

Peer Observation in Teacher Education: *Heroes one and all*

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Peer observation- common models

- Trainees observe tutor teaching input sessions.
- Trainees observe experienced teachers teach (mentor, colleagues, video examples).
- Trainees observe each other teach (microteach, training classes)
- Trainees observe each other teach in placement.

- Tutor



- Experienced teachers



- Other trainees





- It is good to see examples of (good) practice.
- Trainees are able to see different teaching approaches.
- They will notice salient features of the lesson.
- They will notice the features we want them to notice.
- They will notice something useful.
- They will implement what they have noticed into their own practice.
- Noticing will help change their practice for the better.
- Giving trainees an observation task will help with all of the above.

Research

- Longitudinal study on pre-service course.
- Focus on teacher learning.
- 12 participants.
- Interviews at different stages of the course.
- Research questions on describing teacher knowledge and learning events.
- **Peer observation** emerged as a point of interest.

Apprenticeship of Observation (Lortie 2002)



We play school ... Grace is always the teacher, Carol and I the students. We have to do spelling tests and sums in arithmetic; it's like real school, but worse, because we never get to draw pictures. We can't pretend to be bad, because Grace doesn't like disorder.

Margaret Atwood

Cat's Eye p. 61

1. Lorraine

Planning,
structure and
fun.

The way that I – it was quite – it was good fun, it was a really nice personal style ... It was the speed and the way it was very well-integrated

2. Caroline

Meeting the
needs of the
learners

What I noticed was he had a great empathy with the students ... So he empathised with anyone who might be shy or afraid to show their feelings.”

Concerns about own teaching.

- Trainees noticed aspects of the lesson which related most closely to things they were worried about in their own teaching.
- This was in spite of any task which asked them to notice something else!

1. Lorraine

Worried
about error
correction.

I was always very aware of observing – whenever I've observed ... I sort of think, "I need to do something about the error correction," so I'd be very focused on how other people did it and then just try to introduce it.

2. Simon

Worried about
behaviour
management

But actually what I noticed most was the things he did to help with behaviour management, because I struggle with this so I wanted to see what he did and I learned a lot.



Teaching skills and teacher persona



- Trainees noticed aspects of teaching when they felt “in tune” with the teacher they were observing.
- Teaching “skills” were often intertwined with teacher persona and trainee felt they couldn’t *do* one if they couldn’t *be* the other.
- Most common areas were “confidence” and “charisma”.



1. Gill

Described herself as lacking in confidence.

One teacher was immensely charismatic and the other seemed to be very experienced and confident and – so I couldn't really identify with those people very much and I can't really remember specifically except that the teacher was amusing and commanding.

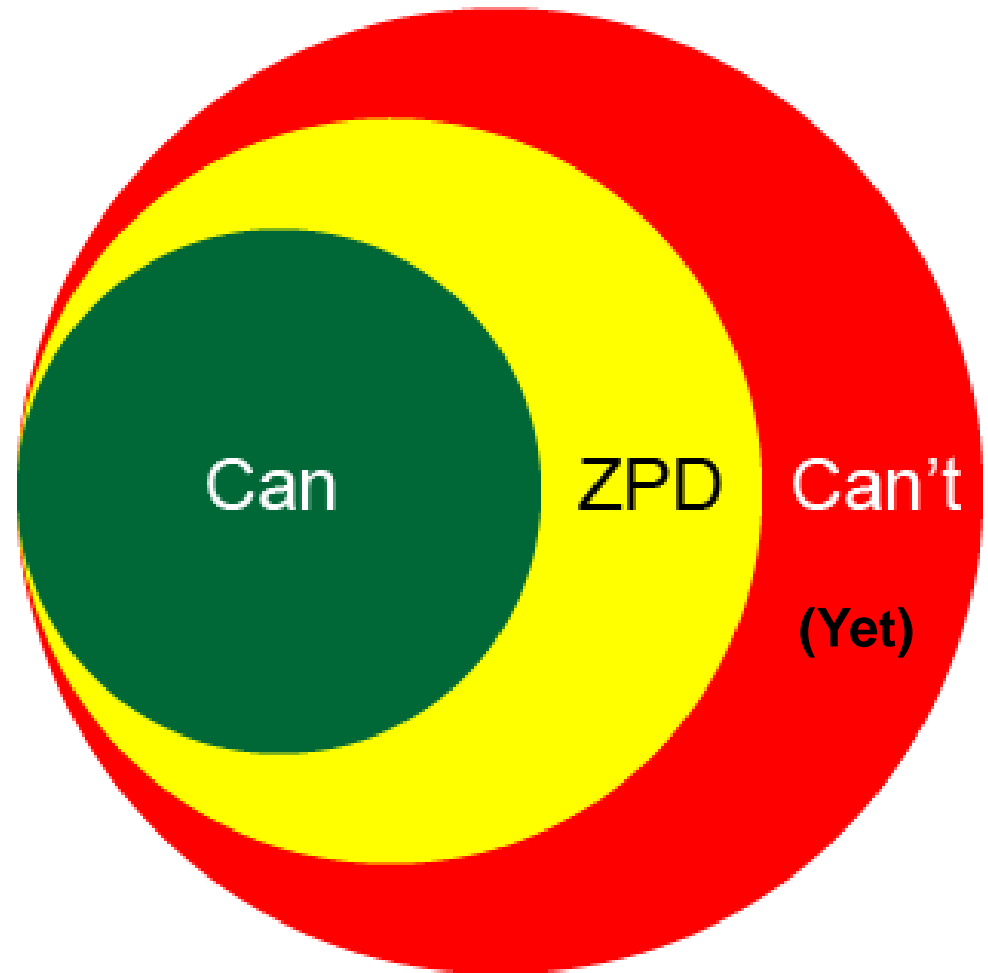
2. Jo

The teacher was really charismatic and enthusiastic and I remember thinking “I want to be that sort of teacher and do that”.



Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

Vygotsky
(1978)



In and outside the ZPD

- Trainees learned more from watching peers or near peers.
- They felt that more experienced teachers' practice was "beyond them".
- Watching a teacher do something which didn't work was a good learning experience and translated into practice.

1. Oliver

Limit of ZPD

But the observations are ... were really useful, yeah. More just in terms of sort of noticing where things have gone wrong and why they've gone wrong. So like we were saying when you watch experienced teachers, you don't really, it's quite hard to say, "oh that's why that happened," because they're so, they're so experienced at doing it they're kind of one step ahead. Whereas with inexperienced teachers I think it's much more, it's much more obvious when something goes wrong, why.



2. Ted

Error engenders confidence.

*One teacher did try and implement it in the next lesson and just **crashed and burned** miserably but then all of us did start doing it and it certainly felt like it worked really well in this lesson ... it was just like a lot of these things on the course, which someone says oh do this and you think that's ridiculous and when you're in the process of doing it in the back of your mind you just don't have the confidence that it's going to go well and so it takes more than one attempt really.*





The greatest
teacher, failure is.

Star Wars VIII (2017)



Impact on practice

- Trainees learn from peer observation in ways that enhance other aspects of a course.
- They don't try to imitate the teacher they observe.
- They are generally able to make sense of what they see in relation to their own practice.
- They notice what they want to notice!

1. Julie

Observation
as part of
whole
experience

And I think there is the kind of danger when you're observing someone that you do, you kind of pick up on all the stages and you think, "well you could have done that and you could have done that." And when you do actually teach you know that you can't think of all those extra things that you could have done but it kind of reinforced all the things in our input sessions and helps us identify that. So yeah, I think it's completely integral to the whole experience really.

2. Oliver

Importance of peer observation

just kind of little techniques for classroom management, they're quite useful and you can't really pick them up any other way. You can't teach them. ... So I think there's definitely stuff that you pick up from observing that you can't in any other way.

Suggestions for teacher education programmes.

- ✓ It's useful.
- ✓ What trainees notice is more complex than an observation task.
- ✓ Acknowledge the Apprenticeship of Observation.
- ✓ Think about the persona of the teacher to observe.
- ✓ "Great" teachers are not always the best examples.
- ✓ Mistakes are a learning opportunity, let trainees see them!
- ✓ Don't set an observation task.
- ✓ Let trainees set their own observation task.



Heroes of the observation!

