REFLECTING IN THE MOMENT: ENGAGING THE OBSERVER AT THE POINT OF OBSERVATION

75 word abstract: The presentation focuses on the area of reflective practice within trainee teacher practicum. The particular focus is on the value of engaging observer teachers more fully and immediately during an observation of teaching practice. There are profound implications in terms of helping the observer to notice the significance of particular events occurring within an observed lesson and engage with the event through immediate ‘in the moment’ commentary.

Long summary: Too many teacher training programs based on training English language teachers ignore what must be regarded as an essential component of any such training i.e. the practicum. In some training programs this component is completely absent, in others it is paid lip service through limited opportunities for micro-teaching and in others it takes the form of an end of course practicum opportunity in which trainee teachers sit in on experienced teachers’ lessons and are occasionally invited to participate as a task-setter or monitor. My point of reference for this paper is the type of course in which the practicum is embedded within the program and the learning is therefore experiential. The Cambridge Certificate for English Language Teaching (CELTA) and the Cambridge Diploma for English Language Teaching (Delta) are both examples of embedded practicum in which trainee teachers are required to plan and deliver lessons throughout the duration of the course. These are observed and commented on extensively by the observing teacher trainer. During these teaching opportunities the non-teaching trainee teachers are required to watch the lesson, take notes, often based on a formal observation task given to them by their teacher trainer, and at the end of the lesson, provide feedback to their colleague. This presentation focuses on a technique used by the trainer within such an observation; simply stated, it involves the trainer posing questions to the observing trainees in the moment, based on a pedagogically significant occurrence or trainee teacher behaviour and resultant learner action, that is of importance and presents as a ‘teachable’ moment. Having employed this technique with many different groups and in differing cultural, linguistic and academic backgrounds, I have found that engaging the observing trainees directly and immediately by drawing their attention to significant teaching moments in this way presents a valuable opportunity to raise awareness and highlight practical demonstrations of an issue that may otherwise only be available as a discussion on an academic level; it has the additional benefit of helping trainees tune in to important teaching moments and become more thoughtful in both noticing and engaging with that moment.
75 word abstract: Do students mull over words, stories, high frequency phrases and sentence structures that they hear and speak during classroom instruction time? Do they use these words, phrases and sentence structures to express themselves in written reflections? This paper presents an analysis and a summary of the impact of listening and speaking experiences in the English language classroom on Economically Weaker Section (EWS) students’ written reflections.

Long summary: Most Economically Weaker Section (EWS) students have little or no exposure to English, and very few opportunities to speak English in their homes and friend circles. The English classroom, be it in a formal school setting or an after school, non formal setting, is the only place where they hear and speak a substantial amount of English. It is true that even in a non formal setting in which the main objectives are to enhance listening and speaking skills, the definition of ‘substantial’ varies from teacher to teacher. Yet in comparison with a traditional setting with its focus on reading, writing, and the drill approach, the non formal English classroom affords these students more listening and speaking experiences, as well as deeper insights into the contexts in which they happen. Twenty eight EWS students learning English in a non formal setting are the focus of this paper. Their listening and speaking experiences come from teacher read alouds, instructions by the teacher/peers to perform tasks, role plays to practice common structures, framing/responding to questions, discussions, and brief presentations. The teacher highlights new vocabulary, phrases and structures that appear in listening tasks, or that she would like them to use in speaking tasks by (1) pre-teaching, (2) scaffolding comprehension in different ways – gestures, facial expressions, use of realia, voice changes, illustrations, (3) encouraging the students to write the new words/phrases/structures that made an impact on them, along with their Hindi meanings and illustrations, (4) conducting word identification and pronunciation drills (5) giving multiple exposures and encouraging the repeated use of new vocabulary/phrases/structures, (6) constructing a word wall as a permanent resource for the students. At the end of class the students do a piece of free writing on any topic, experience, feeling, event, or anything at all of their choice. The only condition is that they write at least two to three sentences in class at the end of every class. The teacher will conduct a baseline test of student writing at the beginning of the research period. Then, over a period of four months, during which the students will attend two classes a week, their written reflections will be tracked in order to study the impact of the vocabulary/ phrases/common structures heard and spoken in class, on their writing. The author expects that the findings of this research will inform the best practices used to teach English to EWS students.
THE IMPACT OF USING EVALUATION CRITERIA ON WRITING PERFORMANCE: A STUDY OF PRE-SERVICE ENGLISH TEACHERS

75 word abstract: This paper examines the usefulness of task specific analytic evaluation criteria as a teaching-learning-reflective tool. 10 pre-service ESL teachers will be given evaluation criteria along with response paper task prompts. The impact of these criteria on task performance will be studied through an analysis of questionnaire responses and classroom discussions. Salient patterns and perceptions of use of evaluation criteria along with pedagogical implications of such ‘evaluative’ scaffolding will be reported.

Long summary: The usefulness of employing evaluation criteria, either analytical or holistic, in the context of testing writing proficiency, is quite well established. It is researched largely from an assessment perspective, for the purposes of establishing inter/intra rater reliability. Such evaluation criteria are also used by teachers in some second language writing classrooms to help them evaluate learner performance reliably and by the discerning teacher to provide feedback. It is rarely used, however, by practicing teachers as a teaching-learning-reflective tool and even if used, hardly documented or researched. The usefulness of scoring criteria is systematically taught in courses on evaluation, but teacher development courses, particularly in the Indian context, rarely provide the space for teachers to learn about it experientially.

The attempt made in this paper is to find out whether analytic task specific evaluation criteria can be used as a tool to aid teacher-as learner-performance. The paper will attempt to answer the following research question: If evaluation criteria are given to ESL teacher-as learners during task execution will it have an impact on their performances?

A group of 10 pre-service teachers enrolled in a course on Language Testing and Assessment will participate in this study. Achievement tests, in the form of response papers, will be used to monitor progress in learning content and, incidentally, the development of writing skills. A set of writing tasks with task-specific evaluation criteria will be given. The criteria will be analytical with descriptions of three levels of performance across three sub-criterion – content-organization-language. This will serve as a checklist for teachers to identify which aspects of content and language have to be attended to while working on a specific task. These detailed task specific descriptors, might enable the teachers to ‘notice’ (Schmidt, 1990, 2010) task requirements with reference to not only each sub-criterion but also level wise differences in performance.

The impact of using such evaluation criteria will be studied through a series of post task completion review questions, questionnaire responses and classroom discussions. The patterns of use of evaluation criteria will be presented both quantitatively and qualitatively. The pedagogical implications of using evaluation criteria as a scaffolding device to improve language performance will be discussed along with the need for such experiential teaching on teacher education programmes.