EXPLORING PEER OBSERVATION,

REFLECTIVE PRACTICE AND

TACIT KNOWLEDGE

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ABSTRACT

This research project investigated and compared two different approaches to peer observation, the first highlighting the role of the observee as learner and the second the observer as learner. It then considered whether the latter would prove to be more beneficial with regards to reflective practice and professional development.

Six teachers in a UAE college of Higher Education were interviewed prior to and after the observations in which they took part to ascertain their feelings and attitude to peer observation and whether the experience influenced their perception of the process.

The study found that the teachers' approach did not differ for the first and second observations, namely they focused on what they could gain from both observations. However, it found that a number of factors are crucial to the success of a peer observation process in terms of reflective practice and professional development, specifically the relationship between the two teachers involved, their own attitude to peer observation as means of reflective practice and professional development and a clear focus for observing when embarking on such a scheme.

I am indebted to the six teachers who took part in this study for their time, understanding and enthusiasm. I sincerely hope they gained something of value from their role in this study.

I am also most grateful to my tutor, Dr Mick Randall, for his continued support and advice.

Finally, my sincere thanks to my husband, John, for his patience and encouragement.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Rationale

The researcher chose to investigate peer observation after having experienced both evaluative and peer observation some months previously. On comparing the benefits and drawbacks of both she concluded that peer observation had the potential for promoting professional development in a way that observation for appraisal purposes did not. In particular, her feeling was that the experience of observing was more conducive to promoting reflective practice since it allows time to observe, reflect and draw one's own conclusion whereas the anxiety she felt whilst receiving feedback prevented the opportunity for reflection. Moreover, and perhaps this is one of the major weaknesses of feedback in an appraisal situation, the researcher did not agree with her observer's choice of feedback since she felt he addressed rather superficial aspects of her teaching. Although his comments were positive and encouraging they did not concern areas she wished to develop herself.

The act of observing allows one to choose what to reflect on whereas the points raised in a feedback session are at the discretion of the person giving feedback and therefore imposed on the recipient. As Richardson (2000) states

> "In peer observation, teachers have the freedom to observe and take away from the observation anything they consider fruitful and discard what they deem distracting. Teachers tend to take working on improving instruction more seriously when they are allowed to determine the proper course of action rather than having it dictated to them." (p15)

This alternative approach to peer observation has already been explored by Cosh (1998) who argues for,

> "a more active and reflective model, where the focus is less on the observed and more on the active self-development of the observer." (171)

The researcher's comparison of the two types of observation led her to reflect on how peer observation could become a valuable tool for professional development; however the feedback session remained an ambiguous area. As long as teachers give feedback to a peer about their teaching the evaluative element remains since no matter how one tries to remain objective, one can not avoid drawing on one's own value system. The researcher felt therefore that if the element of evaluation was removed the feedback session could be transformed into a true discussion resulting in a more positive experience for both teachers involved. However, in order to determine whether the modification of the feedback session would be effective it was necessary to ask the participants to experience and compare both approaches. The initial aim of the study, therefore, was to ask six teachers to experience and compare two approaches to peer observation; the first would include a feedback session during which the observer would comment on the observee's teaching whilst the second would include a feedback session during which the observer would discuss what s/he had learnt or gained from the observee's teaching. The two approaches and the study are discussed in greater detail below in Chapter 4.

1.2 Background to the Study - The Institutional Environment

The educational institute where the study took place is part of a nationwide group of colleges[1] which offer free higher education to Emirati post high

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[1] There are fourteen colleges in the group, six exclusively for women, six for men, one which provides corporate training and one further college which has separate facilities for men and women.

school students. Three programmes are proposed in this college, Diploma, Higher Diploma and Bachelor of Education. The teachers taking part in the study taught on either the Diploma Foundations or Higher Diploma programmes. At the time of the study there were approximately 1900 students enrolled in the college.

There are a variety of nationalities employed at the college; however the majority of the English teaching faculty are first language speakers of English. The educational system in the UAE dates back to the early seventies and since the establishment of the first schools it has relied heavily on non-Emirati teaching staff.

One of the major differences between an educational establishment in the country of origin of the six participants and the UAE is the transience of faculty. Teachers are employed on a three year contract renewal of which is not automatic, and the months leading up to renewal cause a certain amount of uncertainty amongst the teaching staff since they are informed of management's decision to renew or terminate their contract six months before its expiry. Although current economic conditions do not guarantee a teaching position for life anywhere in the world there is a certain amount of additional instability in the UAE since cultural factors, internal politics and management's view of his or her professional abilities all play a role in determining whether a teacher retains his or her position.   All teachers are evaluated by the students and by management; the former complete an on-line survey on aspects of a teacher's performance and achievement in the classroom whilst the latter evaluate a teacher by means of observation, the frequency of which is determined by how near a teacher is to renewal of contract. It is not uncommon for a teacher to be observed three times in the year leading up to contract renewal. It is clear therefore that observation for appraisal purposes is a substantial determining factor in whether a teacher's contract is renewed or terminated.   Upon non-renewal teachers therefore

must seek employment elsewhere which may well entail changing countries. Obviously, this puts a great strain on teachers in the months leading up to contract expiry as they must consider these eventualities.   Given the determining role played by observation for evaluative purposes in this situation it is possible that it is viewed with a certain amount of apprehension and unease which could then impact on a teacher's perception of peer observation.   The following chapter addresses the subject of the study, peer observation, and the type of observation the participants had previously experienced to determine whether and how these other types of observation influence teachers' attitudes and feelings towards peer observation.

CHAPTER 2
PEER OBSERVATION

Although classroom observation is a recognised form of professional development in many institutions, it remains an area of ambiguity and concern to many of those who experience it. Some teachers have uncertainties about its aims, its usefulness, and their own role within the process. Nevertheless, many supporters believe that it is invaluable in promoting reflective practice and self-development despite teachers' perceptions of and reservations about the process. For example, Lam (2001) carried out a study in Hong Kong of 2400 teachers and their opinion of classroom observation and found that

> "… although classroom observation is seen as an indispensable component in both staff development and appraisal, it is not well received by teachers in general." (p162)

Further findings in the same study revealed that most teachers preferred a peer observation approach since it favoured development rather than appraisal.

> "The results of the present study reveal that educators in Hong Kong wish for a peer-coaching model of classroom observation." (p171)

Clearly, the resistance felt by some teachers towards the presence of an observer in their classroom acts as a barrier to the potential benefits and self development classroom observation can offer. One of the main aims of this study is to explore teacher beliefs and perceptions about the observation process and how they impact on their opportunities for reflection and professional development. This chapter will also examine the wider field of classroom observation and explore teachers' experiences of classroom observation and how they influence their perceptions of the subject of this study, peer observation.

The three stages of observation are outlined below, followed by a brief discussion of the most widespread practices of observation. Finally, peer observation itself is examined with a discussion of some of the arguments for and against existing models.

2.1 Stages of Observation

Whether for formative or summative purposes, there are generally three stages in the observation process, pre-observation meeting, the observation and feedback. This three-stage process is advocated by many researchers (see for example, Martin & Double 1998, p165, MacKinnon 2001) since it allows for a cycle of continuous professional development.

Diagram 1

Cycle of observation and continuous professional development[2]

Pre-observation meeting

Reflective Practice and
implementation of feedback

Observation

Feedback session
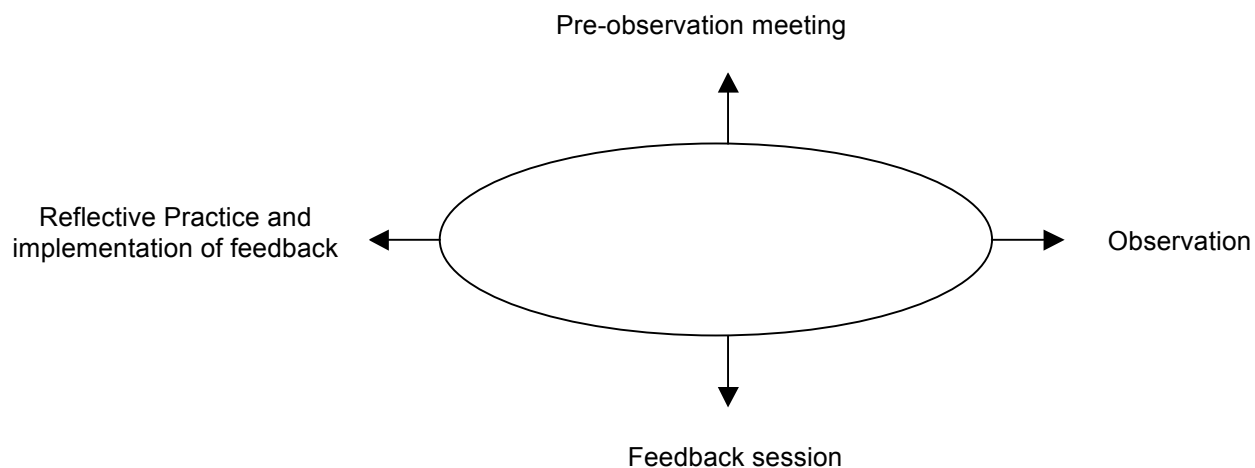
2.1.1 Pre-Observation Meeting

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[2] Adapted from Bell, LTSN Generic Centre, Peer Observation of Teaching in Australia, 2002.

The aims of the pre-observation meeting are firstly to give the observee the opportunity to explain his or her teaching objectives and reasons for choosing that particular lesson. As Martin & Double (1998) state

> "The observer must be clear about the teaching programme so far, the learning intentions for that particular session and the teaching strategies to be adopted." (p163)

Although some believe that the pre-observation meeting is an optional stage, it has the benefit of allowing the observer to see the wider picture from the outset, that of the lesson within the teaching objectives of the programme. The observee may also at this point give the observer a lesson plan which may be referred to during the observation.

Secondly, the etiquette of the observation should be defined, where the observer sits, time of arrival and departure, whether s/he should participate in any way and other such issues. Thirdly, the focus of the lesson may be determined with the teacher indicating to the observer whether s/he would like any particular area or classroom behaviour to be attended to. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, the pre-observation meeting is the occasion for the observer and the teacher to establish a relationship of trust and confidence.

2.1.2 Observation

If all of the above are satisfactorily discussed beforehand the observation itself should be fairly straightforward. The observer may want to take general notes, use an observation tool or checklist, whatever s/he decides will depend on the focus of the lesson. The notes taken will be used as a starting point for the feedback so it is important that they reflect the observer's impression of the lesson. If the aim of the observation is to obtain an overall picture of the lesson then it is important to devise a method which allows this. Some researchers advocate dividing the notepaper, one side for the teacher and one for the students, others consider taking notes at regular intervals can give

a fair overall picture of the lesson, whatever is decided researchers agree that a focus is essential as an observer can be easily distracted by any number of events that take place inside or outside of the classroom. Richards and Lockhart (1996) state that

> "The value of the observation is increased if the observer knows what to look for." (p24)

Obviously, what to look for is determined by the reason for the observation and the observer's skill. If the observation is for evaluative purposes the observer is likely to be a supervisor and his or her agenda may well be set by the educational establishment; if it is for developmental purposes many educators advocate establishing the focus beforehand, in discussion with the observee. Richards and Lockhart (1996) advise that

> "… giving the observer a task, such as collecting information on student participation patterns during a lesson provides a focus for the observer and collects useful information for the teacher." (p24)

In addition, the information obtained may be a suitable starting point for the subsequent feedback session.

2.1.3 Feedback

The feedback is generally led by the observer but the input of the observee is equally as important in making the experience as positive and beneficial as possible for both parties. Some educators advise giving the teacher an opportunity to state their impressions of the lesson at the beginning of the feedback session, indicating that his or her input is equally as valuable and allowing him or her to retain some control over the proceedings. Strengths should be emphasised and built upon with attention paid to the learning achieved. Martin & Double (1998) advise that observers should

"Take time to acknowledge and praise areas of evident competence and try to develop an understanding of why a particular situation was perceived to have produced a valuable learning experience." (p164)

Weaknesses are discussed with a possible plan for trying new techniques and methods but these improvements should be fair and achievable. However this is carried out the aim is to give the observee the opportunity to analyse and reflect on the lesson constructively. The feedback should be given in a non-judgemental manner with the prime objective being the personal and professional development of the observee. Gosling (2000) states that

"In such a meeting there is a joint responsibility to keep the feedback focused and constructive, and to emphasise that the role of the observer is not to be a judge, supervisor or superior, but to encourage reflection on the lesson observed." (no page number)

The observer should bear in mind that conclusions may only extend to the lesson observed and not to any wider context. In addition, the presence of a third party in the inner sanctuary of a classroom can affect both the behaviour of the teacher and the students and this should be taken into account when discussing the lesson.

One of the most sensitive areas to deal with in peer observation is the giving of feedback. Since this is such a delicate area it could be suggested that feedback be eliminated altogether to avoid any possibility of creating tension or negative feelings between peers and colleagues. However, if feedback is not given teachers may question why they have been observed or have observed another teacher. Brinko (1993) in a review of the literature published on the subject outlines a summary of guidelines which indicate how to optimise the giving of feedback. She states that in order for it to be most effective feedback should be accurate, concrete, specific and focused and

given by an individual who is knowledgeable, trustworthy and of less or equal status. Interestingly, she refers to a study carried out by Tuckman and Oliver (1968) which suggests that feedback given by a supervisor often produces the opposite effect of that intended. In addition, it should be given as quickly as possible after the observation and in a manner which is sensitive to each individual.

2.2 Established models of observation

The participants of this study had all been observed or observed others during their teaching career; the following discussion will therefore focus on the types of observation participants had already experienced, namely, observation for pre-service teachers, observation for appraisal and peer observation.

2.2.1 Observation for Pre-Service Teachers

Most EFL teachers have obtained EFL certification from one of the international bodies offering such training and an integral component of the programme is for student teachers to be observed by teacher trainers. For example, the CELTA[3], delivered by the University of Cambridge incorporates six hours of teaching practice for the trainee to be observed by the trainer. Student teachers then have the opportunity to discuss their strengths, weaknesses and areas of improvement with their teacher trainers. The teaching practice is assessed and therefore subject to a certain amount of evaluation, however most CELTA trained teachers regard the teaching practice as highly beneficial and rewarding despite any anxiety felt during the practice. This is most certainly because of their role during the training, that of a student, learning from more experienced practitioners. Student teachers also observe experienced teachers, generally the teacher trainers, which allows them to see first hand how an experienced teacher operates, how the planning is implemented and how improvisation is integrated into the lesson.

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[3] Certificate of English Language Teaching to Adults.

Moreover, many trainers in such training centres are sensitive to the developmental needs of young trainees, many of whom may have just graduated. The intensive nature of these courses allows trainees and trainers to form a closer relationship than that which may be found in universities and colleges which contributes to a more positive learning experience. However, the understanding remains that the trainee is there to learn from the trainer. As Randall and Thornton (2001) state

> "This relationship will be recognised, at least tacitly, by both parties; although the tutor may well take a more 'reflective approach' to the teaching, both parties will acknowledge the greater experience of the tutor." (p17)

The positive impact of observation for training is evident: it is an integral, developmental element of a training process during which teachers acquire knowledge and experience and it is therefore an essential starting block in the progression from novice teacher to competent teacher and subsequently to experienced teacher. Consequently, this type of observation is regarded by most teachers as a necessary and positive stage in their early career, as a trainee at International House, Barcelona states

> "The feedback (on the teaching practice) was clear and useful and allowed me to focus in on areas of difficulty." (2007, IH Barcelona website)

2.2.2 Observation for Appraisal

In the field of education there currently exist two approaches to classroom observation appraisal. The first is that the observed teacher is assessed to determine whether his or her teaching performance is in line with defined standards; s/he may also be held accountable for certain performance indicators, targets and competences in the classroom, for example the appraisal may be linked to how well students perform on a particular

examination. The second is for developmental purposes in which the strengths and weaknesses of a teacher are observed, assessed, analysed and developed to promote learning within the classroom. To summarise, one could say that the former is summative and the latter is formative.

Classroom appraisal in the United Kingdom has been standard practice since 1991[4] and, until recently, the aims were stated as,

> "… to assist in the professional development of teachers and at the same time improve the management of schools." (Bartlett, 1998, p479)

However, educators have questioned whether these two processes are compatible, stating that a teacher's developmental needs do not necessarily correspond to the school's overall management objectives. Furthermore, it would appear that although appraisal may be introduced for developmental aims but is, in fact, intended for evaluative and monitoring purposes.

> "The history of teacher appraisal seems to follow a pattern identified by Apple (1988) whereby a potentially controlling mechanism may be introduced under the guise of professional development. Once in place its nature may be changed radically." (Bartlett, 1999, p480)

The paradox is that many institutions attempt to integrate the two into one approach which many educators say simply does not work.

> "Appraisal must be either about development or about judgement. It must be either formative or summative. It cannot be both." (Powney, 1991, p84, quoted in Bennett, 1999, p414)

The debate between educators and the government is indicative of the confusion that has existed for some time over the purposes of classroom observation for appraisal. According to Bartlett (1998, p 481) teachers have

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[4] Classroom observation for appraisal purposes has been obligatory for all teachers in primary and secondary education since 1991 following Department of Education Regulations.

become distrustful of government and/or senior management stated intentions, that of professional development and they assume their real intentions to be that of holding teachers increasing more responsible for students' performance. Obviously, this impacts not only on teachers but also on collegial relationships as those appraising find themselves in an evaluative role. Moreover, teachers question the value of the process itself believing the aspect of professional development to be allocated a secondary role.

Despite this empirical research suggests that a developmental approach can result in positive benefits both for appraisees and appraisers, as well as senior management. (see Bartlett, 1998 and Kyriacou 1997). However, due to the perceived failure of schools to implement it to government standards, measures have now been introduced to render it compulsory and centrally controlled as well as giving it a more evaluative perspective. The Education (School Teacher Performance Management) (England) Regulations 2006, due to come into force on 1st September 2007, gives the most recent government guidelines on teacher appraisal. The "Performance Management Policy" is drawn up by the governors of individual schools but it is the head teacher's responsibility to implement it. Briefly, the aims of the policy are to ensure 'school improvement, school self-evaluation and school development planning. (p6)" The teacher and 'reviewer' draw up a plan, which lasts a 'cycle' of one year and which comprises the teacher's objectives, the timescale, training and development needs as well as a 'classroom observation protocol'. The Performance Management Policy paragraph 17 (2) (b) states that the classroom observation 'arrangements' shall

> "subject to paragraph (3), specify any particular aspects of the reviewee's teaching performance that will be assessed during each observation." (p9)

This however does not mean that only those specified aspects of performance of teaching will be assessed, the teacher may also be assessed

on any other factor "for the purposes of these Regulations" (p9). Moreover, if any part of a teacher's classroom performance is deemed unsatisfactory,

> "Where evidence emerges which gives rise to concern about the reviewee's teaching performance…" (p9)

additional observations, over and above the standard three per year, are carried out.

Although the Performance Management Policy is an assessment plan, classroom observation plays a central role in this assessment. Clearly, this has implications for teachers especially since the results of appraisals are now linked to salary increments (p6) and are recorded on a teacher's record for six years (p10). As a result, it is reasonable to suggest that teachers may become anxious about their performance, given the significance of not meeting government guidelines.

Indeed, past research in other areas of education in other parts of the world has found that this type of evaluation can evoke in teachers a range of emotions from highly distressing to confidence building. Wang & Day (2001) found in a study of a group of ESL teachers following a TESOL programme that both novice and experienced teachers experienced such feelings as "nerve-wracking", "put-on-the-best-show" and "get-used-to-it". They attributed this to not knowing what their supervisor was looking for, lack of feedback, lack of opportunity to explain their teaching aims prior to the observed lesson and the "invasive" presence of the observer which affected the teacher and students alike. The majority of observations were reported to be stressful and intimidating and although there was one report of a positive experience this was attributed to the supervisor's skill at making the observee feel at ease.

Gebhard (1990) in his discussion of six "models of supervision" points out some of the shortcomings of "directive supervision", which is the type of

evaluation that many teachers have been subject to throughout their careers. In brief, it consists of a supervisor visiting a teacher's classroom, observing how s/he teaches and subsequently suggesting improvements which coincide with the supervisor's idea of 'good teaching'. It is therefore the supervisor who dictates the right kind of teaching which can and often does result in resentment on the part of the teacher and subsequently a lack of confidence and reluctance to try out new ideas or take risks in the classroom. Although this is generally something that teachers experience in the early stages of their careers it can affect them for many years and as Faneslow (1990) highlights even if the supervisor is trying to be helpful the very act of being told what to do and how to do it suppresses a teacher's desire to explore, analyse, make decisions and take responsibility for their own teaching.

For those teachers who have experienced such uncomfortable and negative feelings during observation it is no surprise therefore that they should be wary of any type of intrusion into their classroom, whatever the overall objective. Richardson (2000), in a study designed to improved teaching methods in his teaching establishment, found that requests to visit another teacher's classroom were met with suspicion and mistrust.

> "The typical responses I received were the flat-out rejections, the uninviting hums and haws followed by excuses, the sceptical cocked eyebrows, or the plastic reception smiles, a bold attempt at diplomacy". (p10)

He attributes this to teachers' fear of being judged since any kind of observation is synonymous with evaluation.

> "It seems it's not so much a matter of being watched that causes the uneasiness about peer observation, but the fear of being evaluated." (p11)

To combat these negative elements many educators promote a more developmental approach to observation by a supervisor. Gebhard (1990), proposes five other models of supervision, alternative, collaborative, nondirective, creative and self-help-exploration[5]. Each has a different focus but the objective is the same: to move the responsibility for a teacher's development onto his or her own shoulders using varying strategies such as offering alternatives of a particular aspect of teaching, encouraging the teacher to explain his or her ideas and objectives or 'visiting' other teachers' classrooms. However, the fact remains that the teacher is observed by an individual of higher rank whose primary responsibility is to ensure that observation is a positive process all the while ensuring that any teaching behaviours requiring improvement are addressed. Clearly, a skilful, sensitive and understanding person is required for such a role and it would be naïve to suppose that this can be achieved without training, experience and a positive attitude. It is often the case, however, that many institutes simply do not have the time or resources to equip their managers or supervisors with the skills to perform such tasks. Furthermore, it is often the case that young EFL teachers begin their careers in such institutes and observation for appraisal purposes may be implemented purely because the director of the institute believes it is good practice but does not ensure that it is done so according to the developmental principles discussed.

The institute in this study requires that supervisors employ a checklist of twenty-nine categories covering the areas of "quality of class and student behavior management", "quality of the instructional process" and "quality of communication". The teacher is assessed on a four point scale with one equating to unsatisfactory and four excellent. The observation is carried out by a supervisor who may or may not teach the subject being observed. The requirement to make a decision or a judgement about teacher competencies on such a scale indicates that this model is highly evaluative, especially since the results of the observation are instrumental in the teacher having their

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[5] Adapted from Gebhard (1990) p156.

contract renewed or terminated. In addition, some might question the judgement of a supervisor who trained as a Mathematics or Business teacher as an observer in an EFL classroom.

At the institute where the study took place all six teachers had been observed for evaluation purposes several times and it is clear that they were all aware of the impact of a negative evaluation. How this affected their view of peer observation is discussed in detail in the findings of this study, however it is reasonable to suggest, given the findings from research in the United Kingdom and the USA discussed above, that such an evaluative model could not fail to impact on their attitudes and feelings towards any form of observation.

2.2.3 Peer Observation

Richards (2005) defines peer observation as

> "a teacher or other observer closely watching and monitoring a language lesson or part of a lesson in order to gain an understanding of some aspect of teaching." (p85)

It differs therefore from evaluative observation in that the focus is on a desire to understand the teaching methods, techniques and style of a particular teacher. There is, in theory, no element of judgement or appraisal and the observation itself is considered to be a catalyst for discussion, understanding, collaboration and ultimately, improvement of the teaching process and the self-development of the teacher being observed. The role of the observer is crucial in that s/he can see classroom behaviours that are not visible to the teacher and this second pair of eyes can perceive that which is hidden from the teacher. Sandy (2006) describes a lesson during which he thought his Japanese students were talking about him. On asking a colleague to observe this situation he found that they were in fact discussing how to approach the task they had been set. It is not possible for a teacher to attend to each

individual student and aspect of their behaviour simultaneously so it is inevitable that much of what goes on in the classroom does so without the teacher being aware of it. The understanding of one's own actions, their impact and consequences are essential for reflective practice and so one of the reasons peer observation can be effective is to allow an extra window into what is happening in the classroom.

Peer observation is widely regarded as a tool for professional development which facilitates the promotion and sharing of reflective practice amongst professionals.

> "At its best, the peer observation of teaching is a process that encourages reflection on teaching practice, identifies developmental needs, and fosters debate and dissemination around best practice." (Hammersley-Fletcher & Ormond, 2005, p213)

The reflection that is hopefully achieved will lead to an examination or re-examination, on an individual or collective basis, of current practice and teaching methods, thereby improving the efficiency and effectiveness of a teacher in the classroom. As Hammersely-Fletcher and Orsmond (2005) state

> "…reflective practitioners are those who use experiences as opportunities to consider both their philosophy and their practice." (p214)

Practically, this means that a teacher must examine and analyse what s/he does in the classroom, decompose it, analyse it, subject it to scrutiny and finally understand why s/he does something. Secondly, s/he must determine whether his or her practice or methods can be improved and the cost of any improvement.

Researchers and educators (Gosling 2000, Richards 2005) advise that peer observation should follow the same three stages as observation for appraisal purposes, (outlined above). Peer observation therefore retains the stage during which a teacher is watched by a colleague and the degree of explicitness of any evaluative aspect is dependent on the observer. However, even if the aim of the observation is overtly developmental it is difficult to pinpoint the moment at which an observer passes from observation to evaluation. Even a moment of comparison with one's own teaching involves evaluation.

Moreover, no matter how much confidence and trust one has in a colleague it is impossible to deny that being observed exposes us to others, our actions, our reactions, how we interact with other human beings are placed under scrutiny and for many it can be a highly unnerving experience. Although there may be no material risk associated with peer observation, such as salary increases or retention of employment, there is a real risk of loss of self-esteem or face which can affect negatively not only the person being observed but also the observer.

Hammersley-Fletcher & Ormond (2005), in a study of teachers' views on peer observation found a number of areas for concern: anxiety over giving and receiving feedback, the possibility of collegial relationships being damaged, not knowing what was required of them and the time involved in the process were all areas perceived by teachers to present difficulties. However, one teacher did acknowledge that, in time, peer observation could be effective and another that it could lead to improved relationships with colleagues they previously had little contact with.

Cosh (1998) suggests that many teachers are

> "… unsure over whether the purpose of peer observation is to learn or to assess." (p171)

She also questions whether one teacher has the right to make judgements of another since

> "Given the subjective nature of teaching, the ill-defined and constantly shifting nature of notions of good teaching, different learner preferences and the lack of any proof of how students learn most successfully, it seems that none of us are qualified to make judgements on the teaching of our peers, and that our judgements are, therefore, of questionable value to anyone other than ourselves." (p172)

On this point Blackmore (2005) highlights a lack of consistency between observers due to each teacher's individual and personal view of what constitutes good teaching and Hammersley-Fletcher's (2005) findings indicate that the process of reflective practice is 'unstructured."

Jarzabkowski & Bone (1998) also question whether peer observation is an adequate tool for "…evaluating the quality of teaching." (p180) The significant point they make is that the arbitrary nature of such studies does not guarantee validity.

In UK institutes of higher education, following an initiative by the Quality Assurance Agency in 1995, peer observation or peer review has become a means of assessing quality of teaching, through developmental and evaluating approaches[6].   Many universities (Essex, Reading, Nottingham, Nottingham Trent) have carried out peer observation schemes and consequently published guidelines and recommendations based on their findings.

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[6] [6]The Quality Assurance Agency (2000) now stipulates that "Subject providers must demonstrate how the teaching delivered by their staff leads to learning by their students." Quoted in Blackmore (2005).

In one university Blackmore (2005) carried out an evaluation of the process and found that younger members of staff tended to benefit most from the experience and attributed this to the fact that they were still on a "learning curve". Recent positive experiences on EFL courses could also contribute to their more constructive attitude towards observation. More experienced faculty members, on the other hand, "endured" the experience; she concludes

> "Interviews with staff aimed at determining the impact of peer appraisal on teaching quality showed that there had not been any wholesale improvements evidenced or perceived by the teaching staff, although it was recognised by some that it did encourage reflective practice." (p230)

It appears therefore that, for some, peer observation can be a delicate, sensitive area especially concerning teachers' attitudes to the process and whether peer observation constitutes a valid means of assessing good practice in teaching. Nevertheless, many researchers and educators remain convinced that the benefits compensate for any negative issues. Martin & Double (1998) implemented a pilot peer observation scheme which produced varied teacher reactions. Some found the experience of being observed and observing positive and rewarding whilst others had strong reservations about its usefulness. However, they conclude that

> "The positive feedback from the staff who took part outweighed the evident difficulties and a permanent scheme has now been adopted by the department." (p167)

Slade (2002) reports a study of over 400 staff at Nottingham Trent University. The aims of this study were to

> "… encourage reflective practice, and to identity and share existing good practice across the university." (p1)

This particular study was reported to be highly successful, as Slade (2002) summarises

> "Feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with benefits exceeding expectations. Peer observation at Nottingham Trent did encourage reflective practice,…" (p3)

Other educators and researchers have found that changing the focus of the observation can make it a more positive experience all round; for the observer since s/he benefits from seeing a colleague in action, and less threatening for the observee since any element of judgement is removed.

Showers & Joyce (1996) experience of setting up peer coaching schemes led them to "redefine" the role of observer and observee,

> "the one teaching is the "coach", and the one observing is the "coached"." (p15)

The aim of these researchers is to eliminate any element that may have a negative or opposite from intended effect. For example, Showers & Joyce (1996) also decided to eliminate the feedback session stating that

> "When teachers try to give one another feedback, collaborative activity tends to disintegrate." (p15)

Cosh (1998) also advocates that the onus for self-development should be on the observer observing for his or her own benefit. However, she maintains that the feedback session should be retained,

> "…as along as the emphasis is always on what the observer has learnt or decided to think about". (p175)

Faneslow (1990) suggests that observing others can encourage a teacher to re-evaluate his or her own teaching,

"Whereas the usual aim of observation and supervision is to help or evaluate the person being seen, the aim I propose is self-exploration – seeing one's own teaching differently." (p183)

However one defines peer observation, it is clear that the design of such a scheme should take into account its objectives and the circumstances in which it will be carried out.   As the researchers above highlight it can vary in its structure according to who is going to employ it, the reasons for its implementation, the anticipated outcomes and the institutional environment. Researchers do all agree, however, that one of the major aims of peer observation is to achieve professional development through structured and analytic reflective practice and it is this objective that is discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3

REFLECTIVE PRACTICE AND TACIT KNOWLEDGE

The previous chapter discussed the procedures and implementation of peer observation along with other forms of classroom observation and their potential related effects on the participants. This chapter will examine the ultimate aims of the process of peer observation, reflective practice and professional development of both observer and observee and within this the role played by tacit knowledge.

Generally accepted definitions of reflection include terms such as self-inquiry, knowledge of oneself, critical analysis of ones' teaching and why we do something rather than how. Sternburg & Horvath (1995) state that reflection is

> "… typically defined as continuous learning through experience." (p13)

while Schon (1983, 1987) defines two kinds of reflection which are characterised by the situation in which they take place, 'reflection-in-action' and 'reflection-on-action', the former taking place in real time during a particular action or incident and the latter being consideration of an event retrospectively. Eraut (2003) defines the two further, the 'reflection-in-action' taking place within a defined period of time with little time for conscious reflection

> "… a rapid reading of the situation and equally rapid response in an intuitive mode…" (p2)

For Eraut this type of reflection is strongly linked to a practitioner's

> "prior experience of similar situations and working with the same people." (p2)

The second type of reflection, 'reflection-on-action', involves a more conscious process and is typically used in "problem solving situations". (Eraut 2003, p2) while Leitch and Day (2000) give their definition as,

> "Reflection-on-action, on the other hand, is viewed as teachers' thoughtful consideration and retrospective analysis of their performance in order to gain knowledge from experience." (p180)

However these definitions do not explain how reflection becomes reflective practice. Does 'practice' entail 'doing'? If so, how does reflection become action? Many educators believe that conditions can be created for the promotion of reflective practice, for example Richards & Lockhart (1996) support the use of journal writing, peer observation and action research while Wallace (1991) suggests using diaries, narratives, videos and recording amongst many other methods and Bartlett (1990) and Bailey (1990) discuss the benefits of keeping a daily journal. The choice of method depends largely on the focus of the reflection. For example, should a teacher wish to examine his or her attitude towards a group of students, a diary may well prove useful and enlightening.

However, it should be borne in mind that the outcome of any reflective practice may differ from one individual to another since it concerns a personal and, sometimes, solitary process. Should an individual opt for collaborative reflective practice it should also be kept in mind that any retelling or sharing of a reflective episode would open it up to change depending on who the listener is, the focus of the reflection and the rationale for retelling.

Kuit, Reay & Freeman (2001), in an attempt to 'develop methods of reflective practice' along with tools for its implementation, found that definitions given for a reflective teacher described qualities of a good teacher rather than reflective practice. However, there is very obviously a problem with this since, as Ofman (2000) points out, qualities such as empathy, creativity and

understanding are qualities of a person, whereas competencies such as classroom management and the ability to identity learning styles can be acquired through experience and reflective practice. Kuit, Reay & Freeman (2001) finally identified a set of 'tools' designed to encourage reflective practice which in turn led them to their own understanding of the term which focuses on "the process of teaching" rather than the product.

> "A reflective teacher is one who compares their teaching against their own experience and knowledge of educational theory that predicts what might happen. Invariably, these comparisons highlight differences between theory and practice, and the reflective process re-adjusts the theory until it accurately describes the practice. Therefore, reflective practice is about the *process* of teaching rather than about a simple evaluation of teaching, questioning why we do something rather than how, and most important of all, learning by this process." (p130) (italics in original)

This emphasis on the process of teaching supports Schon's (1983) definition of a teacher as an artist rather than a technician. However, it focuses on thinking rather than doing and for reflective practice to lead to professional development there must surely be some action following the reflection. As Kuit, Reay & Freeman (2001) point out

> "Reflection is part of our professional development but reflection alone is not sufficient for professional development to occur." (p138)

A clear focus is required if reflection is to become reflective practice, otherwise it may merely become the retrospective analysis of a problem in the classroom that requires a solution. Kuit et al (2001) found in their study designed to define reflective practice, all participants using the critical incident method chose a negative experience to reflect upon; it would appear therefore that reflective practice is seen, at least in some cases, as a solving and understanding process. Eraut (2003) agrees on this point stating that

"… people typically recollect and reflect on incidents that have had a strong emotional impact on them, puzzled them, or been apprehended as of special importance or significance." (p3)

The danger of this type of reflective practice is that it can become a reaction to some sort of failure when most would agree that reflective practice is first and foremost a proactive process concerned with improving best practice. Improving best practice, however, can be far more difficult since many practitioners see no point in changing a process that works and subscribe to the 'if it isn't broken, don't fix it' syndrome. Moreover, as Tomlinson (1999) points out, there is a

"… widespread tendency to prefer automatic (easy) modes of processing as opposed to effortful deliberation." (p408)

which, given the work-load and stressful day-to-day activities of many teachers, is entirely comprehensible and indeed does not prevent them from becoming "professionally competent".

However, Sternburg & Horvath (1995) go a step further, suggesting that reflective teachers benefit from problems.

"… reflective teachers are considered to be those who use new problems as opportunities to expand their knowledge and competence." (p13)

Reflective practice, therefore, would appear to require a clear focus as well as willingness and motivation on the part of teachers to improve and/or change their existing practice which in turn depends on a teacher's ability to analyse his or her teaching, critically reflect and accept that the benefits are worth the cost of reflection. Experience also plays a central role in the capacity to turn reflection into reflective practice since recognition that improvement and/or change are required rests on having encountered a particular situation

previously, being able to perceive the whole picture and how the focus of reflection fits into that picture. Similarly, tacit knowledge, which is bound up in experience allows teachers to recognise intuitively when a situation calls for reflection.

In addition to the two types of reflection, Eraut (2000) defines three different types of knowledge, codified knowledge, cultural knowledge and personal knowledge. Codified knowledge is often referred to as propositional knowledge, knowledge that is accepted as true and is explicit in its nature since it can be articulated. Cultural and personal knowledge can be both explicit and implicit. Eraut calls the sum total of these knowledges "aggregate knowledge" which, as stated, is made up of explicit and implicit knowledge, the latter being commonly referred to as tacit knowledge[7]. Individuals can communicate explicit knowledge, especially as it is to a large extent, codified, accepted knowledge; however tacit knowledge is that which individuals can demonstrate through their actions but can not verbalise or communicate to others. Eraut (2000) defines three types of tacit knowledge

> "tacit understanding of people and situations, routinised actions and
> the tacit rules that underpin intuitive decision-making." (p113)

Experience plays a major role in the accumulation of tacit knowledge; procedures or tasks requiring concentration and focus in the early years of a person's career become routines with the build up of experience and subsequently tacit knowledge is acquired. This tacit knowledge plays a crucial role in situations at work when a person will make use of all knowledge he has of a situation or a person to come to a conclusion or a decision. Furthermore, all three types of knowledge contribute to the impressions and beliefs an individual may have of another and so influence how s/he will react in situations of a more social and interactive nature.

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[7] Some researchers differentiate between implicit knowledge and tacit knowledge, the former being that which is known but is not disclosed and the latter being that which is known but can not be disclosed (see Gourlay 2002 for discussion).

How then are tacit knowledge and reflective practice interrelated? Some researchers (Eraut, 2000, Reber, 1993) believe that implicit learning leads to tacit knowledge and that explicit or formal learning leads to explicit knowledge. Anderson's ACT theory (1983, 1996) proposes three types of memory, working, declarative and procedural. The working memory is that which allows individuals to carry out every day tasks but, since its capacity is limited, the declarative memory is used to supply conscious, explicit rules which are often informed by formal learning. Once these rules have become automatic they pass to the procedural memory which is the source of routinised, intuitive skills which individuals employ unconsciously and rapidly. The declarative memory, therefore, is the source of explicit knowledge and the procedural memory that of implicit knowledge.

In the case of tacit knowledge if the learning is implicit is reflective practice present? It would seem reasonable to suggest that the reflection-in-action described earlier as the intuitive mode of reflection would inform tacit knowledge and that reflection-on-action, the more problem solving mode, would inform explicit knowledge. However, the distinction between the two is not so clear cut: there are certainly moments when an individual is employing tacit knowledge and reflection-on-practice occurs, for example while explaining a particular grammatical structure s/he has explained numerous times before and then realises that s/he has made a mistake. At that moment reflection-on-action intervenes as the teacher consciously realises his or her mistake. As Eraut (2000) states

> "Routines are regularly interrupted by short periods of problem-solving to resolve difficulties or decision-making to adapt to changes in the external context." (p124)

In addition, there are numerous examples of procedures or activities that require explicit learning, ie driving a car, typing, which, once mastered,

require no reflection for their execution and therefore pass into the domain of tacit knowledge or, as Anderson (1983, 1996) suggests, the procedural memory.

Tomlinson (1999) suggests that explicit learning occurs quite quickly, especially when working memory is used, while implicit learning is a slower process requiring practise and the build up of routines. However, explicit action can be slow, especially if conscious reflection is required whilst implicit action occurs quickly and unconsciously. Explicit learning therefore requires reflection whilst implicit learning does not and as Tomlinson (1999) states

> "… implicit learning is the default learning mode for humans, though consciousness is equally a feature of our normal state, that in the balance with explicit learning, graded and dynamic dimensions of processing are involved…" (p411)

He extends this to information-processing and supports the view that humans have two modes, a '*conscious serial mode'* and a *'tacit parallel mode'* and that these have the same features as explicit and implicit action, with the former being

> "… deliberatively focused and flexible, but also relatively slow and severely limited in capacity" (p415)

while the latter is

> "… a very fast processor of much information simultaneously, but which is relatively inflexible and not open to direct access or control." (p415)

It would appear therefore that deliberative, reflective, explicit action and unconscious, intuitive, implicit action are complementary and inter-dependent and that each is called upon as a particular situation dictates. Consequently,

reflective practice which draws on tacit knowledge results in action that is faster, more intuitive and more efficient.

A further debate concerns whether tacit knowledge is individual or collective or both (Gourlay, 2002). In a study carried out into classroom observation on the participants' perspectives of the process Cockburn found that the collaborative relationship between the observer and the observee not only indicated collective tacit knowledge but also allowed it to be made explicit. As the observer states, feedback

> "makes explicit that which is implicit – tacit knowledge – being overt …
> being a mirror on process … and you can observe that mirror in the
> feedback. Often they'll recognise something in the feedback, not that
> they were unaware of [it or] just haven't articulated before, so it's a
> chance for articulation and in that you get some confidence in
> discussion which can lead further…" (p382)

A similar discussion exists for reflective practice. Kuit, Reay & Freeman (2001) claim that reflective practice is best carried out in collaboration, however this assumes that two teachers, at least, are together when reflecting on a certain situation or that something that they are both aware of triggers this process. This is somewhat at odds with the idea of reflecting to develop one's practice since each individual's developmental needs will necessarily differ. As Eraut (2003) points out

> "The highly summarised accounts of incidents that result may still lead
> to some cross-fertilisation of ideas, but are unlikely to trigger much
> reflection if they lack the detail that engages the listener's imagination
> and provides possible links to the listener's own experience." (p3-4)

Therefore, unless a teacher feels involved and affected by a discussion with another teacher little of it will remain with him or her for further reflection. Practically, this would imply that whilst observing a teacher will derive maximum benefit if what s/he sees is relevant to his or her own teaching.
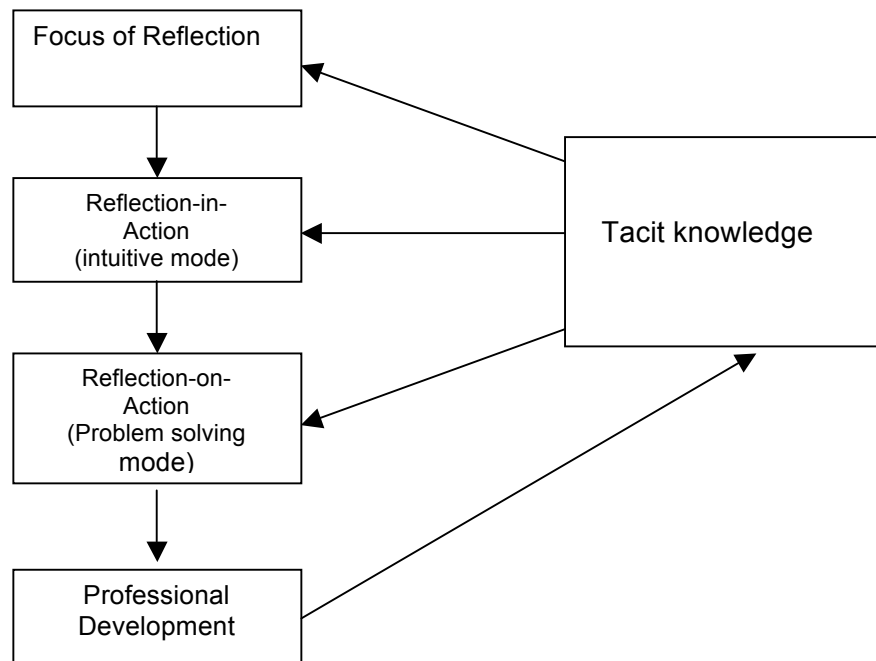
Moreover, it is a choice that observers make; that which is of interest and relevance will be retained and may become the focus of further reflection.

Despite these still debated and unresolved issues it can be accepted that reflection and tacit knowledge do inform one another and that the two play a significant role in professional development.

The drawing together of all three concepts is illustrated in Diagram 2 which comprises the focus of reflection, Schon's (1983) two forms of reflections, all of which are informed by tacit knowledge and subsequently lead to professional development, which subsequently allows for further accumulation of tacit knowledge.

Diagram 2
Reflection, Professional Development and Tacit Knowledge

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  ┌──────────────────┐
  │ Focus of         │◄──────────────┐
  │ Reflection       │               │
  └────────┬─────────┘               │
           │                         │
           ▼                         │
  ┌──────────────────┐      ┌──────────────────┐
  │ Reflection-in-   │◄─────│                  │
  │ Action           │      │ Tacit knowledge  │
  │ (intuitive mode) │      │                  │
  └────────┬─────────┘      └──────────────────┘
           │                     ▲
           ▼                     │
  ┌──────────────────┐◄──────────┘
  │ Reflection-on-   │
  │ Action           │
  │ (Problem solving │
  │ mode)            │
  └────────┬─────────┘
           │
           ▼
  ┌──────────────────┐
  │ Professional     │──────────────►
  │ Development      │
  └──────────────────┘
```

To summarise, tacit knowledge is informed by personal, cultural and, to some extent, codified knowledge. It is highly individualistic and context bound and its value resides in the fact that it allows professionals to perform their work more quickly and efficiently. Although it can not generally be expressed it can be observed through the actions of a professional. It plays a central role in both reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action since it allows professionals to react intuitively to novel and/or difficult situations and to find solutions retrospectively for incidents requiring reflection.

The final point in this discussion is two-fold; how does tacit knowledge become explicit and how is it employed? It is widely accepted that tacit knowledge, especially that amassed from professional experience, has considerable value and that the difficulty is how to access, transfer and exploit it. According to Eraut (2000) there are two ways of making implicit knowledge explicit, by encouraging interviewees to disclose information or to interpret the implicit from the explicit.

> "…there are two possible approaches to knowledge elicitation; to facilitate the 'telling' or to elucidate sufficient information to infer the nature of the knowledge being discussed." (p119)

However, he does point out that even if it can be made explicit it requires considerable expertise on the part of interviewers.

> "More difficult to characterise in any knowledge typology are understandings acquired by experience which remain largely tacit and remain fairly resistant to knowledge elicitation techniques seeking to make it more explicit." (Eraut, 2001, p3)

Despite the difficulties involved in accessing implicit knowledge it is clear that to do so is desirable. Its value, as discussed, resides in the fact that it allows a professional to work more quickly, efficiently and effectively and there are obvious benefits if it can be transferred to other professionals and novices. As

discussed earlier, implicit knowledge is informed to a great extent by experience of previously encountered situations or incidents and how professionals react to them. It is this experience therefore, gained through tacit knowledge and learning, that is so valuable since, should a professional manage to articulate both the experience and the tacit knowledge that informs it, it could lead to recognition, acknowledgement and appreciation of what his or her work entails which could then be transformed into explicit knowledge and exploited more fully.

The analysis, interpretation and inference applied to the data in this study therefore assumed the possibility that tacit knowledge could be made explicit. Subsequently, one of the research aims was to explore whether tacit knowledge was made available during the peer observation process and/or the interviews carried out and whether it could become a catalyst for reflection. This corresponds to Vygotsky's (1978, 1986) theory of social constructivism which states that through dialogue and interaction knowledge is made available. Although Vygotsky's theory refers to the 'construction' of knowledge between an expert and a novice through 'scaffolding', it is also possible that, through dialogue and social interaction, peers may share new ideas and concepts which may then lead to tacit knowledge being articulated and made explicit. The theory was therefore that if, during the dialogue and social interaction produced by the peer observation process, something a participant thought, said, observed or did triggered the unearthing of tacit knowledge it could hold his or her attention sufficiently to lead to reflection and possibly to changes or improvement in his or her teaching practice, in other words reflection which would lead to reflective practice.

CHAPTER 4

THE STUDY

4.1 Design and Procedures of Research Methods

The study was designed to compare two different approaches to peer observation, the first being the approach suggested by researchers such as Gosling (2000) and Richards & Lockhart (1996) with the three stages of pre-observation meeting, observation and feedback being given by the observer to the observee. The alternative approach, previously explored by Cosh (1998), comprised the same three stages, however the feedback stage differed in that feedback would not be given by the observer to the observee; it would be a discussion of what the observing teacher had learnt or gained from watching a peer teach. The logic behind this change in focus was that the anxiety produced by receiving feedback would be removed and that the anticipated discussion would focus on areas that both teachers would like to develop. This, in turn, would lead to reflective practice on the part of both teachers which they could then apply to their own professional development. To find out whether this had occurred the teachers were interviewed prior to and after the two observations to determine their feelings, attitudes and perceptions to observation and whether these had changed in any way as a result of what they had experienced during the observations.

Six teachers took part in the study at the request of the researcher. As all the participants had themselves carried out some form of research in the past they were sympathetic to the request and requirements of the researcher and consequently they took part willingly in the study. The profile of the teachers is shown below in Table 1.

		Age	Years teaching overall	Years teaching at present institute	Nationality
Table 1 - Profile of the Participants					
Pair 1	Teacher 1(F)	23-34	6-10	0-5	Irish/British
	Teacher 2(F)	54-65	16+	0-5	British
Pair 2	Teacher 3 (F)	54-65	16+	6-10	Irish
	Teacher 4 (F)	45-54	16+	0-5	British
Pair 3	Teacher 5 (F)	35-44	11-15	0-5	British
	Teacher 6(M)	54-65	16+	6-10	New Zealand

		Educational Qualifications	Previous Employment
Table 2 – Educational Qualifications and Previous Employment of the Participants			
Pair 1	Teacher 1(F)	MA TEFL MA Women's Studies CELTA BA English/French	College of HE British Council Private college Primary & Secondary Schools University
Pair 1	Teacher 2(F)	MA Applied Linguistics DELTA CELTA BA	College of HE British Council University
Pair 2	Teacher 3 (F)	Masters of Education DELTA Higher Diploma in Education BA	College of HE Private Language College Private and Government Secondary Schools
Pair 2	Teacher 4 (F)	MA Media Technology Diploma in TEFL PGCE	College of HE Private Language School(Teacher Trainer) Secondary School
Pair 3	Teacher 5 (F)	MSc Applied Linguistics MA General Arts DELTA CELTA	College of HE British University Private Language School International House
Pair 3	Teacher 6(M)	Information requested but not supplied	College of HE Secondary Schools

The study was carried out in an Emirati nationwide college of higher education for female students[8]. As Table 2 shows the teachers are all well educated and experienced but have varying professional backgrounds, covering primary, secondary and tertiary education as well as the private

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[8] Male and female students study in separate colleges in this particular institution.

sector. They are all first language speakers of English and share a similar western culture, five originating from the United Kingdom or Ireland and the sixth from New Zealand (see Table 1).

The initial stage was a group meeting for the researcher to explain the anticipated development of the study. Subsequently, each teacher was interviewed individually. The teachers were paired and requested to organise the observations. Following the observations the teachers were then interviewed a final time. The whole process from the researcher's initial request to take part in the study to the completion of the final interview took just over six months. Table 3 below illustrates the stages of the study.

Table 3 – Stages of the Study	
Participants	**Event**
All teachers & researcher	Group Meeting
Researcher & individual teacher	Interview 1
Teacher 1 & Teacher 2	Observation 1 (Teacher 1 observed)
Teacher 1 & Teacher 2	Observation 1 (Teacher 2 observed)
Teacher 1 & Teacher 2	Observation 2 (Teacher 1 observed)
Teacher 1 & Teacher 2[9]	Observation 2 (Teacher 2 observed)
Researcher & individual teacher	Interview 2

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[9] Teacher 1 and 2 represent the three pairs, that is they all carried out the observations simultaneously and these numbers do not refer to the teachers named 1 and 2 in the study.

The first formal interaction of the researcher with the participants was during the group meeting which was held to explain the study to the participants, its objectives, how it would proceed and to give the participants the opportunity to discuss any concerns or issues they might have.

The aim of the first interview was two-fold; to determine the participants' attitude to and opinion of firstly observation in general and secondly peer observation. This would allow the researcher to acquire an idea of the extent to which the teachers' experience of observation and in particular observation for appraisal purposes affected their view of peer observation and its usefulness.

The overall aim of the second interview was to determine participants' feelings, attitudes and perceptions towards peer observation once they had completed the observation process and whether these differed from their views previous to the process. The questions posed therefore covered the following general areas:

- How did the proposed alternative approach in the second observation affect the participants?
- What were the most beneficial parts of the process?
- What were the most negative parts of the process?
- What did they learn (if anything)?
- Did the process lead to Reflective Practice?
- Did the process uncover tacit knowledge?
- Did the teachers feel they had developed professionally?

4.2 Research Methods

The design of the study necessitated the use of both action research and ethnographic research methods which, as some researchers point out, is not undesirable since they often complement each other (see McDonough &

McDonough, 1997 and Cresswell, 2003). In this study it is the use of qualitative, interpretative and inferential analysis that draws the two approaches together and these are discussed in greater depth below within the domains of action research and ethnographic research.

4.2.1 Action Research

Wallace (1998) defines action research as

> "… systematically collecting data on your everyday practice and analysing it in order to come to some decisions about what your future practice should be." (p4)

The value of action research is that it is carried out by a teacher within a professional setting in response to what is perceived as a problem or issue that requires attention; it is therefore relevant and applicable, and as Cohen et al (2000) point out

> "Action research may be used in almost any setting where a problem involving people, tasks and procedures cries out for solution, or where some change of feature results in a more desirable outcome." (p226)

Although Cohen et al and Wallace agree on how action research should be conducted Wallace's model is characterised by the necessity to reflect in a structured manner in order to find a solution. He describes the process as a cycle comprising professional practice, reflection upon that practice which ideally leads to professional development. Diagram 3 below illustrates the cycle:

Diagram 3 - Professional Practice, Reflection and Professional Development[10]
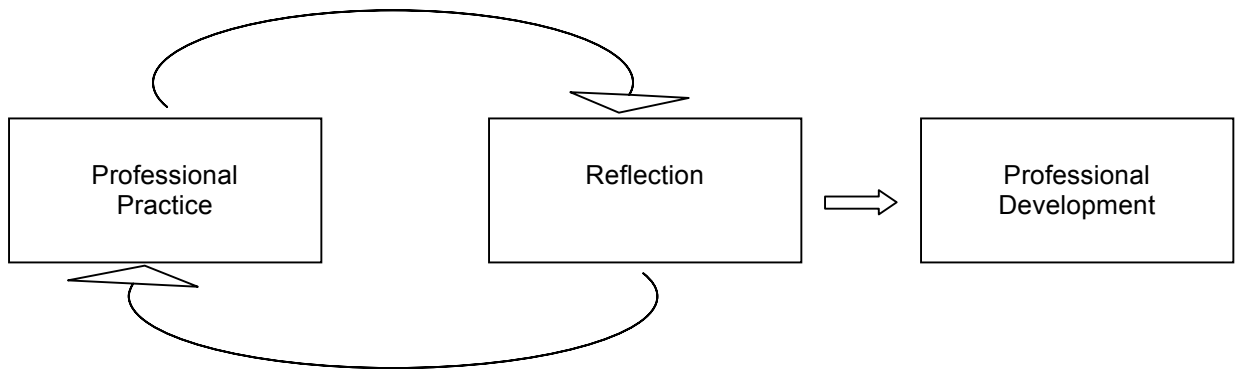
The action research approach is represented in the overall design of the study with the identification of a particular situation, investigation, and recommendations for improvement. Although the area of investigation was not a stated problem for the participants of the study, it was identified as an unexplored area of potential professional development by the researcher. Since few of the participants had experienced peer observation it was anticipated that the opportunity to take part in such as study could lead to reflective practice and therefore contribute to the personal and professional development of the researcher herself and, hopefully, the teachers involved. As Wallace (1998) states:

> "Action research involves the collection and analysis of data related to some aspect of our professional practice. This is done so that we can reflect on what we have discovered and apply it to our professional action." (p16)

The study can therefore be defined as an inquiry into whether the introduction of a particular practice could lead to reflection on teaching and, consequently, bring about benefits of a professional nature to those involved.

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[10] Adapted from Wallace 1998, p13

Nunan (1992) has a flexible approach to the definition of action research; contrary to other researchers (Cohen et al, 2000) he does not believe that change is a requirement of action research.

> "I would also dispute the claim that action research must necessarily be concerned with change." (p18)

Change in the form of improvement of a method or system is obviously desirable, and for most teachers carrying out an action research project it is highly satisfying to see their work result in positive change. However, the aim of this study is not so much change at an institutional level through the possible adoption of a peer observation scheme, rather the unearthing of the participants' beliefs and attitudes which would encourage them to revise their perception of the observation process, resulting in reflective practice and the promotion of professional development.

Although the participants were the source of the data required for the study, they were not involved in the planning and implementation or in the evaluation of the findings. They were not therefore collaborators in the action research process but the subjects of the study and in this sense the study steers away from the action research model proposed by Kemmis & McTaggart (1992) and referred to in Cohen et al (2000).

> "It is not research done on other people." (p227)

Action research is often seen to be a collaborative approach to enquiry, however in this instance the research was carried out by an individual rather than by a group, a technique supported by both Nunan (1992) and Cohen et al (2000, p226).

> "While collaboration is highly desirable, I do not believe that it should be seen as a defining characteristic of action research." (Nunan, 1992, p19)

However, it was anticipated, that the experience of observing and being observed by a peer would affect the participants in an individual manner and in this sense they did collaborate in the research since their views and attitudes to the whole process were the focus of the investigation. In addition, should any change take place in their perception of peer observation this repositions their role in the study from that of impartial subject to implicated participant.

As stated earlier the study drew on both action research and ethnographic methods and it is this latter approach which is discussed now.

4.2.2 Ethnographic Research

Ethnographic research falls within the domain of qualitative, naturalistic study. Although it is traditionally seen as the study of a particular culture, generally through observational means, it also encompasses a range of approaches which have derived from and are characterised by these naturalistic, qualitative elements.

Nunan (1992, p53- 54) defines two "perspectives" of ethnographic research, the "naturalistic-ecological" perspective and the "qualitative-phenomenological hypothesis". The former advocates that research should be carried out in the natural environment of the subjects under investigation. Only if the subjects are studied in their natural setting can this type of enquiry have ecological validity; this point is discussed in further detail below. The latter is concerned with the need to integrate the subjective views and perspectives of the subjects under investigation into the findings so that they become part of the 'objective reality' (Nunan, 1992, p20) of the research. The present study conforms to both principles since the participants of the study were investigated in their own working environment, carrying out their daily occupation whilst the focus of the study was their beliefs, feelings and attitudes. Since the analysis of these factors is central to the findings of the

study, it is clear that the subjectivity of each participant was incorporated throughout and became part of the reality or truth of this study, in its own particular context.

In addition, the researcher has worked alongside the teachers involved in the study for almost two years and at the commencement of the study had known them for one year. She is therefore a member of their cultural environment and has knowledge of and understands the professional setting they work in, comprising management style, national culture, the students, the syllabus or a range of other features particular only to this environment. Given her role and relationship with the participants the researcher was well placed to provide a detailed, albeit subjective, description of the setting and context in which the research occurred.

The methods of data collection, semi-structured, in-depth interviews and a group meeting, required the use of qualitative, interpretative and inferential analysis, a further feature of ethnographic research. It was anticipated that this qualitative analysis of the data which contained the participants explicit and stated views would lead to the uncovering of implicit knowledge. Cohen et al (2000, p140) quote Splindler & Splindler (1992:72-4) and agree that this is a desirable trait for an ethnographic study:

> "Some sociocultural knowledge that affects behaviour and communication under study is tacit/implicit, and may not be known even to participants or known ambiguously to others. It follows that one task for ethnography is to make explicit to readers what is tacit/implicit to informants."

Clearly, the use of interpretation and inference is essential in the unearthing of tacit knowledge[11] since necessarily the participants can not or may not wish to express it, highlighting not only the subjective nature of the

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[11] See chapter 3 for a more in-depth discussion of tacit knowledge.

information supplied to the researcher but also the possibility of subjectivity intervening in the researcher's interpretation of the findings.

The participants were required to observe and be observed by a peer without being influenced by the researcher since she was not present at the observations. However, contrary to the principles of ethnographic research the researcher manipulated the process of observation by requiring the participants to change their focus of observation for the second observation. Nunan (1992) clearly states

> "The researcher does not attempt to control or manipulate the phenomena under investigation." (p56)

Pure ethnography would require that the participants experience the phenomena without interference from the researcher, however the aim of this study was to compare these two different approaches and consequently the manipulation was inescapable and central to the study.

Nunan (1992) states that

> "Ethnography places great store on the collection and interpretation of data, and, in marked contrast with the experimental method, questions and hypotheses often emerge during the course of the investigation, rather than beforehand." (p56)

The present research required data collection to take place during the pre-observation and post-observation stages. It was then analysed, interpreted and explanations proposed for the phenomena which occurred during the study. No initial hypothesis was formulated, rather a set of questions requiring answers to be provided by the participants. It was not possible to anticipate how any of the participants would react to the observations or to predict the data which would be collected. In this respect, the data created the theory, rather than the theory seeking data to prove or disprove it. This

method of data collection and analysis is referred to as grounded theory and is a further defining feature of an ethnographic study.

To summarise, ethnography is the study of a specific culture in a unique context, the aim of which is to collect data which will provide a theory of human behaviour through subjective and interpretative analysis. This uniqueness of both an ethnographic and an action research study has implications for both reliability and validity. Whilst the study took place in a particular and individual context the concerns voiced by the participants are relevant in that they may be similar to those experienced by teachers in other institutions and therefore contribute to an overall understanding of the issues addressed. Consequently, the following discussion focuses on the reliability and validity of the findings.

4.2.3 External Reliability

Nunan (1992) defines external reliability as

> "… the extent to which independent researchers can reproduce a study and obtain results similar to those obtained in the original study."
> (p14)

The specific, context-bound nature of this study may possibly prevent the study from being replicated exactly. The UAE education system is still very young and faces very different issues from similar institutes in the participants' countries of origin. It is possible therefore that similar research carried out in other countries would have differing results. However, peer observation is a widespread and recognised form of professional development and the issues raised in this study are common to issues raised in research in other parts of the world. Moreover, while there are often context-bound factors that account for a part of the findings, the objective of research in this area must be to determine which concerns are common to all

studies, wherever they take place, in order to build up a complete and comprehensive picture of the situation.

4.2.4 Internal Reliability

Holland and Shorthall (2000) define internal reliability as

> "… consistency in data collection, analysis and interpretation of results." (p12)

The six participants of this study were all requested to follow the same process as designed by the researcher. There were interviewed twice each and all but one participated in the initial group meeting[12]. Although the interviews all followed a similar set of questions, the semi-structured nature of the interview allowed for deviations which depended on the participants' responses. It can be said therefore that consistency of data collection was achieved in allowing the participants to express their views equally. Some ethnographic studies are not able to present all data collected thereby making it difficult to verify findings, however the interviews in this research were carefully transcribed, analysed and interpreted by the researcher in line with her original study objectives and are available for analysis by interested parties (see Appendices1 to 13).

4.2.5 External Validity

External validity refers to the generalisability of a study, in other words it should be possible to authenticate the results obtained in a larger study. Nunan (1992) however states

> "…for action research there is not the same imperative to deal with external validity. In many cases practitioners are less concerned with generating generalisable knowledge than with solving pressing problems associated with their own particular workplace." (p18-19)

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[12] One of the six initial participants at the group meeting did not take part in the study. Teacher 5 volunteered to take this teacher's place after the group meeting but before the pre-observation interview.

And as Wallace (1998) points out

> "This is where it [action research] differs from other more traditional kinds of research, which are much more concerned with what is universally true, or at least generalisable to other contexts." (p17)

Moreover, the ethnographic and context-bound nature of this study entails a subjective, individual analysis of the findings which, although they may be of interest to other teachers and researchers, are unique to the circumstances of the study.

4.2.6 Internal Validity and Objectivity

Holland and Shorthall (2000) state that

> "For a piece of research to be considered internally valid, it must be shown that the results obtained are the result of the treatment applied, and not any other extraneous variables." (p12)

As for all research it is necessary to maintain as objective a view as possible whilst collecting data, analysing the results and presenting the findings. The present study employed three methods of obtaining data, questionnaire[13], group meeting and interviews. The group meeting which took place at the initial stage of the study was intended to reveal issues for further exploration in the subsequent interviews. Although the questionnaire was designed to assist in the structure of the interview it also served as a verification of the participants responses. This mixture of research techniques is considered by many researchers as beneficial, as McDonough & McDonough (1997) maintain,

> "In fact there are good reasons to incorporate several techniques in data-gathering. This allows the opportunity of greater credibility and greater plausibility of interpretation." (p71)

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[13] The questionnaire was designed to obtain factual background information about the participants such as education, previous and present employment; the information collected is represented in Tables 1 and 2 displayed on pages 37 and 38 respectively.

It is clear that the researcher's relationship to the participants could have had some impact on the information provided, quantity as well as quality. This issue is inescapable since the researcher had worked with all six teachers for a year previous to the study, some of them quite closely. She therefore had a varying personal and professional relationship with them and it is possible that those who trusted her sensitivity, confidentially and professionalism would have felt more at ease to disclose sensitive information[14], possibly resulting in an imbalance in the quantity and quality of data obtained. However, no matter how well designed the questionnaire and interview, no matter how skilfully the interview is carried out, no matter how much trust exists between researcher and subject, one can only draw conclusions from the information that people are willing to divulge which, in any case, will be the subjective view of each individual. As Nunan (1992) states

> "Rather than subscribing to a belief in external 'truth', ethnographers believe that human behaviour cannot be understood without incorporating into the research the subjective perceptions and belief systems of those involved in the research, both as researchers and subjects." (p54)

Moreover, it is generally accepted that action research is the search for a solution to a context-bound problem with particular players and that rather than discounting the possible subjectivity that may arise it should be incorporated into the research and the conclusions drawn. McDonough & McDonough (1997) argue that although objectivity is desirable it should not be at the expense of "contextual specificity" and that

> "One argument for action research is that it has typically accepted that the actors, including the researchers as observers, are an integral part of the situation being researched, not simple nuisances to be eliminated or controlled out of the way." (p62)

4.2.7 Ethical Considerations

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[14] The teachers were assured by the researcher of their anonymity.

Inevitably, sensitive issues were addressed during the course of this study and one participant voiced her concern about confidentiality of information, in particular within the institution in which the study took place. Obviously, should any delicate information be made public there is the risk that collegial relationships could be damaged; consequently, names of the participants, as well as the institution, were withheld to ensure total anonymity and confidentiality. In addition, the participants were reassured that the management of the educational establishment were not informed of or involved in the research, in any way.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS FROM PRE-OBSERVATION INTERVIEW

5.1 Group Meeting

A group meeting was held to discuss any issues or concerns the participants had prior to commencing the peer observation process. A number of concerns were addressed; time pressure, worries about being judgmental and giving feedback, the difference between the two types of observation and Teacher 2 was unsure of her role since she had never experienced peer observation previously. Through discussion these concerns were resolved (see Appendix 1) although it should be noted that one of the teachers at these meeting did not subsequently take part in the peer observation process. However, a different teacher volunteered to participate.

Although all six teachers stated at the meeting that they were happy to be partnered with any other teacher, two of them expressed at a later date the desire to work together. Given the small number of teachers in the study it was not possible to put together teachers of similar backgrounds and experience. Table 4 below shows that pair 1 comprised the youngest teacher and one who had been teaching for considerably longer and was also a teacher trainer and two teachers were paired with their immediate superior, the Academic Coordinator. An Academic Coordinator is generally responsible for a team of teachers and has administrative duties as well as teaching duties, albeit less than full time teachers.

		Age	Years teaching overall	Years teaching at present institute	Relevant Previous Experience	Present Academic Role
Pair 1	Teacher 1 (F)	23-34	6-10	0-5	Teacher	Teacher
	Teacher 2 (F)	54-65	16+	6-10	Teacher/Teacher Trainer	Teacher
Pair 2	Teacher 3 (F)	54-65	16+	0-5	Teacher	Academic Coordinator
	Teacher 4 (F)	45-54	16+	0-5	Teacher/Teacher Trainer	Teacher
Pair 3	Teacher 5 (F)	35-44	11-15	0-5	Teacher/Teacher Trainer	Academic Coordinator
	Teacher 6 (M)	54-65	16+	6-10	Teacher	Teacher

Table 4 - Profile of the Partnerships

5.2 Observation for Appraisal Purposes

The findings from the first interview revealed a number of similarities in feelings and attitudes towards observation for evaluation purposes which all six participants had experienced both at the institute in this study and in previous employment. Five teachers admitted to feelings of nervousness and anxiety when informed that an observation was imminent as well as during the observation with comments such as

> "I always get really nervous even though I've been teaching for years…" (T5, Appendix 6, lines 141 – 142)

The reasons given for these feelings concerned two main issues, which for some teachers were related, that of retention of employment and that of not knowing whether they were teaching according to the supervisor's standards.

"… I would say probably very anxious in the first two [observations]… because I felt there was so much at stake in terms of me keeping my job basically, that's why I felt anxious, that anxious about it." (T1, Appendix 2, lines 227 – 229)

"… they [other teachers] would talk a lot about being renewed and not being renewed…" (T5, Appendix 6, lines 38 – 39)

"I think an awareness that you might be doing, a feeling that you might be doing it not quite right or not to the other person's satisfaction and it is, the object of the evaluation is whether or not you will continue to be employed so there are things that are on the line." (T6, Appendix 7, lines 77-80)

"We are all perhaps anxious about being found wanting or that we're not quite as good, or somebody else might think that we're not quite as good as we thought we were…" (T3, Appendix 4, lines 107-110)

However, two teachers did report having positive feelings, albeit mixed for one, towards the observation process.

"So I think there's an element of it [preparing for the lesson] being kind of satisfying and it reminds you that you can do it, but of course it's a bit nerve wracking, again because you don't know what the observer is going to look for, is going to pick you up on." (T2, Appendix 3, lines 193-196)

"I don't mind having people coming to observe me, I feel quite happy, I feel confident about my teaching…" (T4, Appendix 5, lines 92-93)

Moreover, Teacher 2 felt that management could also benefit from observation.

> "I think it's quite useful for other people to see that you are professional and to see that you're a good teacher, you know, I think that that can only do good." (Appendix 3, lines 207-209)

Despite the positive feelings expressed by these two teachers, all six admitted to putting extra time and effort into preparing the observed lesson, ranging from doing a practice run with a different group of students to enlisting assistance from colleagues or simply spending extra time on the objectives of the lesson through to the production of a detailed lesson plan. Despite being observed a number of times all teachers agreed that it affected their behaviour in the classroom and reported being less relaxed, less familiar with the students, more careful and better organised. Clearly, this has implications for the validity of observation as an evaluation instrument since it raises the question of whether the observer can obtain a reliable impression of a teacher's abilities in the classroom. Teacher 1 felt the presence of an observer affects both the teacher and the students and acts as an "inhibiting factor" (Appendix 2, line 198) while Teacher 5 felt that observation is useful and allows the observer to obtain "information" about a teacher. However, Teacher 6 stated that the impression an observer has can only be valid for the lesson observed.

> "… you can get an idea that a teacher is or is not able, at least once a year, of putting together a very well structured lesson." (T6, Appendix 7, lines 33-35)

The feedback from observation for evaluation purposes was seen as a necessary part of the process with most teachers agreeing that they felt comfortable during the feedback session. However, those teachers who had

not received verbal feedback experienced feelings of confusion and resentment. One teacher awaiting feedback was clearly quite concerned that it would not be forthcoming stating she would be "really upset" if she did not receive any (T2, Appendix 3, line 80). Two other teachers, after waiting some time for feedback, finally felt compelled to approach their supervisors which clearly resulted in some irritation and resentment

> "And I thought well I sweated buckets over that lesson and you just say it's fine." (T3, Appendix 4, lines 322-323)

However, despite the stated desire for feedback there was a varied reaction to its usefulness.

> "… I've got much more EFL experience than the person who's observing me. I don't actually put a lot of weight on what they say…" (T2, Appendix 3, lines 265-267)

While some teachers acknowledged acting on advice given during feedback and others only did so if they felt it was relevant.

> "I don't think it's very often that somebody gives you advice that you haven't already thought of yourself but if it was about how I come across or if it was a suggestion, if it was a suggestion of something I hadn't done before, yeah of course, that's partly how I've learnt what I've learnt." (T2, Appendix 3, lines 289-293)

> "I guess I suppose the thing is you take feedback and sometimes I just take feedback as gospel and then sometimes I think maybe it's not gospel, maybe I should just think…." (T1, Appendix 2, lines 344-346)

For other teachers the determining factor in whether they implemented advice given during feedback was how they felt about their observer.

"… I remember for example we had one, em one supervisor here, A.B., who had worked on the DELTA programme and so I quite respected his opinion…" (T3, Appendix 4, lines 131-133)

" … I don't feel defensive, but who knows, it very much depends on how the feedback, how the feedback is given for me more how much I respect the person who's giving it to me." (T2, Appendix 3, lines 275-278)

Interestingly, one teacher used to receiving highly positive feedback stated that she placed little value on it; however on receiving less positive feedback from a new supervisor she experienced feelings of anger and confusion and discovered that although the feedback in itself was not of value the validation of her teaching was significantly more important that she had previously thought. The paradox of this incident is that although she considered this type of evaluation to be a "farce" the lack of face she experienced in receiving a less positive evaluation had a significant impact on her. (T5, Appendix 6, lines 126-163) Furthermore, as suggested earlier, this confusing situation affected not only the teacher being observed but, in her opinion, the observing supervisor (Appendix 12, lines 784-794).

Most teachers agreed that observation for appraisal carried out in the institute in this study was more formal, official and entailed higher stakes than that they had experienced in previous employment. The use of a checklist, scores, critical feedback and the observation's role in determining whether or not they retain employment were cited as contributing factors.

To summarise, it is evident that, at this particular institute, observation for appraisal purposes affects the majority of teachers quite negatively and as discussed earlier and underlined by Wang & Day (2001) the lack of adequate feedback, uncertainty about a supervisor's intentions and the impact of

his/her presence all contribute to these feelings of anxiety. Furthermore, the value of the process itself is questioned. The amount of time and planning devoted to an observed lesson indicates that none of the teachers would be comfortable being observed in their day to day teaching or, at the very least, they wish to show how they are capable of teaching in that one lesson, which is hardly surprising given the implications of the observation.

The next step was to determine whether these negative feelings were transferred to other types of observation, namely peer observation and what effect, if any, they had on them while taking part in the peer observation scheme.

5.3 Peer Observation

The participants clearly differentiated between observation for developmental purposes and observation for appraisal purposes and this is summed up succinctly by Teacher 6.

> "I perceive there being two kinds of observation. There's the observation that you have to go through in order to keep your job, that's a game, it's a game I know how to play well. Then there's the observation that I've done rarely in my teaching career where it's an open playing field and it's seen as a chance for you to improve your skills and to learn from your colleagues…" (T6, Appendix, lines 594-599)

Those who had experienced peer observation, on the whole, found it positive and useful for self-development. Although some experienced the same feelings of anxiety and nervousness as they did during observation for appraisal purposes they attributed this to their own personal dislike of being observed rather than feeling under pressure to perform. Teacher 1 pointed out that peer observation did not entail the same risks concerning employment and feedback.

"… but I wasn't being appraised by a manager and I, my job wasn't at stake, you know I wasn't getting critical feedback." (T1, Appendix 2, lines 437-439)

Five participants were enthusiastic about observing a colleague and indicated that this was their overriding motivation in agreeing to a peer observation scheme since it would allow them to gain ideas and inspiration for their own teaching as well as giving them an opportunity for reflection.

"I really want to learn from someone else, for me the benefit would be to come away with something that I don't know how to do, or something that I do know how to do, or perhaps do it differently…" (T4, Appendix 5, lines 233-235)

"… it would be good for, you know, a reflection for you own teaching because you could think about things that you wouldn't normally, you know in day to day life you don't do so much as you should do but it would force you to be more reflective and to think what are the things that I don't feel very comfortable with…" (T5, Appendix 6, lines 479-483)

Teacher 2, however, when asked what she thought the potential benefits of peer observation could be, was uncertain.

"I'm not sure, that's my honest answer. I'm not sure, I think it's interesting. I think one might pick up one or two tips. I don't think it's that important and I think that's why, when teachers are busy, although it's a nice idea it's what doesn't happen because I don't think it's high priority." (T2, Appendix 3, lines 410-413)

Despite this positive attitude to observing a colleague, some participants were less relaxed about being observed and one teacher was concerned about her observer's perception of her teaching.

"… I suppose I want them to respect me as a professional and so I care that I do a good job and so if things went totally pear-shaped I would feel upset…" (T1, Appendix 2, lines 531-533)

Most of the participants were apprehensive of giving feedback and indicated that they would focus on the positive or find a sensitive way of handling negative feedback. An important concern was the desire to avoid damaging a relationship with a colleague.

"I just hope that I'm getting it right … that I'm not offending anybody cos I'd hate to do that, I still have to work with, you know, the people I work with and so even if I felt that I've said something accurate, if it's upsetting or offensive … it's affected negatively my working relationship with that person." (T3, Appendix 4, lines 415-419)

However, two teachers felt that the risks of damaging a collegial relationship would be minimised if they were free to choose who to observe. Three teachers indicated that their choice of partner would depend on how much respect they had for that teacher and five teachers what they could learn from the observation and in the case of Teacher 4, to compare with her own teaching. Teacher 2 also indicated that this type of comparison could help her improve her own teaching, which obviously involves a certain amount of reflection. Other reasons given for choosing an observation partner were to receive feedback and to observe another teacher with a group of difficult students. In summary therefore and significantly for this study, the most important reasons for choosing a partner were to learn and gain something of value whether from the observation itself or the feedback.

Clearly, the teachers understood the potential developmental benefits of peer observation as well as the risks involved, especially when giving feedback. Furthermore, two indicated their awareness of how past experience could affect the process. One participant was aware that the opinion she already

had of other teachers could influence what she observed and thought whilst observing.

> "I don't think anybody goes in blind, you know. Nobody is a tabla rasa, you've already written something before you get in there." (T3, Appendix 4, lines 408-410)

Moreover, Teacher 1 states clearly that she does not wish to be influenced by her past experience of observation.

> "I mean that's a very critical way of assessing a teacher's performance and most of my peer observation, my observation experience I suppose has been of that vein, do you know what I mean, so I may already be coming to the table with an experience of a quite, a critical, judgmental way of observing and I'm hoping that's not going to influence me." (T1, Appendix 2, lines 975-980)

These two comments support Eraut's (2001) theory of aggregate knowledge, that the sum total an individual has of another or a particular situation influences how s/he reacts in a subsequent situation. Being aware of one's attitudes and perceptions in this way is an indication that these two participants had considered and reflected upon their possible reactions to the peer observation process.

The findings from the first interview reveal that five out of the six participants understood the objectives and potential benefits of peer observation and, in addition, all six acknowledged that it is a distinct process from observation for evaluation purposes. Those that admitted feelings of anxiety whilst being observed by a peer were able to view these feelings objectively and two admitted being aware of pre-judgmental tendencies. It would appear therefore that the participants were able to separate their negative feelings towards observation for evaluative purposes from that which they would

experience in this study. Teacher 3, having already experienced peer observation, sums it up candidly and realistically.

"… I think at the time it was a good idea and if people could get over their anxiety about it I think it's really, really good. I think you do learn a lot from observation." (T3, Appendix 4, lines 451-453)

It would appear therefore, that at least five of the participants went into the scheme with a positive and rational approach. The following chapter will discuss whether this approach allowed them to benefit from the process and ultimately whether reflective practice and professional development were achieved.

CHAPTER 6

FINDINGS OF POST OBSERVATION INTERVIEW

It was intended that the second set of interviews, on completion of the observations, would take place in the first two weeks of December 2006. However, only one pair of teachers managed to finish on time and the last interview was concluded on 27th March 2007. The entire process therefore took six months from the initial group meeting on 8th October 2006.

This chapter will examine the findings of the second interview within the framework of the initial research questions as stated on page 40 and will also address some of the most significant issues that arose during the process, in particular those specific to each partnership.

6.1 Research Questions

How did the proposed alternative approach in the second observation affect the participants?

One of the aims of the study was to compare two different approaches to peer observation; the first was that the observer would give the observee feedback about their teaching and, if required, suggest ways of improving it while the second was that the observer would watch out for ideas or techniques that could be helpful in his or her own teaching. Four participants stated that they felt no change of focus and that the second set of observations was merely a repeat of the first set. Moreover, for Teachers 1 and 2 this had implications not only for the observations but also for the feedback session.

> "I could not get my head around any change in focus, the two observations were the same except that the second one suffered from being an exact replica of the first, you know, so it just felt a bit pointless in a way because we'd said it all in the first one…" (T2, Appendix 9, lines 278-281)

This is undoubtedly due to the fact that five teachers gave their motivation for taking part in the study as wanting to learn from observing. Consequently, the participants felt no particular change since their approach was already that proposed by the study for the second set of observations and this is summed up well by Teacher 3's comments,

> "… one would hope that you'd learn from an observation anyway because I think you're not just sitting there looking, you know, you, you assume it's going to benefit you … otherwise I wouldn't bother going." (Appendix 10, lines 356-359)

It is debatable whether Teachers 3 and 4, who reported having felt a change of focus, did so thanks to the study; it is more probable, having observed a first time and gained something of value, that they acknowledged the benefits of observing and became more focused in their own approach for the second observation. There are two significant points to highlight from this. Firstly, it would appear that teachers can not be directed how to approach an observation rather it is determined by their own values and philosophy and secondly, it is interesting that five participants, despite their stated negative experiences of observation for appraisal purposes, regarded peer observation as a potential learning experience.

What were the most beneficial parts of the process?

Four of the six participants indicated that they found observing more beneficial than being observed whilst one appreciated both observing and being observed and another being observed and receiving feedback on her teaching. For those who preferred observing the reason given was that they picked up ideas and learnt or were reminded of useful techniques or as Teacher 4 pointed out,

> "Learning from T3 who's more experienced than I am." (Appendix 11, line 501)

As mentioned earlier, this approach is also favoured by Cosh (1998) who suggests that the observer, rather than the observee, should benefit from the observation.

Teacher 3 especially wanted to observe specific skills in her partner who she considered to be more proficient in this area. However, these participants had indicated both in the first interview and reiterated it in the second that a strong motivation in accepting to be part of the process was to observe and learn. Teacher 5 found being observed useful since it encouraged her to prepare and deliver her lesson more thoroughly than usual, which then benefited her students, whilst Teacher 3 felt it was useful to let her observer see what she did with a group of students they shared

> "… so I thought it was kind of useful for her to see what I do with them in addition to what she does with them…" (Appendix 10, lines 147-148)

Her partner clearly appreciated this initiative stating

> "… so it was interesting too, seeing how she dealt with something that I have to deal with…" (T4, Appendix 11, lines 561-562)

The feedback session was carried out by two of the three pairs, the third pair, Teachers 5 and 6 indicated that they could not find the time to do it but this is discussed further below. Although those participants who did give each other feedback were apprehensive of doing so, all four found both receiving and giving feedback highly beneficial and positive and for Teacher 3,

> "… everything she said was pertinent and she certainly didn't go outside the brief…" (Appendix 10, lines 80-81)

Teachers 1 and 2 admitted, however, that the feedback they gave was entirely positive which facilitated the process. As Teacher 1 commented,

> "… in a way it was an easy feedback session for me in terms of delivering feedback to her because, I mean, her lessons were good, I

mean I could see the positive sides of them, I didn't have anything negative to say…" (Appendix 8, lines 207-210)

Teachers 3 and 4 made suggestions about how to improve their partner's teaching and these were accepted and subsequently incorporated into their teaching at a later date.

"… she made some positive comments and emm I wouldn't say she made negative comments but some people could interpret them as negative, she made a few suggestions emm which were good, they were good suggestions…" (T3, Appendix 10, lines 82-85)

Clearly, this teacher felt that the feedback given was accurate and specific as advocated by Brinko (1993) and discussed earlier.

The final significant benefit for three of the participants was the perceived strengthening of their relationship with their partner. Teachers 1 and 2 did not know each other well before the peer observation process and felt their joint experience had contributed to a more positive relationship. Teacher 6 also felt his relationship with his colleague was stronger; however this was not reciprocated and this will be discussed in greater detail below. Teachers 3 and 4 did not experience any significant change in their relationship but, unlike the other two pairs, had worked closely together for some years.

What were the most negative parts of the process?
The most negative aspect of the process, as cited by four teachers, was how they felt being observed; feelings of anxiety, being 'a bit on edge', 'being exposed' were reported and as Teacher 1 stated,

"The feeling I felt when I was being observed, I just don't know why, I just really dislike it." (Appendix 8, lines 727-728)

Moreover, these four teachers indicated that their teaching had been affected, from 'less relaxed' to 'more mechanical' and Teacher 1 also felt the students

were affected. Not surprisingly, these four teachers all indicated that they preferred observing to being observed.

One teacher (T1) indicated that she felt ill at ease when her partner participated in her lesson, especially when she became the focus of attention for the students, although the other five teachers were comfortable with their partner participating. Three teachers reported feeling uncomfortable being in another teacher's classroom although this feeling diminished the second time they observed. Of these three teachers, Teacher 5 experienced feelings of extreme awkwardness due to her unfavourable perception of her colleague's teaching and to the point where she felt it affected their collegial relationship negatively. This is discussed further below when partnership issues are addressed.

Giving feedback was also a source of anxiety, as mentioned above; Teachers 3 and 4 both reported the giving of negative feedback as challenging however, once achieved they felt it had been well accepted. Overall, the most negative aspects concerned how the participants felt being observed by or interacting with their partner subsequent to the observation. Despite this four teachers were in favour of repeating the process albeit with certain changes which are discussed below. Teacher 2, who found the experience interesting but not particularly valuable, was also willing to take part again. However, Teacher 1 stated categorically that she would not like to repeat the experience as she found it 'unpleasant and unnatural' (Appendix 8, line 738)

The most important obstacle practically to carrying out peer observation, experienced by all six teachers, was lack of time either for scheduling the observations or for planning lessons, illustrated by Teacher 5's comments,

> "… so I didn't prepare the lesson as well as I would have wanted to, at all, and I was a little bit unhappy because I don't like the thought of coming to, they're spending their time coming to observe a lesson and

I would have liked to have really given it more consideration…"
(Appendix 12, lines 241-245)

Apart from Teacher 1's concerns about her observer participating in the lesson, the negative issues that emerged in this study corresponded to those found by Hammersley-Fletcher & Ormond in their 2005 study (discussed above). While it is possible that these negative issues may outweigh the advantages of peer observation, it is important to consider how they can be addressed and whether they are specific to particular individuals, partnerships or circumstances. These points are addressed below in the discussion of the findings.

What did they learn if anything?
Of the six participants only two acknowledged explicitly that they had learnt from the process of peer observation. Teacher 3 considered that she had learnt from observing her partner and also during the subsequent feedback discussion while Teacher 4 acknowledged learning from her observer whilst receiving feedback and subsequently acting upon it. The other four teachers recognised that the experience was useful and interesting and certain incidents reminded them of what they could do in the classroom, but overall they did not acquire anything new that could be applied to their subsequent teaching. As Teacher 2 asserted

"I think it's quite unusual when you've been teaching for a long time to have, to see an idea that you've never thought of before but it might be something that you haven't done for a long time." (Appendix 9, lines 247-250)

Did the process lead to Reflective Practice?

Teachers 1, 3 and 6 felt that observing allowed them to reflect on their own teaching and for Teacher 6 to make improvements to his teaching while Teacher 3 also felt that being observed acted as a catalyst for reflection.

> "… on those two occasions when she came in, it sort of, it gets you thinking about what you're doing just a bit more than you normally do and that can only be a good thing." (T3, Appendix 10, lines 542-544)

Teacher 4 however considered that reflection was achieved not only through observing but also through receiving and giving feedback.

> "I think when you give feedback it actually makes you reflect on what you do so that for me was satisfying…" (T4, Appendix 11, lines 332-333)

In summary therefore, four of the six participants stated explicitly that the process had encouraged them to reflect, generally on their own teaching. The most frequent way of achieving reflection appeared to be in comparing what they observed with their own teaching. The other two participants, Teachers 2 and 5, although they did not explicitly refer to reflection as being achieved through the process did mention that comparison with their partner occurred, as Teacher 2's comments illustrate,

> "… you can't help but see whether somebody does something in the same way that you would do it or whether they do it differently." (Appendix 9, lines 173-175)

It would appear therefore that comparison is a natural phenomenon which can potentially be beneficial to teachers, as expressed by Teacher 1,

> "… I think the most positive aspects were, I think, observing the other teacher, just seeing what that teacher, I, as a teacher I'm interested in teaching, you know the process and you rarely get to see other people do what you do every day and you know it gives you a chance to

reflect on what you do every day, by watching somebody else."
(Appendix 8, lines 714-718)

For Teacher 1 therefore, the opportunity to observe, compare and reflect may have allowed her to absorb new ideas and encouraged her to question her own teaching and values and, as advocated by Faneslow (1990), lead to self-evaluation.

For those teachers who engage in this type of self-questioning and self-evaluation it is possible that they access their own tacit knowledge; the difficulty in making such an assumption is that tacit knowledge is, by definition, automatic, intuitive and inaccessible in conscious mode. However, the following section will consider whether certain incidents can trigger the unconscious uncovering of tacit knowledge, and, if so, whether these can be made explicit.

Did the process uncover tacit knowledge?
Tacit knowledge, as discussed earlier, is the knowledge individuals hold that informs extensively the everyday execution of their profession since, as discussed earlier, it plays a crucial role in reflection. Given Teacher 1's comments above it can be argued that comparing one's teaching with another's is a form of reflection which involves accessing the tacit knowledge that informs one's own teaching. This tacit knowledge is activated when observing a situation which is familiar but slightly different, as is the case in peer observation. This comparing of the implicit, what a teacher knows but can not always express, with the explicit, what a teacher sees as an observer, may well lead to the uncovering of tacit knowledge.

According to Eraut (2000, 2003) tacit knowledge is comprised of personal, collective and cultural knowledge and is characterised by the fact that it is so difficult to express. To determine whether teachers were made aware of any

such knowledge participants were asked if their partner had told them anything they were not previously aware of. The response to this was either negative or concerned new information rather than tacit knowledge.

However, during the feedback sessions of Teachers 3 and 4 it did appear that some uncovering of tacit knowledge occurred. Teacher 4 mentioned that her partner had commented on two particular points;

> "I mean one of the things she did say was, and she talked about classroom management, she did say I'm going to try what you did, so I mean that was totally unconscious, that's what I do anyhow…" (Appendix 11, lines 202-205)

> "… she said something like I liked the way you asked that question because it was very direct and I would never have actually have picked up on that so…" (Appendix 11, lines 480-482)

These two examples illustrate the tacit knowledge involved in Teacher 4's teaching, an unconscious activity carried out intuitively and automatically, was clearly noticed by her observer which supports the theory that tacit knowledge can be observed but not articulated.

Tacit knowledge also plays a significant role in how individuals view others and, specifically for this study, how they perceive their observation partners and the impact this has on their relationships. This is addressed in greater depth in the discussion below.

Did the teachers feel they had developed professionally?

Although the teachers were not asked this question directly it was considered that professional development would manifest itself in the application of something they had observed or learnt to their own teaching and/or a desire to continue peer observation.

Teachers 3, 4 and 6 all stated that they had gained or learnt from observing or receiving feedback and that they would incorporate this into their own teaching in the future. Teachers 3 and 4 also rated peer observation highly as a tool for professional development while Teacher 5 did so

"… depending on the person you observe… " (Appendix 12, line 668)

Teacher 6 however, while agreeing that the experience had been valuable, preferred other more skill based forms of professional development. Finally, Teachers 1 and 2 reported having learnt little from the process and that their subsequent teaching would not be affected.

Only one of the six participants indicated that she would not wish to repeat the experience of peer observation; despite the benefits of observing a colleague she considered that being observed affected her teaching negatively and that it felt "unpleasant". However, the other five participants stated they would be willing to take part in a future initiative.

Overall therefore, it appears that the experience was positive for the majority of the teachers, whether through reflection or the opportunity to improve their own teaching, and even those that were less enthusiastic acknowledged having gained something positive. The reasons for the difference in how teachers reacted to the process appeared to be due to a number of factors, specifically those involving their partnerships and the following section will deal with those issues on a pair by pair basis.

6.2 Partnership issues
Teachers 1 and 2
As discussed above, although Teacher 1 was in favour of peer observation at the outset she found the overall experience quite negative while Teacher 2 was uncertain of her role and rather ambiguous in her attitude to peer observation and its value. These two teachers differed widely in terms of

age, experience and previous employment. Although Teacher 1 indicated in the first interview that she would like to observe somebody more experienced than herself (Appendix 2, lines 611-612) it is possible that she felt slightly intimidated being observed and giving feedback to a colleague who was so much older and more experienced. The following comment reveals the imbalance she felt in their relationship which possibly affected her attitude towards the process:

> "… you know T2 is an extremely experienced teacher, she's also a DELTA trainer and my initial reaction was what's she going to learn from me?" Appendix 8, lines 242-244)

Although Teacher 2 did not appear to be affected by this difference she did express doubts about her role during the observations,

> ."… I think there was a problem with, with my role more than the fact that I was there, I wasn't sure quite why I was there…" (Appendix 9, lines 343-345)

This uncertainty undoubtedly contributed to a lack of focus felt by Teacher 2 which had repercussions for the second set of observations and the alternative approach the teachers were asked to take towards them (discussed above) and possibly prevented her from benefiting more fully from the process.

Teachers 3 and 4

Both Teachers 3 and 4 were highly positive in their attitude towards peer observation once the observations had been completed. As discussed above, both felt that they had benefited in terms of learning, reflective practice and given their enthusiasm to apply what they had learnt to their own teaching and take part in such a process again, professional development. The success of their partnership was attributed, by them, to two major factors, their collegial relationship and respect. Not only had they worked together for

a number of years, they worked on the same programme and often shared the same group of students. It is clear that they admired each other's teaching skills as illustrated by the following comments:

"… like her classroom management style is much, much tougher than mine and it's good for me to see that, cos I think sometimes I'm a bit too lax, so that was very positive for me." (T3, Appendix 10, lines 271-273)

"… she was very, very good at sort of eliciting vocab and eliciting examples and the pronunciation, very good." (T4, Appendix 11, lines 403-405)

Both teachers also expressed appreciation of other points, notably how each of them handled the giving and receiving of feedback which, as this study has shown, can be a delicate procedure. Unsurprisingly, they were both aware that the success of their partnership was due to these factors and that this may not have been the case with a different partner, as expressed by Teacher 4,

"I really think it's important, the whole process of observing, for me the most important thing is the relationship you have with the person that you are observing or that is observing you. I would have felt a little more uncomfortable being observed by another member of staff." (Appendix 11, lines 513-517)

Clearly, for these two teachers their relationship was primordial in obtaining a positive outcome to peer observation. For the next partnership, however the relationship was a pivotal factor in the failure of the two teachers to gain from the process and highlights the crucial role of respect, trust and instinct when it comes to choosing a partner.

Teachers 5 and 6

Although Teacher 6 reported having experienced positive aspects to the process, he acknowledged that it was not his chosen form of professional development. Conversely, although Teacher 5 was apprehensive but enthusiastic at the outset and still maintained that she would take part in a future peer observation scheme she found the overall experience disturbing and uncomfortable as what she witnessed as an observer gave her cause for 'alarm'. Clearly, she was aware of the possible effect of observing this teacher since she expressed the desire to have been able to choose a different partner[15],

> "It would be better if you could choose the person that you observe because frankly out of all the teachers that I would not have chosen T6 would be the first one." (Appendix 12, lines 375-377)

During the first observation the two participants were teaching on the same programme and to the same examination requirements which Teacher 5[16] felt were not being accomplished by Teacher 6.

> "… when I went to observe him I was alarmed because he was teaching at far too low a level for our girls." (Appendix 12, lines 161-163)

These issues were not subsequently addressed during a feedback session since, unsurprisingly, none took place.

> "… I was actually relieved when he said let's ... we shouldn't do feedback." (Appendix 12, lines 153-155)

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[15] Only two participants expressed a preference for a particular partner, Teachers 3 & 4. The other four indicated that they did not mind who they were partnered with.

[16] Teacher 5 was Teacher 6's Academic Coordinator.

However, Teacher 5, acting in her role as Academic Coordinator, felt obliged to discuss these issues with Teacher 6 resulting in a delicate and difficult situation, as expressed by Teacher 5,

> "… I was actually quite concerned when I did the observation which, it was horrible because I wasn't observing as part of, I felt like I wasn't in the project, your project, it was more like I was the coordinator going ahh, the girls are not ready for the test, you know." (Appendix 12, lines 171-174)

Moreover, the undesirable outcome to this partnership had further repercussions since although Teacher 6 felt their relationship had been strengthened Teacher 5 considered it to have been affected negatively. (Appendix 12, line 61)

Clearly, the experience of peer observation had varying impacts on the six participants and revealed a number of issues which prevented some of them from benefiting from the process. The following discussion will examine these issues and suggest reasons why they occurred; it will also consider why one particular partnership was so positive and constructive and what can be learnt from their experience.

CHAPTER 7
DISCUSSION

The most significant issue to arise from the process is the importance of trust and respect in the relationship between two teachers. It is evident that Teacher 3 and 4's relationship contributed extensively to the success of their experience. In contrast, the concerns felt by Teacher 5 whilst observing, to a certain extent, confirmed her negative perception of her partner; this, of course, could have been avoided had she been able to choose her own partner. It is therefore crucial to allow teachers to do so, based on their own knowledge of the partner's teaching, personality and attitude to the process. This knowledge is partly explicit in that teachers are able to express why they would like to observe a particular person as illustrated by Teacher 5's comments,

> "… I would like to, in fact love to observe one or two teachers just because emm, one teacher I would like to observe is Eric because I think we are very similar but I'd like to know if we are really, I think we are in the way we teach because all the materials we choose and the way we approach them is always the same…" (Appendix 12, lines 404-408)

It can also be instinctive and intuitive, in other words tacit knowledge which, according to Eraut (2000, 2001, 2003) is informed extensively by experience and which individuals draw on when making decisions, reaching conclusions or forming opinions. Furthermore, it would appear that when selecting a partner for peer observation teachers consult their own opinions, which are informed by tacit knowledge of a person or a situation, as Teacher 3's comments illustrate,

> "I think you'd have a certain, I hate to say judgment but you'd certainly have a certain opinion, you know, before you go in." (Appendix 4, lines 390-392)

Given the highly personal nature of the tacit knowledge involved in forming opinions and the delicate and subjective nature of peer observation it is clear that teachers who have chosen their partner are far more likely to find the whole process positive and constructive.

Although four teachers acknowledged feeling anxious whilst being observed, only one (T1) stated that her teaching had been affected negatively and that her extreme discomfort in being observed had been the most challenging aspect of the process. Although this teacher indicated her appreciation of observing her partner, her comments reveal that she felt an imbalance in their relationship due to the difference in their ages and experience. It is possible therefore that this perceived disparity produced feelings of insecurity and vulnerability which prevented her from benefiting fully from the process. Moreover, given that these two participants hardly knew each other prior to the process, they had little opportunity required to build up the trust and respect required to ensure a positive outcome; however what is reassuring is their joint belief that they became closer as colleagues as a result of their shared experience.

Nevertheless, the anxiety felt by many teachers whilst being observed is a real issue which can and does prevent peer observation from becoming a positive, constructive and valuable experience and, as Teacher 6 indicated, may not be the type of professional development they desire or need (Appendix 13, lines 393-396) and as Teacher 5 states,

> "…I think that certain people would want to do it and certain people wouldn't and the people who don't want to do it would not benefit…"
> (Appendix 12, lines 395-397)

 Moreover, the teacher who experienced such discomfort whilst being observed, Teacher 1, was by far the youngest teacher in the study who may have been apprehensive about being evaluated whilst being observed and,

as discussed earlier, fear of evaluation is a considerable barrier to achieving a positive outcome from peer observation. It is also possible that she did not have the benefit, and possibly self-confidence, of the broad experience held by the other participants.

A further area of ambiguity was the lack of focus some teachers felt whilst observing. Teacher 2, as discussed earlier, expressed a great deal of uncertainty over her role as an observer and along with Teachers 3 and 5 felt knowing what to observe would have improved the process. It was argued earlier in this study that a specific focus is necessary if reflective practice is to be achieved, this lack of focus therefore could account for the limited amount of reflection achieved by these teachers. Furthermore, it is significant that those teachers, (3&4) who provided their own focus, by deciding what would be of interest and beneficial to them whilst observing, turned out to be the most successful partnership in terms of reflective practice and professional development.

For Teacher 5 however, the most challenging area of the process was experiencing discomfort whilst observing her partner and subsequently having to approach him with her concerns[17]. All participants were aware of this possibility of having to give negative feedback prior to the process and had considered how to deal with it. Teacher 4 preferred to avoid doing so, Teacher 1 hoped to find a way to communicate sensitively to her partner any concerns and the four other participants were unsure how they would react while some questioned their own authority to be critical of a colleague's teaching. Unfortunately, there is no guarantee that this sort of situation will not arise and each teacher must decide how s/he will respond. In this case Teacher 5, being Teacher 6's Academic Coordinator, felt obliged to address

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[17] As stated earlier these two teachers had decided previously not to give feedback; however Teacher 5 acting in her role as Academic Coordinator felt compelled to discuss her worries with her partner.

the issue as outlined earlier and while she found this unpleasant and challenging she accepted the situation, stating,

> "But again, for me, from my point of view I'm glad I saw the class and say you've got to start teaching them paragraphs, they can't be writing at this level, I'm glad that happened." (Appendix 12, lines 533-535)

The final point in this discussion concerns that partnership which appeared to benefit most from peer observation. As stated, crucial to their success was their relationship of trust and respect as well as their desire to learn from their peer. Moreover, their discourse was characterised by their references to learning from each other, in particular in areas where they considered each other to be more proficient. It would appear therefore that these two teachers had achieved an equal relationship where one would act as the expert or the novice as required. This corresponds to Vygotsky's (1978) theory of social constructivism discussed earlier, whereby learning and knowledge are gained through dialogue. Vygotsky's model involves an expert with a novice, such as a teacher and a student; in this case each teacher acted as either expert or novice interchangeably depending on the particular situation and the dialogue. This adaptability is indicative of their potential to reflect, learn and gain knowledge as illustrated by Teacher 4's comments,

> "Yeah you know, even now I'm talking to you, talking about it to you has actually brought it back, oh yes, that was good, oh yeah that wasn't so good maybe I should work on that a bit more, or yeah I took that on board, that was good, I actually listened to her, brill, so yeah I think it, reflection is a very important, you always know what you're supposed to do but don't actually do it…" (Appendix 11, lines 581-586)

CHAPTER 8
CONCLUSION

As outlined in the introduction, this study started out as a comparison of two different approaches to observation. It was the researcher's aim to determine whether peer observation could become more beneficial, constructive and positive by removing those elements that can cause anxiety and discomfort, and which are often found in the approach which places the observer in a role where s/he can give critical feedback.

However, as discussed above, five of the six teachers commenced the process with the alternative approach suggested for the second set of observations which gave rise to issues and questions that had not been considered in the original research question. The most significant of these were how the process could lead to reflective practice and the role tacit knowledge plays in achieving reflective practice. This orientation towards new research questions was determined, to a large extent, by the participants' views, actions and reflections during the entire process and is characteristic of an ethnographic study. As Nunan (1992) points out,

> "During the course of their investigations, ethnographers may obtain data which do not support their original questions or hypotheses but are suggestive of others." (p57)

The constantly changing nature of this type of research, which is a reflection of the professional lives of those who took part, was incorporated into the study and, hopefully, represents a true picture of how peer observation, reflection and tacit knowledge, impact on different teachers.

There are several important conclusions to be drawn from this study when determining whether peer observation is suitable as a form of professional development. Firstly, it is essential to take into account the views and

attitudes towards the process of those to be involved especially as it may well be that the negative aspects will outweigh the benefits for some teachers; as this study has shown, peer observation may have a detrimental effect not only on the perception of a teacher towards his or her partner but also on the relationship itself. Moreover, the anxiety felt by some teachers whilst being observed or giving and receiving feedback may have acted as a barrier to reflection which confirms the researcher's initial belief that such feelings may prevent peer observation from achieving its aims of reflective practice and professional development.

Secondly, participants should be encouraged to choose their partner; a teacher who approaches another and asks to observe in order to learn is paying the observee a great compliment and lays the foundations for a solid and positive relationship. Once a partnership is established participants can then determine a focus which is of value to them in discussion with their partner and lay down their own guidelines for the implementation of the observation.

Training on how to focus during the observation and how to give feedback constructively as well as education about the process may also be worthwhile for some teachers, especially since this study shows that many teachers feel apprehensive about giving and receiving feedback. Again, this is linked to the relationship between two participants and underlines the central role of trust and confidence in one's partner.

As discussed, one of the major challenges for the six participants in this study was finding time to plan and carry out the observations. Clearly, this is an issue that requires the intervention and support of management; however it should be stressed that the role played by management should be limited to providing time and resources for professional development and that this should be clearly understood and separated from any form of evaluation.

Finally, this study and previous research (Martin & Double 1998, Slade 2002, Hammersley-Fletcher & Ormond 2005) reveal that peer observation can be extremely constructive and valuable in promoting reflection and giving teachers the opportunity to reevaluate their everyday working lives; however, the challenges outlined above may prevent some teachers from wishing to take part or, if they do so, from finding it useful. In contrast, those teachers who understand and perceive the value of the process, have their own focus, are willing to question themselves and have the confidence to approach a potential partner are far more likely to benefit in terms of reflective practice and professional development. As Teacher 4 sums up,

> "I know what I'm supposed to do in a classroom it doesn't always happen that way. Why doesn't it happen that way? Because of the logistics of what's going on, perhaps time factor, perhaps the students you're working with, perhaps you're having a grumpy day or a bad day or a brilliant day or a good day, I think a lot depends on you and to be honest I mean, I think we so often blame somebody else but you actually have to reflect on yourself and how confident you are and how skilled you are or unskilled you are or whatever. You know, reflection's just, I think it's a really important factor of teaching." (Appendix 11, lines 586-594)

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