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Teacher Training

500 ideas
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input
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Beth Melia-Leigh
and Nicholas Northall

Series editor: John Hughes

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10 benefits of peer observation

Another form of lesson observation is peer observation, when teachers observe each other. New teachers have the opportunity to observe each other on a course, and practising teachers can observe their peers in a real-life setting. It is an excellent way to share ideas, pick up new techniques and see how other teachers do things. If your teacher training course includes teaching practice and enough trainees to allow this, it is definitely worth having the trainees observe each other.

1. Reflecting on peers' lessons

Peer observation can be an important part of the reflective cycle (see Unit 31 for more information about reflection and reflective cycles). Reflecting on peers' lessons – as well as their own – can help trainees to develop as reflective practitioners and can open up a useful dialogue between course participants.

2. Development of feedback skills

With practice, trainees tend to get better at providing and receiving sensitive, balanced peer feedback. This might include making constructive suggestions on their peers' teaching, suggesting strategies for improving in weaker areas and responding positively to comments and criticisms made by peers on their own teaching. These skills are likely to prove invaluable later in their teaching careers when they will almost certainly be required to engage in some sort of observation, either as observees or observers.

3. Seeing good habits

Observing peers is an excellent way to develop trainees' understanding of what constitutes good practice and why. Seeing different teaching techniques and activities being executed successfully by another teacher – and observing a positive reaction from learners – can motivate trainees to want to try out such techniques themselves.

4. Seeing bad habits

Conversely, peer observation can also raise awareness of what not to do. Observing when things don't work and, crucially, analysing why, can lead to development for both for the observee and the observer.

5. Observing the learners



Peer observation provides a good opportunity for course participants to observe the learner group and get to know them better. This can provide insight into class dynamics and the make-up of the group, their interests and learning preferences as well as individual strengths and weaknesses. All of this information will be useful when it comes to planning further lessons and may also be necessary in order to complete written assignments. For more on written assignments, see Unit 37. For an example observation form, see page 237 of the Appendix.

6. Focusing on their own areas for improvement



In order for observers to learn from the experience, encourage the observing trainees to focus on how the observation can help them to improve their own teaching. By thinking about their own action points (for example, giving clear instructions), they can see how their colleague manages this area of teaching (e.g. by using imperatives) and then incorporate these techniques into their own teaching to aid their development. For an example observation task you could use for this purpose, see page 238.

7. Getting a realistic model

For pre-service teachers, peer observation may be perceived as more meaningful and tangible than observing experienced teachers who, at this stage, may have teaching skills and knowledge far beyond anything the trainee can imagine. Indeed, this could be seen as demotivating for novice teachers. Instead, observing colleagues who are at a similar level and stage in their teaching journey gives pre-service trainees a more realistic model to follow.

8. Having plenty to discuss after the lesson



Peer observations can be used to structure the post-lesson discussion, and can be a useful way to bring all observers into the discussion. If trainees know they are going to be asked to draw on their observations in group feedback after the lesson, they are more likely to engage with the process and make meaningful notes. See page 239 for a peer observation task sheet that observers can complete during the lesson. Alternatively, they could use some of the ideas in Unit 27.

9. A necessary component of some courses

Peer observation may be a necessary element of some courses, either because it forms part of the assessment or because it is one of the learning outcomes. In such cases, trainees may be required to draw on their observations in order to inform their own practice, to participate in peer feedback or to reflect on the experience in writing, for an assignment or in the form of a reflective journal (see Unit 37 for more on written tasks).

10. Providing another pair of eyes

When delivering a lesson, it can be difficult to take in objectively what is happening around you. As a result, it can be all too easy for teachers (inexperienced or otherwise) to fail to notice key strengths and weaknesses in their own practice. Another pair of eyes can often provide insight and give a different perspective. As long as there is a degree of trust, an observer can notice things that the teacher may fail to, simply because they are caught up in the moment.

Unit 30.5: Observing the learners

The aim of this observation task is for you to get to know the learners better, both in terms of their language ability and their personality. As you observe, make some notes in the table about the learners.

Name	Nationality	Strengths	Areas to improve	Interaction in class

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Unit 30.6: Focusing on their own areas for improvement

Looking back at your action points from your teaching practice feedback and tutorials, choose at least three aspects of classroom teaching which you still need to work on.

As you watch the lesson, complete the table below, making notes on how the teacher deals with this aspect of teaching and what you could incorporate into your own teaching.

Aspect of teaching	How does the teacher deal with this in the lesson?	What could you incorporate into your own teaching to help you improve your practice?

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Unit 30.8: Having plenty to discuss after the lesson

Peer observation task

As you observe your peers, make some notes about the following areas:

Name of teacher:	Name of observer:
Achievement of aims	
Teacher's rapport with the learners	
Staging of instructions	
Feedback on tasks	
Pace and timing	
Monitoring	
Other	

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Unit 30.8

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New from ETpedia

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Authors: Beth Melia-Leigh and Nicholas Northall

Series Editor: John Hughes

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ETpedia Teacher Training provides both new and more experienced teacher trainers working in a variety of different contexts with pointers, ideas and activities for supporting both pre- and in-service teachers. Each unit of 10 tips makes this resource easy to use and will aid or inspire you whether you are dipping in for a quick idea or looking for more comprehensive guidance.

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3. Make your training more engaging
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This resource also contains printable worksheets and space to write your own tips. For more information, visit www.myetpedia.com

About the authors

Beth Melia-Leigh and **Nicholas Northall** have a wealth of experience of working with both entry level and practising teachers in a range of different contexts. They currently work on a variety of accredited teacher training courses, both face-to-face and online, as well as undergraduate and postgraduate TESOL modules at the University of Sheffield. They also have experience of designing and delivering bespoke teacher training and train-the-trainer courses. Given the lack of support available for teacher trainers, *ETpedia Teacher Training* offers a much-needed collection of tips and advice which the busy teacher trainer can easily and conveniently access.



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