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Irish Research Scheme for Teaching 2019-20

RESEARCH REPORTS
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Introduction

It is my pleasure to present the final research papers from the Irish Research Scheme 2019-20 sponsored by Trinity College London. This has been the fourth full year of the project (including the pilot year) and the first year of the revised timetable, which proved to be a success for the most part. This year we started the project with 12 potential researchers/research groups, all looking at a variety of different topics and issues arising from their context, from classroom based enquiries to whole school management matters.

We launched the project at the ELT Ireland Annual Conference 2019, with a call for submissions and held our first Training Day of the year on March 23rd, hosted by Liam Tyrell at English Studio in Dublin. At this session all of the researchers presented an issue they were interested in delving into for their research project and the group as a whole brainstormed ways that these research questions could be pared down, and what sort of data collection methods could be used in each case. Ben Beaumont from Trinity College London was on hand to give his expert advice on data collection methods which were practical in each circumstance.

The researchers were then encouraged to undertake their projects in the Spring period, return for the Second Training Day on June 29th where we looked at data collation and trying to make sense of the information collated in terms of the overall project, and writing up a research report. Again this day was hosted by Liam at English Studio, and ably assisted by Ben.

The researchers took a much needed summer break before beginning their write up and submitting their draft in December, which was reviewed by myself and Ben, before final submission in February 2020. Of the 12 started, we had 3 final submissions, those published in this document. As we always say on the IRST, the process is the main point, not the product, and the fact that the researchers undertook their project and began to learn about and focus on classroom enquiry is a success from our perspective.

This year's project is going to follow a similar idea, with a Training Day in March, another in June and a good Summer break. The main addition this year will be the inclusion of an online Action Research course from Trinity College London which will be available to all participants.

On a personal note, I am really looking forward to this 5th year of the IRST, and especially to working with a new bunch of researchers working in Irish classrooms. I want to thank Trinity College London, and Ben in particular for all of his support and guidance not only this year but for the past few years, I wouldn't have been able to do it without him.

Chris Farrell, Project Supervisor, IRST



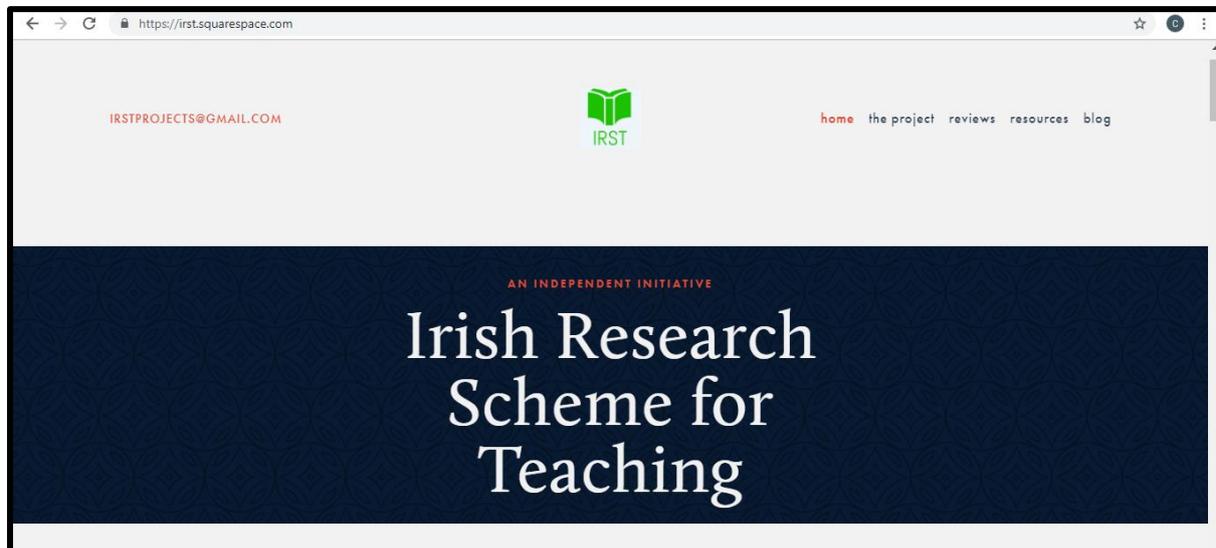
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Identifying areas for language school academic manager's development through the use of anonymous feedback questionnaires

Anna Morris

EC Dublin

Introduction

The idea for this project was born shortly after I attended a talk given by Adrian Underhill at the ELT Ireland Conference in 2018. In his talk, Underhill talked about different models of leadership and organizations, amongst others, the idea of 'learning organizations.' He also emphasized the value of 360-degree feedback process as part of the process of learning.

Since I started my management journey in ELT, I have noticed that the higher you get, the lonelier you become. As a teacher, you are surrounded by students, other teachers, Assistant Director of Studies, Director of Studies, who can all provide feedback to inform your professional development. However, once you step into management shoes, the source of feedback starts shrinking. As soon as you become DOS, you are reliant on feedback from your line manager, usually Centre Director or Head of School, who has limited ability to provide you with feedback that can inform the development of your management skills. This is due to the fact that your line manager sees only the results of your work but is not a direct receiver of that work.

I strongly believe that my professional development can be best informed by my direct reports – teachers. They are the ones who experience my management skills daily and whose work is most affected by my approach and skills. Therefore, their feedback is extremely valuable.

Unfortunately, it is natural that employees worry about unwanted consequences of their feedback and therefore lack confidence to be honest. Even if the manager is approachable and open about receiving feedback, upward feedback remains difficult to gather due to the very nature of a manager – employee relationship.

Many organizations use 360 feedback as part of performance appraisal or as a developmental tool, and so does my organization. Unfortunately, in my organization, teachers have not been included in the process. Therefore, I decided to ask myself whether anonymous feedback



questionnaires could serve me as a useful tool for identifying areas for my professional development. I decided on anonymous responses to maximise honesty and minimise anxiety amongst participants.

Literature overview

Literature on upward feedback in Language Teaching Organizations (further referred to as LTOs) is limited or close to none and therefore, in this section, I will provide an overview of key terms that relate to the topic of the research project. These are: learning organizations, 360-degree feedback and a manager's communication skills.

The concept of the learning organization is described by Senge (1994) in his book '*The Fifth Discipline*.' According to the author, the learning organization is one in which each of its members work towards improving their skills in order to achieve common results. The focus is clearly on individual but an individual who is part of the system and plays an important role in achieving the organization's goals. Senge lists personal mastery as one of the five disciplines, which can enhance the performance of the learning organization. By personal mastery, he understands one's drive to continually work on improving the results they seek. Another discipline listed by Senge is systems thinking, which is interpreted by White et al. (2008) as 'the fact that things work as complex systems, rather than simple linear cause and effect chains.' This means that every element has an impact on the system and one another. The authors explain how Senge's ideas can be applied to LTOs by listing six principles that can be acted upon in order to create the culture of a learning organization – one of the principles of particular relevance to this project is communication and feedback, which, as they emphasize, 'needs to be endemic and multi-directional at all levels of the organization' (p. 44).

This endemic and multi-directional feedback is called 360-degree feedback. As defined by *The Economic Times*, 360-degree feedback is 'a feedback process where not just your superior but your peers and direct reports and sometimes even customers evaluate you. You receive an analysis of how you perceive yourself and how others perceive you.' According to Lepsinger & Lucia (2009), this kind of feedback is likely to be a key element in informing one's individual professional development needs and, as a result, enhancing their effectiveness. It can also encourage teamwork and enhance team effectiveness by involving team members in the development process as well as adding value to their opinions.

Unfortunately, not all employees are comfortable giving their peers or line managers feedback, which is a result of not being familiar with the process, multi-directional feedback



not being a routine or a fear of saying the wrong thing. Therefore, as explained by Impraise (2019), anonymous feedback seems to be the right first step which allows to 'ease people who are new to giving feedback into the process.' Anonymity can reduce the chance of people passing on the opportunity to provide feedback or feedback being only positive rather than constructive.

In contrast, Ryan (2015) strongly criticises anonymity of 360-degree feedback, saying that '360-degree feedback systems shred the fabric of trust in an organization.' She explains that it is because participants can provide whatever feedback they like without taking responsibility for it, which might result in feedback being dishonest and intentionally damaging.

In my research, I decided to focus mainly on communication skills but at the same time giving some attention to how people see my intentions and my managerial skills overall. This area is of particular interest to me as it is one that has affected my relationship with my managers in the past. Covey (2013: 281), in his famous book '*The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*' explains that: "It's phenomenal what openness and communication can produce. The possibilities of truly significant gain, of significant improvement, are so real that it's worth the risk such openness entails."

In addition to that, communication is considered one of the four building blocks of leadership, as explained by Devine (2015). Lester and Taylor (2009) in their book '*Communication: your key to success*' state that the way your colleagues and clients communicate has a huge impact on how satisfied you are in your work. They explain that 'Communication is the heart of every organisation. Everything you do in the workplace results from communication' (p.29). Furthermore, Ellis (2005) explains that too many new managers focus on communicating upward with their line manager, rather than planning their downward communication, which is in fact more important. Ellis (2005:24) also emphasizes that 'one of the keys to your success lies in your ability to effectively communicate with our employees.'

Many authors of management books describe characteristic of effective communication. Chopra and Fradhan (2008) list the seven commandments of communication:

- Credibility – ability to believe in honesty of the messenger
- Context – appropriate for the message
- Content – compatibility and meaningfulness of the message
- Clarity - simplicity of the message and ease of understanding it
- Continuity and consistency – emphasis here is on continuity of communication and repetition of the message
- Channels – should be established
- Capability of audience – capability to process the message



Moreover, the authors emphasize that communication is not only about being the message sender but also about listening, it's not only about being understood but also being able to understand.

The above characteristics are relevant to me due to my own experience communicating with my line managers as well as my direct reports. On many occasions, I found myself reflect on interactions I had and wondered how I had handled them. I asked myself whether I actively listened, managed to deliver a clear message or chose the right setting. Therefore, the focus of this research project is of personal interest and will hopefully drive my professional development in this area.

Method

The research tool used for the purpose of this research was an online anonymous survey (Appendix 1) which was conducted in my organization, EC Dublin, amongst my direct reports - ADOS and teachers. The link to the survey was shared by email and on a poster displayed in the staffroom. All responses were voluntary. Research participants were informed of the purpose of the survey and assured that responses were anonymous and would only be used for the purpose of the research and that the results of the research would then be combined with those of many others and described in a report. To ensure the anonymity of the research participants, no names, identification or contact details of the participants were requested on the survey and no survey response provided any indication of who completed it.

The survey consisted of 8 questions, six of which were Likert scale followed by a comment box. The six Likert scale questions were used to allow me to gather some quantitative data about my skills and on specific areas that, as suggested by literature reviewed, I identified as crucial for successful leadership. In addition to that, I hoped the comment boxes would provide me with useful qualitative data i.e. justification of why respondents had chosen a particular Likert scale response or rating.

The first question is quite general and asks the respondent to rate my strength in five different areas. The second is more specific and asks respondents to decide how strongly they agree or disagree with statements about my communication skills. The third, same as second, aims to establish agreement or disagreement with statements but this time relating to my listening skills and approachability. The fourth question is a mix of statements which relate to how trustworthy and committed I am considered in a professional setting. Question five aims to verify how well I provide feedback. Question six also refers to feedback but focuses on respondent's attitude to providing upward feedback. Likert scale questions refer to very specific skills which could have been missed in general open-ended questions.



The last two questions are open-ended, the aim of which was to allow respondents an opportunity to comment on what was not covered in the survey, yet important for survey respondents. The questions prompted to comment on my other strengths and areas of improvement or whatever else was not mentioned.

Results/findings

The survey was completed by 66% of my direct reports – Assistant Director of Studies and 11 teachers. All survey respondents completed the survey voluntarily and anonymously. Two of the respondents approached me to say that they would be very keen on discussing their responses with me. Full results of the survey can be reviewed in Appendix 2.

The first question asked the respondents to rate my strength in five different areas: communication skills, listening skills, professionalism, attitude to work and organizational skills. The responses and comments were very positive. My skills were rated as strong or very strong by all respondents. Comments described me as very focused and active, dedicated to staff and learners, always ready to listen and able to find a quick solution to problems that might appear.

The second question asked respondents to decide how strongly they agreed or disagreed with statements about my communication skills: whether it was considered appropriate, delivered at the right time and place, delivered in sufficient detail to enable receivers to carry out their responsibilities, whether sufficient notice was given and lastly, clarity of communication. Overall, my skills were highly rated, but two slightly lower responses were given to questions asking about whether communication happens at the right time or place and whether information is provided in sufficient detail. One of the respondents left a comment saying that I sometimes deliver a lot of information at the same time very quickly.

The third questions aimed to establish agreement or disagreement with statements but this time relating to my approachability and listening skills. Again, the responses were very positive. However, a few mid ratings were given for three related questions: whether they consider me approachable, whether they find me intimidating and whether I respect and welcome opinions.

The fourth question was a mix of statements which related to how trustworthy and committed I am considered in a professional setting, as well as how much I care about my team. Here



most respondents responded very positively. However, 2 of the respondents felt that I could not be trusted and that I am dishonest.

Question five aimed to verify how effective the feedback that I provide was. Again, most responses were very positive, suggesting this area was my strength. However, one of the respondents felt that this area was one of concern. The same person left the following comment: *I just wish we could sit and talk more about things we all could do to improve, but I understand this takes time and not everyone would be available. I'd like to have more observations and more workshops and cpds.*

Question six also referred to feedback but focused on respondent's attitude to providing feedback to me. Similarly, most ratings were very positive, indicating that my team feel that I'm passionate about what I do, lead by example and are open to feedback. Only one person indicated that they wouldn't be comfortable giving me feedback.

The last two questions were open-ended, allowing participants an opportunity to add anything else they found relevant. Questions seven asked about other things that I do well and eight - other things I could improve on. Overall, the answers commented on a few areas that respondents found me particularly strong in, including dealing with the staffroom situations, working under pressure or taking charge of my own development. On of the responses expressed concern about training that DoSes and ADoSes receive once promoted from teaching roles and suggested management and HR training.

Discussion and conclusion

The research question I aimed to answer was whether an anonymous survey can inform my professional development. Having read through the responses and analysed the results, I have come to a conclusion that gathering feedback using an anonymous channel is definitely a pathway to establishing a culture of feedback. It creates a safe environment and reduces anxiety. I am satisfied with the results and their value. I also feel that I have opened myself up for feedback, which resulted in two of the respondents offering to elaborate on the survey questions face-to-face, which is the ultimate result I would like to achieve.



Although the results were quite reassuring, it has become clear that there are some people on the team that do not trust me and do not think I value their work. This suggests that further research is needed to help me establish why they feel that way.

The main takeaways for me are:

- It is worth gathering feedback because there is always something you can learn from it.
- Environment of trust has to be established gradually.
- Anonymity encourages honesty.
- Some questions will be left unanswered.
- Anonymous surveys are a good start but ultimately, the aim is to create environment in which upward feedback will become a routine.
- I would indeed benefit from training in HR management.
- I should reflect more on the amount of information I deliver and how quickly I do it.
- I should reflect more on the amount of feedback I provide and whether it is sufficient.
- I more aware of my strengths and weaknesses.
- I am more aware of what I do well and what I should continue doing well.
- Most of the respondents value my work and feel valued by me.

This research project has also led me to a conclusion that it would be worth trying to administer quick, short and very focused survey immediately after certain activities I would like to receive feedback on. One example could be post-observation feedback. I would be very interested in finding out how useful teachers find my feedback and how I could improve to make it more useful for their development. The same could be done after quarterly meetings to verify how useful the information and discussions were. Administering the surveys immediately after the events, while things are still fresh, would likely generate more detailed and accurate responses.



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Appendices:

Appendix 1: The Survey

Identifying Areas for Professional Development

This survey is part of a research project carried out under Irish Research Scheme for Teaching 2019/20. The aim of the research is verify how effectively can an anonymous questionnaire be used to identify areas for manager's professional development.

We want to assure you that your responses are completely anonymous. Responses to anonymous surveys cannot be traced back to the respondent. No personally identifiable information is captured unless you voluntarily offer personal or contact information in any of the comment fields. Additionally, your responses are combined with those of many others and summarized in a report to further protect your anonymity.

By completing this survey you are giving informed consent to your participation in this research. If you have any further questions about this research or would like to receive a report on the results you can contact Anna Morris (annamorris@ecenglish.com).

1. Rate Anna's strength in the following areas

	very strong	strong	neither strong or weak	weak	very weak
Communication skills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Listening skills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Professionalism	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Attitude to work	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Organizational skills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Comments

2. Rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements

	strongly disagree	disagree	neither agree or disagree	agree	strongly agree
The form of communication chosen by Anna is appropriate for its purpose	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Communication happens at a time and place that is comfortable for me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Information is provided in sufficient detail to enable me to carry out my responsibilities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Information is provided with sufficient notice in order to enable me to carry out my responsibilities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Information provided by Anna is clear	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Comments:



3. Rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements

	strongly disagree	disagree	neither agree or disagree	agree	strongly agree
Anna is approachable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It's easy to talk to Anna about work related issues	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am confident Anna will do her best to help me resolve problems	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I find Anna intimidating	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Anna welcomes and respects my opinions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Anna is always too busy to talk to me so I don't bother	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Comments

4. Rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements

	strongly agree	agree	neither agree or disagree	disagree	strongly disagree
I can trust Anna	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe in Anna's honesty	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel supported by Anna	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Anna has my best interest at heart	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Anna values me and my work	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Comments



5. Rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements

	strongly disagree	disagree	neither agree or disagree	agree	strongly agree
I receive feedback on my work frequently enough	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Feedback I receive from Anna helps me improve	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I find Anna's feedback detailed and specific enough to learn from it	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Feedback provided by Anna is constructive	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel comfortable receiving feedback from Anna	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Comments

6. Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements

	strongly disagree	disagree	neither agree or disagree	agree	strongly agree
Anna is passionate about he job	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Anna leads by example	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Anna looks for opportunities to develop her skills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Anna is open to feedback	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel comfortable giving Anna feedback	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Comments

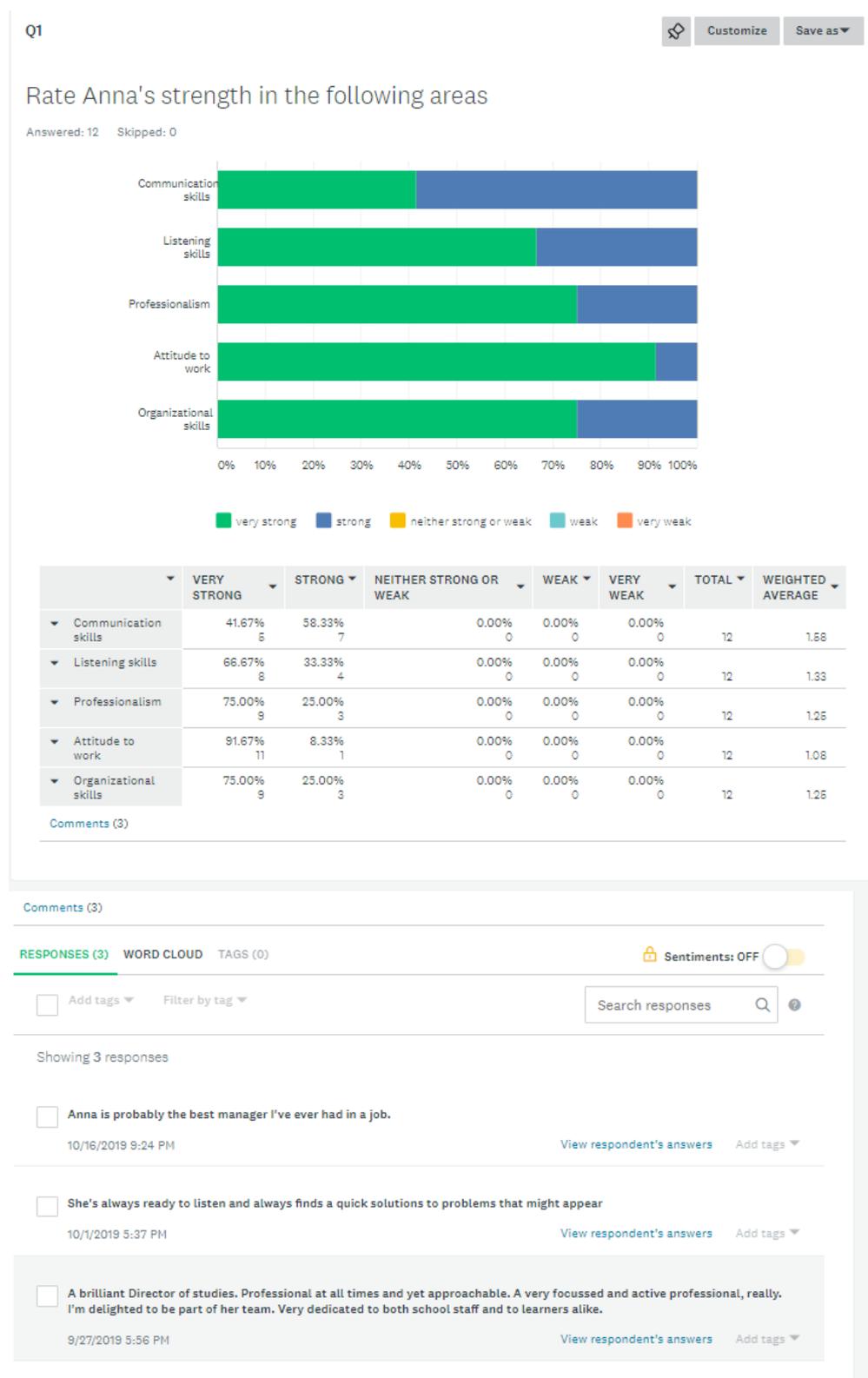
7. Is there anything else that Anna does well or anything specific you'd like to mention?

8. Is there anything else that Anna might be able to improve on or anything specific you'd like to mention?

Done



Appendix 2: Survey Results



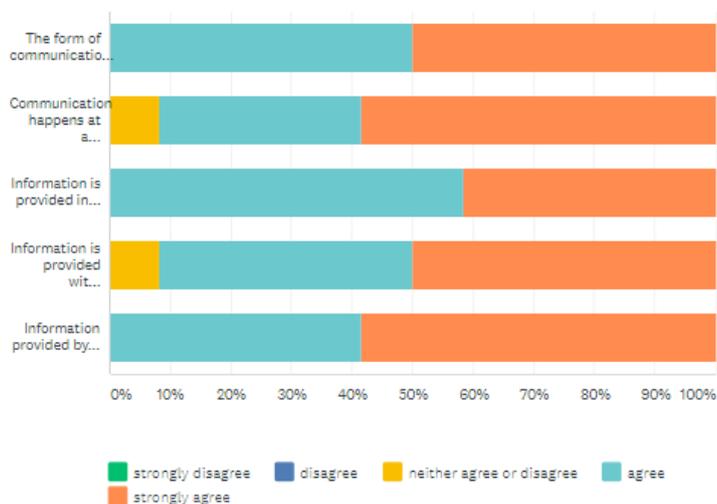


Q2

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Rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements

Answered: 12 Skipped: 0



	STRONGLY DISAGREE	DISAGREE	NEITHER AGREE OR DISAGREE	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
▼ The form of communication chosen by Anna is appropriate for its purpose	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	50.00% 6	50.00% 6	12	4.50
▼ Communication happens at a time and place that is comfortable for me	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	8.33% 1	33.33% 4	58.33% 7	12	4.50
▼ Information is provided in sufficient detail to enable me to carry out my responsibilities	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	58.33% 7	41.67% 5	12	4.42
▼ Information is provided with sufficient notice in order to enable me to carry out my responsibilities	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	8.33% 1	41.67% 5	50.00% 6	12	4.42
▼ Information provided by Anna is clear	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	41.67% 5	58.33% 7	12	4.58

Comments (1)

RESPONSES (1) WORD CLOUD TAGS (0)

Sentiments: OFF

Add tags Filter by tag

Search responses

Showing 1 response

Sometimes Anna delivers a lot of information at the same time very quickly.

11/14/2019 5:40 PM

View respondent's answers Add tags



Q3

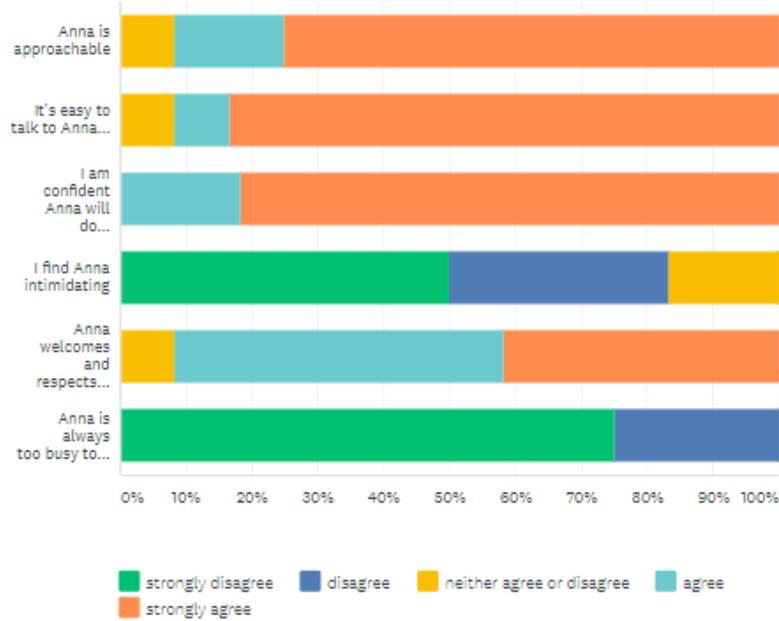


Customize

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Rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements

Answered: 12 Skipped: 0



	STRONGLY DISAGREE	DISAGREE	NEITHER AGREE OR DISAGREE	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
Anna is approachable	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	8.33% 1	16.67% 2	75.00% 9	12	4.67
It's easy to talk to Anna about work related issues	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	8.33% 1	8.33% 1	83.33% 10	12	4.75
I am confident Anna will do her best to help me resolve problems	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	18.18% 2	81.82% 9	11	4.82
I find Anna intimidating	50.00% 6	33.33% 4	16.67% 2	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	12	1.67
Anna welcomes and respects my opinions	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	8.33% 1	50.00% 6	41.67% 5	12	4.33
Anna is always too busy to talk to me so I don't bother	75.00% 9	25.00% 3	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	12	1.25

Comments (0)



Q4

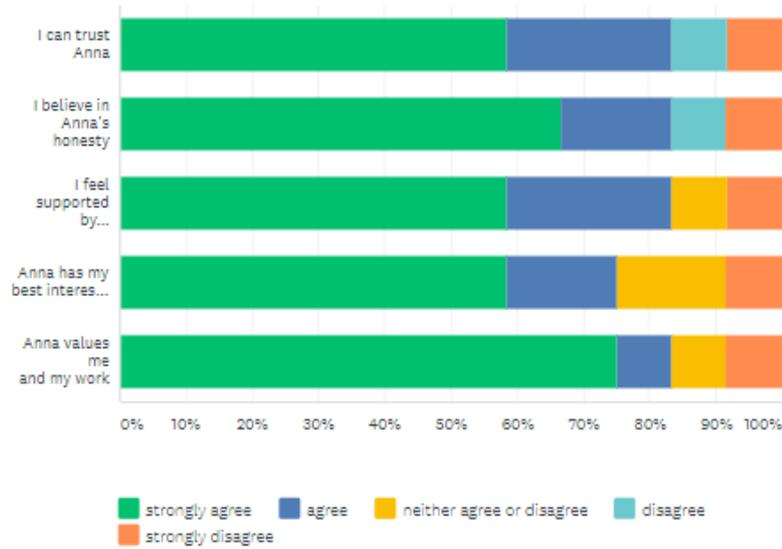


Customize

Save as

Rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements

Answered: 12 Skipped: 0



	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	NEITHER AGREE OR DISAGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
I can trust Anna	58.33% 7	25.00% 3	0.00% 0	8.33% 1	8.33% 1	12	1.83
I believe in Anna's honesty	66.67% 8	16.67% 2	0.00% 0	8.33% 1	8.33% 1	12	1.75
I feel supported by Anna	58.33% 7	25.00% 3	8.33% 1	0.00% 0	8.33% 1	12	1.75
Anna has my best interest at heart	58.33% 7	16.67% 2	16.67% 2	0.00% 0	8.33% 1	12	1.83
Anna values me and my work	75.00% 9	8.33% 1	8.33% 1	0.00% 0	8.33% 1	12	1.68

Comments (0)

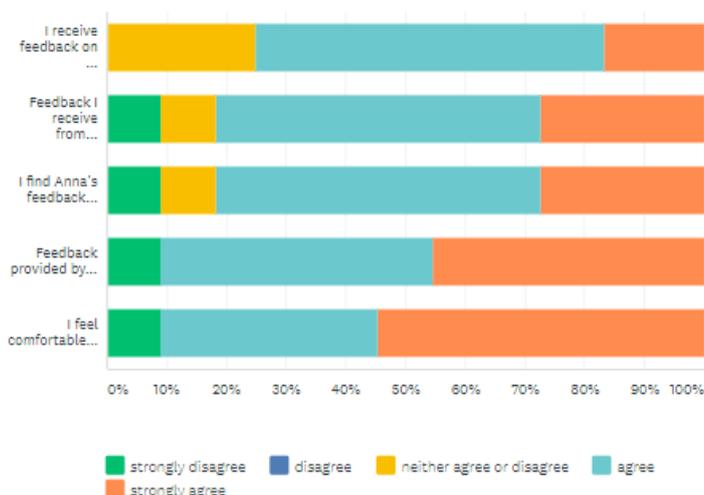


Q5

Customize Save as

Rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements

Answered: 12 Skipped: 0



	STRONGLY DISAGREE	DISAGREE	NEITHER AGREE OR DISAGREE	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
I receive feedback on my work frequently enough	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	25.00% 3	58.33% 7	16.67% 2	12	3.92
Feedback I receive from Anna helps me improve	9.09% 1	0.00% 0	9.09% 1	54.55% 6	27.27% 3	11	3.91
I find Anna's feedback detailed and specific enough to learn from it	9.09% 1	0.00% 0	9.09% 1	54.55% 6	27.27% 3	11	3.91
Feedback provided by Anna is constructive	9.09% 1	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	45.45% 5	45.45% 5	11	4.18
I feel comfortable receiving feedback from Anna	9.09% 1	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	36.36% 4	54.55% 6	11	4.27

Comments (3)

RESPONSES (3) WORD CLOUD TAGS (0)

Sentiments: OFF

Add tags Filter by tag

Search responses

Showing 3 responses

I haven't received feedback on my teaching from Anna in quite a while, last obs was from Fiona
10/21/2019 7:15 AM [View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags](#)

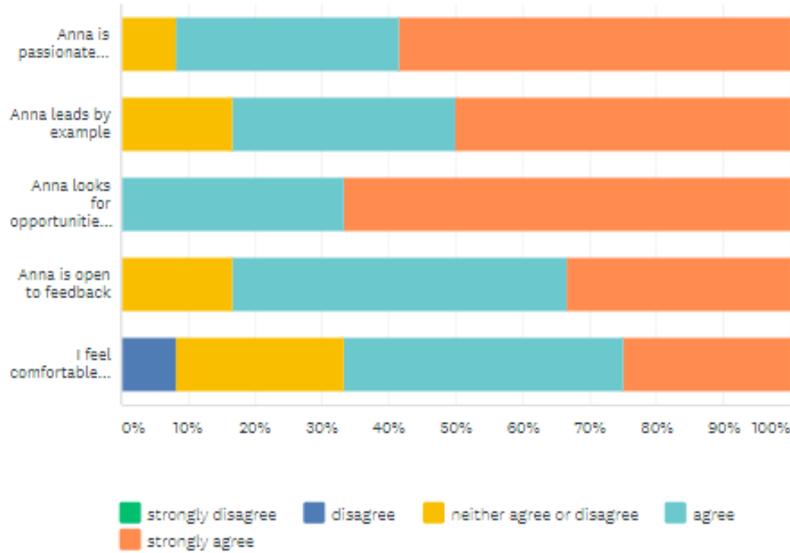
It would be interesting to find out what students have said about my classes so that I could work on developing my own practice
10/8/2019 8:01 PM [View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags](#)

I just wish we could sit and talk more about things we all could do to improve, but I understand this takes time and not everyone would be available. I'd like to have more observations and more workshops and cps
10/1/2019 5:37 PM [View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags](#)



Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements

Answered: 12 Skipped: 0



	STRONGLY DISAGREE	DISAGREE	NEITHER AGREE OR DISAGREE	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	TOTAL
Anna is passionate about her job	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	8.33% 1	33.33% 4	58.33% 7	12
Anna leads by example	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	16.67% 2	33.33% 4	50.00% 6	12
Anna looks for opportunities to develop her skills	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	33.33% 4	66.67% 8	12
Anna is open to feedback	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	16.67% 2	50.00% 6	33.33% 4	12
I feel comfortable giving Anna feedback	0.00% 0	8.33% 1	25.00% 3	41.67% 5	25.00% 3	12

Comments (1)

RESPONSES (1) WORD CLOUD TAGS (0)

Sentiments: OFF

Add tags Filter by tag

Search responses

Showing 1 response

I've never had the opportunity to give her any feedback formally, but I do feel she's open and approachable to receive feedback.

10/1/2019 5:37 PM

View respondent's answers Add tags



Q7

Save as

Is there anything else that Anna does well or anything specific you'd like to mention?

Answered: 8 Skipped: 4

RESPONSES (8) WORD CLOUD TAGS (0)

Sentiments: OFF

Apply to selected Filter by tag

Search responses

Showing 8 responses

Anna is an excellent problem solver and works extremely well under pressure. Her communication in these cases does not falter.
11/14/2019 5:40 PM [View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags](#)

Anna has done a great job of maintaining harmony in a staff room that is...not for beginners! I think she has really benefitted from her focus on development of her own skills.
10/21/2019 7:15 AM [View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags](#)

She's also a fun person to work with which is nice.
10/16/2019 9:24 PM [View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags](#)

Anna is very calm in dealing with challenging situations or people and yet is assertive need needs to be.
10/8/2019 8:01 PM [View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags](#)

You are doing a great job :) specially considering the circumstances the school has gone through. If we survived all the drama last year, it's thanks to you.
10/8/2019 7:21 PM [View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags](#)

Anna is a genuine person who does her best to ensure that the working environment is the best it can be.
10/1/2019 5:56 PM [View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags](#)

I like how she leads the team even in the face of difficulties and disagreements that might happen in the teachers' lounge. She shows strong leadership skills in dealing with problems. She's very fair when it comes to these situations.
10/1/2019 5:37 PM [View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags](#)

That's all
9/29/2019 9:27 PM [View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags](#)



Is there anything else that Anna might be able to improve on or anything specific you'd like to mention?

Answered: 7 Skipped: 5

RESPONSES (7) WORD CLOUD TAGS (0) Sentiments: OFF

Apply to selected ▾ Filter by tag ▾ Search responses

Showing 7 responses

- It seems to me as though DoSes and ADoSes in most schools are promoted from teaching roles, but management actually quite different from teaching though they share similar characteristics. It's unclear to me how much management/HR-specific training DoSes and ADoSes get but it seems absolutely vital and could be a really helpful line of development to pursue.
 10/21/2019 7:15 AM [View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags ▾](#)
- Nothing really
 10/16/2019 9:24 PM [View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags ▾](#)
- Anna is the best DOS I have ever worked with.
 10/8/2019 8:01 PM [View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags ▾](#)
- Keep doing your best and listening to your staff.
 10/8/2019 7:21 PM [View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags ▾](#)
- Practical advice on lesson planning for non book days. How to improve planning "my own" lesson with out the guidance from the book.
 10/1/2019 5:56 PM [View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags ▾](#)
- Ok
 9/29/2019 9:27 PM [View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags ▾](#)



How Successful are Annual Quality Observations in Assessing 'Good Teaching'?

Gavin Reddin

Centre of English Studies

Section 1: Context and Aims:

Observation plays an crucial role in teaching as well as in teaching practice of trainee teachers both during initial teacher training courses and during diploma courses. Every school differs in their approach to observing their teaching staff. Most schools conduct observations of teachers on an annual basis. This is usually undertaken by a supervisor (e.g. Director of Studies). The teachers are given notice as to when the observation will take place - this may vary from one day's notice to a week. The teacher is typically asked to supply a lesson plan for the time the observer will be in the class. These observations tend to be evaluative by nature, but more schools, including my own school, the Centre of English Studies, are using observations to implement professional development programmes. This has become an integral part of professional development strategies that some schools are undertaking.

The aim of my research is to highlight the nature and limitations of annual quality observations within my own school, the Centre of English Studies, by gauging the feelings of teachers who have undergone the observation procedure.

Rationale:

CES Schools' teachers are encouraged to follow the Communicative Approach in lessons, aiming to make communicative competence the goal of teaching and learning. This, often informs how an observer carries out their observation of the teaching cohort. The observation procedure broadly takes the following form:

- The teacher is informed that they will be observed - teachers are generally given two days' notice.
- The teacher is given an observation sheet on which they must fill out the aims of their lesson, anticipated problems and solutions, a class profile, how the lesson fits into the timetable for the week, and the lesson procedure.
- There is a pre-observation meeting where possible.
- This observation sheet along with classroom materials is given to the observer on the morning the observation will take place
- After the observation has taken place, the observed teacher is asked to reflect on their lesson in writing and this is given to the observer.
- Feedback then takes place the following day with both observer and observed teacher giving their opinions on the lesson as a whole and on the observed teacher's teaching in general.
- These observations will help to inform the Head of Teacher Development as to which areas to focus on in any future workshops or research groups.



Findings:

Teaching is a complex and dynamic process. Many things occur during a lesson at the same time, so it is impossible to observe all of them (Richards, 2011). Every student is an individual and each one will respond to the lesson in their own way. Some may be stimulated by the lesson and feel that the lesson is pitched at the right level of challenge for them, while other students may feel that the lesson is too easy for them, that they are not being challenged enough and may switch off. At the same time, the teacher may feel that the lesson is not going according to plan or that the lesson may have been pitched at the wrong level, and therefore may be struggling mentally to maintain the flow of the lesson (Richards, 2011). "Although there are several types of observational procedures or techniques that have been used to examine effective teaching (e.g., charts, rating scales, checklists, and narrative descriptions), the most widely used procedure or research method has been systematic classroom observation based on interactive coding systems" (Waxman, 2010) These coding systems allow the observer to record nearly everything that occurs in the classroom from what the students are doing in the lesson, such as how they are interacting with the teacher, other students, and the class materials to what the teachers do during the lesson - how they manage the classroom environment, materials and students. But many of these judgments are objective. Equally, how students and teachers respond to the lesson are not always directly observable.

Another drawback is the very fact that an observer is in the room. The presence of an observer can have a very negative impact on how a teacher performs, as my interviews with teachers at CES bore out. Many teachers interviewed felt that the observed lesson was not a true reflection of their teaching. Tension and anxiety were two of the most prevalent feelings among teachers who were being observed. This tension and anxiety begins when they are told they are being observed. All the teachers I interviewed felt that the tension and anxiety came from the belief that they were being evaluated no matter how much the observer stressed that it was purely to help continue to develop their teaching. One of the most common complaints among the teaching cohort is the fact that there is "a period when all the teachers get observed and it might take a month to get through all the teachers and you don't know when you'll be observed so for that period you are really anxious." Some teachers over-prepare for their lessons, while others teach in a way that they feel the observer wishes them to teach, and this may cause some confusion for students who are used to their teacher teaching in a particular manner when not observed. An experienced observer will be fully aware of the effect their presence will have on a teacher, whether that teacher is experienced or not, but the following comments were made by teachers at CES:

There's something deeply personal about being observed.

I feel that when I'm observed I'm a completely different teacher to when I'm in the class on my own with my students.

I don't see how anyone can evaluate my teaching based on a 25-minute observation.



I plan everything in so much detail for when I'm observed that I don't allow for anything to happen outside of that plan.

I feel like it's a punishment even though it's supposed to be for development purposes.

I feel like my flaws are exposed when I'm being observed.

I can never get used to it.

I'm constantly second guessing myself when an observer is in the room. I feel that if it's a disaster, I have so much to lose.

Even my students don't behave naturally when an observer is in the room. Maybe they feed off my anxiety.

Post observation meetings are strange for me because I never feel that any observed lesson is a true reflection of the way I teach or what my classes are like.

Learning is a messy process but I feel observations have to show that it's not.

We have a period of a few weeks where all the teachers are observed. We're all thinking will it be me this week. Should I keep a favourite lesson for when I know I'll be observed. We're all anxious during that period.

Teachers hate being observed and I don't know if it's that beneficial.

Some of the anonymised comments above are a very good indication of the drawbacks of observations. Does an observer get a true reflection of what goes on in the classroom on a daily basis by observing a lesson for 25 minutes every six months to a year? Does an observer get a true reflection of what goes on in the classroom when a teacher is so anxious and cannot be themselves in a lesson they are being observed in? No doubt there is a need for school managers and directors of studies to see how their teachers are getting on in the classroom, but if teachers see the process as punitive, this will have a negative impact on teacher development and staff morale. Equally, giving teachers an opportunity to show management what they are like in the classroom is ineffective if this takes place infrequently and on an ad-hoc basis.



At CES, teachers, when asked about post-observation feedback, felt that the observer often led the process. "Most research on supervision suggests that the nature of talk between the supervisor and the teacher in post-observation conferences is dictated by the supervisor" (Richards, 2011). This suggests a top-down approach to both observations as an evaluative process and for teacher development.

The teachers I interviewed had suggestions that could make the whole procedure less onerous and more teacher and development friendly - and consequently, more bottom-up. Here are some comments:

"I think peer teaching is far more beneficial because it is less stressful knowing that you are being observed by someone who doesn't have authority over you. You can learn so much from other teachers."

"I would feel it is more beneficial if I observed myself by recording the lesson and looking at the lesson with a more experienced teacher to talk about the strengths and weaknesses of the lesson."

"I think recording lessons is really beneficial because you can really see the kind of things you are doing well in a lesson and the kind of things you just aren't very good at. Watching yourself back is better than an observer telling you what you're doing or not doing. It's more immediate. But if it's going to be effective, you'd have to do it over a few weeks so you can see any trends."

"I think teachers should be allowed to volunteer when they would like to be observed and to tell the observer the reasons why they want to be observed. You should, as a teacher, be able to have a chat with the observer and tell the observer what areas they should focus on when they observe the lesson. I think that would bring some degree of ownership to the process for the teacher."

"I think if staff was divided into groups with a mixture of very experienced, medium experienced, and novice teachers. Let's say you had 4 in each group and they could organise peer observations or videoing the classroom because peer obs are difficult to organise in a busy school. They watch the videos together and talk about the lesson. Then they can prepare a report for the DoS."

"I think the observer and the observed should collaborate on the lesson being observed. There should really be a pre-observation discussion and both of them can come up with an idea for the lesson and what areas they can both focus on. Why should it be a one-way street with the observer having all the power?"

From my survey of teachers at CES, it was not always clear to those being observed what the observer was looking for. As Jack Richards says, teaching is a dynamic process, and equally, learning is a messy process as well; "Different learning processes are responsible for different aspects of language. Indeed, given that the language is as complicated as it is, one would not expect the learning process to be any simpler" (Larsen-Freeman, 2003). Therefore an observation of on average 25-minutes (generally the standard number of minutes that an observation occurs in ESL schools in Ireland) of the teaching cohort in a school is asking a lot in order to capture what is going on in the classroom both from a teaching and from a learners' perspective.

As Richard Day points out, there are two areas of teaching in language teaching, subject-matter knowledge and action-system knowledge. Subject-matter knowledge refers to the specific information that teachers need to teach content. Action-system knowledge refers to information dealing with teaching and learning in general regardless of subject matter, an example being



classroom management. Day suggests a formal program of observation that I think can assist teachers within a language school:

- Developing terminology for understanding and discussing the teaching process
- Developing awareness of the principles and decision making that underlie effective teaching that the school wishes to see implemented in the classroom
- Distinguishing between effective and ineffective classroom practices
- Identifying techniques and practices that teachers can apply to their own teaching (Richards & Nunan, ed. 1993)

If a school has a particular philosophy of what makes teaching effective and wants to implement that at a classroom level, teacher development and classroom observations need to be tightly linked. As stated above, CES teachers are instructed to implement the Communicative approach, but much of this is nebulous and far too general for it to be a coherent philosophy within the school.

Observations that occur once every half year or more for 25 minutes will not allow school management to see how well teachers are delivering whatever is promised to students.

Furthermore, we must always keep students in mind. An observer may not like what is occurring in the classroom, but what if a student is enjoying the process and getting more out of it than the observer realises? Equally, if there are a wide variation of goals and objectives among students in one classroom, can an observation establish whether a teacher has met all of those goals and objectives? One student may be in class to be able to communicate at a basic conversational level, while another may want to achieve fluency. How much the observer considers the student in an observation is not known to the teacher being observed, according to my research. Observations may need to move away from how a teacher is teaching, to how does the teaching impact on the students learning. If a teacher forgets to check their instructions, loses time on a particular activity, or doesn't recast a student's mistake, for example, do any of these oversights impact negatively on a student's "learning" and how is an observer able to see that? "The major message, however, is that rather than recommending a particular teaching method, teachers need to be evaluators of the effect of the methods that they choose" (Hattie, 2003).

As Earl Stevick asked, "Why do some language students succeed and others fail? What may the learners and teachers of a foreign language hope to succeed at anyway? How broad, how wide may be the measure of their failure, or of their success? (Stevick, 1981).

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Which techniques for communicating lesson aims and objectives are preferred by learners as a learning tool?

IRST Project 2019

Fiona Cox

Introduction

This is a teacher development project based around developing practical techniques to communicate lesson aims and objectives in the EFL classroom.

I am currently ADoS at a global chain school in which a specific set of teaching standards has been established in order to maintain consistency and standards across schools. These standards are monitored through quarterly classroom observations with a focus on one standard per quarter. In 2019, the area of focus assigned in quarter 2 was the communication of lesson aims and objectives which includes the visualisation and signposting of aims and objectives throughout a lesson.

In 10 out of 15 observed lessons, the aims and objectives were communicated at the beginning of the lesson but not referred to at any point throughout the rest of the lesson. The communication consisted of the teacher reading the lesson aims and objectives from the board and asking the students if they had any questions at the end. The students did not ask any questions in any of the lessons observed. In 2 of these lessons, the aims and objectives were communicated at the beginning of the lesson and subsequently referred to by the teacher throughout the lesson. In 1 lesson the aims and objectives of the lesson were discussed with the students at the beginning of the lesson and referred to by means of eliciting throughout the lesson. In 1 lesson, the aim only was stated and in 1 lesson the objectives were stated with no aim.

The observations revealed that students were rarely involved in the communication process and were passive participants in this phase of the lesson. Though lesson aims and objectives were communicated for the most part, it was not evident that students understood their purpose, particularly in many lessons where aims and objectives were abandoned after the first five minutes. Additionally, feedback with teachers revealed that some found it difficult to write student friendly aims and objectives, others acknowledged that they simply carried out this stage as a teaching obligation and others simply found this part of the lesson very boring.

This data therefore led to the initiation of this action research project. My aim is to develop techniques for communicating lesson aims and objectives and identify which techniques are most popular among students.



Research question

‘Which techniques for communicating lesson aims and objectives are preferred by learners as a learning tool?’

Main aim

To identify learner preferences in the communication of lesson aims and objectives.

Literature Review

Before delving into the practical elements, it was necessary to conduct research which would establish key areas to consider when developing techniques to communicate lesson aims and objectives. I therefore focused on three main research areas; visible learning theories, designing lessons and aspects of learner motivation

Visible learning is ‘when there is deliberate practice aimed at attaining mastery of the goal, when there is feedback given and sought, and when there are active, passionate, and engaging people (teacher, student, peers, and so on) participating in the act of learning.’ (Hattie, 2009:22). Hattie also states that ‘learning objectives at the beginning of the learning process reveal what the goal of learning is’ and that ‘it is important not only for teachers to know what the goal of the lesson is and when it has been achieved but also to share this knowledge with the learner and to make it the explicit subject of the lesson’ (Hattie and Zierer, 2018: 122). He describes this visualisation process as ‘an important tool for teachers’ (Hattie and Zierer, 2018: 124). Sarah Williams, who has dedicated a section of her blog to visible learning, concurs that ‘it is all very well deciding what you want them to learn and then just delivering the lesson...but if the students aren’t included in this knowledge you will be missing a large learning opportunity’ (Williams, 2016). Tessa Woodward compares the visibility of learning objectives to that of a restaurant menu ‘in some restaurants there is a fixed menu, in others you can choose from a selection. Either way it’s quite nice to know what’s coming before it arrives’ (Woodward, 2001:52). On the other hand, Scrivener mentions that ‘Teachers sometimes prefer the ‘surprise approach’ to teaching methodology, often students don’t really know why they followed a particular procedure or did a particular activity’ (Scrivener, 2000:78). My school has identified the need for learning objectives to be visible, however my observations did reveal that some teachers still use elements of the ‘surprise’ approach. There is therefore a need to demonstrate how aims and objectives can be used as a ‘learning opportunity’ (Williams, 2016) and a “teaching tool” (Hattie and Zierer, 2018: 124).

Thus, before designing these techniques there are some key things to consider. According to Bruner (1961), “The role of the teacher should not be to teach information by rote learning but instead to



facilitate the learning process. This means that a good teacher will design lessons that help students discover the relationship between bits of information” (McLeod, S. A. (2008). Bruner.). The techniques I develop should facilitate this discovery process in that they will help students to identify links between the lesson activities, i.e. the lesson objectives, and the main learning goal.

There exist few concrete ideas about techniques to communicate aims and objectives; therefore, identifying a need for development in this area. Tessa Woodward suggests letting ‘students decide which order they want to do things in, which things they would like to cross off the list and what personal goals they would like to set for the lesson’. (Woodward, 2001:52) Benson suggests that learners make their own decisions on learning goals ‘Results of experiments in which learners are asked to set their own goals and plan activities within the classroom suggest that increased learner control is beneficial to language learning in the short term’ (Benson 2013: 154). Scrivener explains that ‘having trust in your students’ abilities to learn and in their abilities to make decisions about what and how to learn’ (Scrivener 2012). These ideas are certainly worth consideration in the development process.

Harmer refers to intrinsic motivation being a result of some students being ‘motivated by the enjoyment of the learning process itself’. (Harmer, 2001:51) In his list of motivation sources, the teaching method features as a key component; he states that when both students and teachers ‘are comfortable with the method being used, success is more likely’ (Harmer, 2001:52) During my observations, it was clear that neither teachers nor students were comfortable with the teacher led approach to communicating aims and objectives and therefore a more learner centred approach may result in increased motivation.

Penny Ur describes one of the characteristics of motivated learners as being goal orientated and states that ‘the learner is very aware of the goals of learning, or of specific learning activities, and directs his or her efforts towards achieving them’ (Ur, 1991:275)). She also affirms that in order to arouse students’ interest in a task that ‘learners should be aware of the objectives of the task both language learning and content’ (Ur 1991:281). These affirmations imply that having clear goals in a lesson should result in more motivated students and therefore more engaged students.

With this literature in mind the techniques I develop should demonstrate whether or not the way in which we communicate lesson aims and objectives can influence the learning experience for the students.



Method 300-500

Research Participants: 14 students Intermediate A class at EC Dublin.

Level: B1/ B1+

Location: Dublin

Date: Tuesday 07.01.2020 – Friday 10.01.2020

Action: I developed four techniques for communicating aims and objectives in the classroom. I used a different technique each day and had the students evaluate them.

Method: I presented the project to the students on Tuesday 07.01.2020 and explained that each day we were going to use a different technique to talk about lesson aims and objectives. The meaning and concept of lesson aims and objectives was clarified before starting. I explained to the students that at the end of each lesson we would discuss what they liked and didn't like about the technique and at the end of the week they would vote on their favourite technique.

Data Collection Method 1: At the end of each lesson, the student worked in groups of three to discuss what they liked and disliked about the method used to talk about lesson aims and objectives.

Considerations: I decided on B1+I for this project because students have enough language ability to discuss the techniques and are still at the stage where they are enthusiastic about learning and participating in class. As a data method collection, I chose a focus group to facilitate discussion and take the pressure off weaker students who may initially struggle with the concept

Data Collection Method 2: I reviewed the four techniques with the students and elicited how we had worked with aims and objectives each day. I put the techniques on the board and numbered them 1-4. Students wrote their favourite number on a piece of paper and put it in a box.

Considerations: As an anonymous survey this provided the most honest feedback for student preferences. Having worked with the concept throughout the week and reviewed the techniques before voting, I felt confident that students knew what they were doing.

Techniques : Day 1: Discussing Aims and Objectives with students

Day 2: Students decide on learning goals from the coursebook.

Day 3: Students decide / guess lesson Objectives



Day 4: Students decide / guess the aim of the lesson

(refer to appendices for more detail)

Results and findings

The comments from the focus group and the voting results give a clear understanding of learner preferences with regard to the communication of aims and objectives.

Overall, the majority of students enjoyed choosing their own aims and objectives from their course book and the discussion of aims and objectives proved the least popular as a technique among students. Regarding the focus group, it is clear that the students have more positive feedback to give about techniques two, three and four and more negative comments about technique number one.

The data shows that out of a total of 15 students, 7 preferred the course book technique (no. 2), 6 voted for guessing the lesson aim technique (No. 4), a mere 2 picked guessing the objectives technique (No. 3) and the discussion of aims and objectives received zero votes from the students.

The focus group comments give us more insight into the reasons behind these results. A running thread in the positive comments for all techniques was firstly that students were aware of where the lesson was taking them and secondly that they all felt that there was more talking and participation in general throughout the lesson. Regarding the two most popular techniques (two and three), students found them both fun and didn't see the time going by. Students also referred to their enjoyment of the competitive element and board presentation in techniques three and four.

In terms of negative feedback, the underlying theme for techniques two, three and four was that students find it challenging to think of alternative ways to accomplish activities and to express aims and objectives with the appropriate language. Finally, students commented that technique number one was overly wordy and long, and boring as a result.

Discussion

In reference to my initial research, Hattie and Williams described visible learning as 'a teaching tool' (Hattie and Zierer, 2018) and a learning opportunity (Williams, 2018). The techniques I have



developed can certainly be used as a valuable teaching tool to raise awareness of the learning process for students in an enjoyable way. As the week progressed students adapted to the concept and found it easier to volunteer ideas about what the steps they need to take in order to achieve their goals. Important to share this knowledge with learners - yes, they gave positive feedback on knowing the direction of the lesson.

Woodward's suggested menu methods heavily influenced technique number 2, the most popular technique, in which students chose the order in which they would do activities from the book. I was amazed at students' reaction to this activity, they were instantly engaged and participating. Some teachers commented on the difficulty of managing such a lesson when students choose different activity orders. My advice was to ensure that students justified why they were doing certain activities at certain times or come to an agreement with the students on the order we were all going to follow.

Harmer suggested that learners could be motivated by the learning process itself and by using these techniques I have shown that by highlighting the learning process and directly involving the students in it, they were more motivated. Their learning preferences clearly highlight that they got much more enjoyment from student led rather than teacher led techniques. .

Penny Ur suggested that "making learning goals clear could result in arousing interest" (Ur, 1991) in the classroom. I think that techniques three and four which involved guessing aims and objectives were very successful in achieving this. Students had more clarity on how to reach an aim and what an aim actually is. I also previously mentioned Ur's comment that motivated learners are goal orientated", I think using these type of techniques can actually help learners to become goal orientated.

Conclusion

Hattie comments that 'the biggest effects on student learning occur when teachers become learners of their own teaching, and when students become their own teachers' (Hattie, 2009:22)

As a result of this research, I have become more aware as a teacher in terms of what, how and why I am teaching certain points.



I have facilitated training sessions on this topic to share my ideas with teachers in my school and in other schools belonging to the chain. The feedback I received was very positive and in general teachers had never thought of utilising aims and objectives in this way and acknowledged that they had been using them in a lesson as part of teaching standards rather than a teaching tool.

As a result, teachers have used some of these techniques in their lessons and given feedback on their experience. In general, they were quite surprised at how unaware students were about why they were doing certain activities. Teachers realised the importance of discussing the 'why' with students and that this contributes to more meaningful and focused feedback on each task. In addition, some new techniques have been created such as using the quiz platform Kahoot as a quiz to guess the most logical order of objectives or matching the objectives to the activities.

As a follow up to this research it would be interesting to establish the link between using such techniques and the possibility of developing learner autonomy in this way. Nunan's nine steps to autonomy include a myriad of elements touched upon in this project.



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Appendices

Focus Group – Students		
	What did you like about the lesson?	What did you dislike about the lesson?
Technique 1 – Discussing aims and objectives	We know where we are going Everybody talked more cause the teacher asked lots of questions	It was a bit long Sometimes boring I don't understand why we need to talk about what we will do for so long , I just want to do it Too much writing on the board
Technique 2 – decide on your objectives from the course book	The book day is sometimes boring but this was fun We see why we do some activities We choose which activities we like We see why some activities in the book are not so useful sometimes We can say if we don't like an activity and it's ok We see that we need more practice than what is in the book The time went really quickly We participated more	Difficult to think of other ways to do things because we are not teachers
Technique 3 Guess the objectives	We can see how to learn something We can see that there are many different ways to achieve the aim We like the steps on the board, we feel like we are climbing a stairs. We talked a lot	Difficult to think of three objectives
Technique 4 Guess the aim	It was fun It was like a competition Helped us to see which grammar goes with the situation The time went really quickly We spoke a lot	It was difficult to write Difficult to think of a result but clear when we saw it



Vote for students favourite technique

Students preferred technique			
Technique 1	Technique 2	Technique 3	Technique 4
0	7	2	6

Lessons 1

Technique 1 Discuss these aims and objectives

Aim: by the end of the lesson you will be able to talk about your English course in detail

Do you ever talk about your course? E.g your English Course?
Who do you talk about your courses with ?
Do you have enough English to talk about it?

Yes, with my family, but in my language :-)
Also, with friends at school.
Maybe for univeristy application
We don't always have the correct vocabulary

Obj 1: Learn and use vocabulary related to education and school

Do you already know some vocabulary?

Are we going to use that today?

How many new words/ expressions are you going to learn?

Obj 2: Learn and use different adjectives to describe people and things

Why do we need to describe people and things when we talk about our courses?

Obj 3: Practise listening for general and specific information

What do you think you will listen to ?

How will this help you to achieve your aim?



Lesson 2

Technique 2 – using the coursebook to create our own aims and objectives

- Students decide on main aim of the lessons
- Students decide what steps (Objectives) they need to take to achieve this aim
- Choose activities
- Evaluate tasks in the book (do you like them, do you need more practice, is there another way to do this activity)
- Create their own tasks
- Decide to skip/ do / adapt coursebook tasks

HOW'S YOUR COURSE GOING?

VOCABULARY Describing courses

1 Match the questions (1-8) with the answers (a-h). Check you understand the words and phrases in bold.

- 1 Why are you doing it?
- 2 How's it going?
- 3 How was it taught?
- 4 Did you enjoy it?
- 5 What were the **tutors** like?
- 6 Did you have much **coursework**?
- 7 Did you find it useful?
- 8 How is it **assessed**?

a 25% of the **overall mark** is on the **coursework** and the rest is on the **final exam**.
b They've introduced a new system at work so we're all **getting training** in how to use it.
c I'm **struggling** a bit, to be honest. I failed my last **module** so I can't afford to fail another.
d Yes and no. I guess it was **good** for my **CV**, but it wasn't **relevant** to my current work as I never use Excel.
e They were very **encouraging** and gave us a lot of **feedback**.
f It was all done through **workshops**, so it was all very **practical**.
g Well, I started out quite **keen**, but I lost a bit of **motivation** as I wasn't making much **progress**.
h Yeah, it was quite **demanding**. We had regular **assignments** and the **seminars** involved a lot of reading beforehand too.

2 Work in pairs and answer the questions. Use a dictionary to help you if you need to.

- 1 What might you do for an assignment? Apart from **have**, what other verbs can go with **assignment**?
- 2 Why might you struggle on a course? What's the opposite of **struggling** on a course? Think of two more adjectives to describe a tutor.
- 3 If tutors are **encouraging**, what do they say to you? Think of two more adjectives to describe a tutor.
- 4 When do you get **feedback**? Why do tutors give you **feedback**?
- 5 Think of three ways you can be **assessed**.

6 Think of four things you might get training in at work.
7 What things might help you maintain or increase your motivation on a course?

3 With your partner, look at these different types of courses and training. Tell your partner about any that you have done. Ask each other questions like those in Exercise 1.

a degree course	IT training
a postgraduate course	first-aid training
an evening course	leadership training
an online course	training in using a machine

LISTENING

4 Listen to two colleagues on a break at work. They talk about a course the woman is doing. Take notes about the following:

- 1 type of course
- 2 how they learn
- 3 tutors and students
- 4 length of course
- 5 assessment & qualification

5 Do you think the course will be good for her career or not? Why? / Why not?

6 Listen again and complete the sentences with three words in each space.

- 1 Well, you learn _____ . You know, how to listen and guide people through problems.
- 2 It's very practical. I mean, we have some _____ which are about theory ...
- 3 Great. They're all very _____ , but they present things in a very clear way.
- 4 Well, there are one or two guys that aren't as supportive _____ .
- 5 I can imagine. You want _____ !
- 6 I think there are eleven weeks left. It's _____ an evening a week.
- 7 ... you could do more, but I don't have time _____ my workload here.

7 Work in pairs. Discuss the questions.

- Is encouragement always better than criticism?
- Do you think you would be good at counselling?
- Do you know anyone who has studied something that they don't use anymore?
- When do you think is a good time to stop studying?

GRAMMAR

Future time clauses

When we want to specify the time at which a future action will happen, we often use a clause starting with a time expression such as when, after, once, etc.

8 Look at these sentences from the conversation. Answer the questions below.

- a I'm going back after I've had this coffee.
- b So what are you going to do when it ends?
- c I might do another course once I've finished this one.
- d As soon as I find a proper job, I'll probably stop doing my studying.

- 1 What are the time expressions in each sentence?
- 2 Do you know any other time words like when and after that can join two parts of a sentence?
- 3 What tenses follow the time expressions?
- 4 Do the time clauses refer to now or the future?
- 5 Can the sentences start with the time clause?

C Check your ideas on page 176 and do Exercise 1.

9 Complete the questions with your own ideas. Then work in groups and take turns asking and answering your questions.

- 1 What are you going to do after ...?
- 2 Where are you going to stay when ...?
- 3 While you're on holiday ...?
- 4 What'll happen once ...?
- 5 How long is it before ...?

C For further practice, see Exercise 2 on page 176.



Result

- Aim: By the end of the lesson we are going to be able to talk about our courses now and our plans for after using future clauses.

Objectives:

- Learn vocabulary
 - Task 1: first we will try to guess the answers to see if we are using similar vocabulary, then compare with the book, we can add a pronunciation practice here to make sure we can say the words properly, then complete exercise 2 because it helps to see the vocabulary again, then we will do exercise 3 to use the vocabulary ourselves)
- Do a listening activity (to see if we can recognise the new vocabulary and compare their conversations to ours practice before. Do 4,5 6 but skip 7 because we want to spend more time on the grammar)
- Study Future time clauses so that we can talk about our future plans more naturally
- Practice using the clauses in real sentences



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 e They were very encouraging and gave us a lot of feedback.
 f It was all done through workshops, so it was all very practical.
 g Well, I started out quite keen, but I lost a bit of motivation as I wasn't making much progress.
 h Yeah, it was quite demanding. We had regular assignments and the seminars involved a lot of reading beforehand too.

2 Work in pairs and answer the questions. Use a dictionary to help you if you need to.

- What might you do for an assignment? Apart from *have*, what other verbs can go with *assignment*?
- Why might you struggle on a course? What's the opposite of *struggling* on a course?
- If tutors are encouraging, what do they say to you? Think of two more adjectives to describe a tutor.
- When do you get feedback? Why do tutors give you feedback?
- Think of three ways you can be assessed.

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- I can imagine. You want _____!
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- I might do another course once I've finished this one.*
- As soon as I find a proper job, I'll probably stop doing any studying.*

- What are the time expressions in each sentence?
- Do you know any other time words like *when* and *after* that can join two parts of a sentence?
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G Check your ideas on page 114 and do Exercise 1.

9 Complete the questions with your own ideas. Then work in groups and take turns asking and answering your questions.

- What are you going to do after ...?
- Where are you going to stay when ...?
- While you're on holiday ...?
- What'll happen once ...?
- How long is it before ...?

G For further practice, see Exercise 2 on page 173.



ec **Technique 3**
Guess the objectives

You will be better able to understand in detail what native speakers are saying and speak more fluently in the context of a video blog about reusing and recycling

The graphic features a dark chalkboard background. On the left, a hand in a light blue sleeve holds a piece of white chalk, pointing towards a staircase of white chalk steps that ascends from the bottom left towards the top right. Each step is marked with a white question mark. A green rectangular box with white text is positioned in the upper right area of the chalkboard.



Technique 3

Guess the objectives

You will be better able to understand in detail what is said in standard spoken language and speak more fluently

Create your own video blog for the class

Decoding language and mimicking

Listen and check

Predict detail gap fill

Listen for gist

Listen without sound



A chalkboard background with a white staircase of steps leading from the bottom left towards the top right. At the top of the stairs is a question mark. A hand holding a piece of white chalk is visible on the right side of the board. The title 'Technique 4 Guess the Aim' is written in white on the left side, with a circular logo containing the letters 'ec' to its left. Four orange boxes with white text are placed on the steps of the staircase.

ec **Technique 4**
Guess the Aim

describe and discuss the function and appearance of different buildings

examine gradable and ungradable adjectives

listen to a conversation about a building

learn vocabulary to describe different aspects of buildings

?



Technique 4 Guess the Aim

describe different kinds of spaces, use this language to describe homes and architecture.

describe and discuss the function and appearance of different buildings

examine gradable and ungradable adjectives

listen to a conversation about a building

learn vocabulary to describe different aspects of buildings



Trinity Irish Research Scheme for Teaching

Please complete the form below with as much detail as possible.

Send completed for the IRSTprojects@gmail.com before **Friday March 20th**.

1. Researcher(s) (Inc. email and institution)

2. I would like to research...(list some ideas or questions)

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