you can also make notes on the graph to comment on what they were doing that either displayed high interest in the lesson or low interest. Afterwards, in a feedback session, you can discuss what might have raised the student's interest at all stages of the lesson. This activity is even more interesting if there is a group of observers all watching different students. By gathering the graphs together, you create a wider perspective on why some students are responding positively to a lesson and why perhaps some aren't.

● Authenticity

The graph also allows us to monitor how authentic a task is or how real the response of our students is. When you think students are giving very authentic responses, perhaps to classroom discussion, the trend line rises. If the exercise seems very controlled or inauthentic then the line drops. As with pace, you would hope to see plenty of fluctuations, with perhaps more authenticity towards the end of a lesson.

● Learner-centred or teacher-centred?

You can also measure where the focus is at different stages of the lesson. For example, in the graph below, the high points show that the lesson was learner-centred with students working together. The low points show that the lesson was very focused on the teacher. The graph also shows us that the majority of the lesson seems to be very teacher-centred. This isn't necessarily negative, but most lessons would normally aim to be more student-centred.



Observing objectively

You will probably think of more ways to use this approach to observing. For example, you could also use it to measure the balance of teacher and student talking time. One important point to note about this graph, however, is that it is an example of an observation tool which reports back on the lesson rather than one which forces you into making judgements about a lesson. There is some level of subjectivity when using it and it certainly isn't 100 per cent scientific. Nevertheless, it does provide a useful overview of an aspect of teaching. It offers a useful starting point for discussion after a lesson between teacher and observer. It can quickly highlight causes of difficulties or demonstrate why a lesson has been successful. Finally, with different observers in one lesson all focusing on different aspects of the lesson, a collection of graphs together builds into an accessible perspective of the lesson.



John Hughes is a freelance teacher, trainer and author. He has worked in Austria, Poland, Italy, Malta and the UK. He currently lives and works in the USA.

jnhghs@msn.com

Focused observation

Focus:

+

+

+

+

+

+

0 mins

30 mins

60 mins

Length of lesson/observation

