

Problematizing the Subject Position of the Observers in the ELT Field

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Abstract

This chapter explores the unseen, silencing and effective practices of invisibilization in the classroom observations made by the Ministry of Education- external institutions - of English teachers in public schools in Colombia. This study argues that such practices of classroom observation are not simply normalized practices (formats, rubrics and data), but represent more than a process of instrumentalization, functioning as a social practice, where the teacher, observer and school directors, among others, are involved in an asymmetrical power-relation where an *expert reasoning system* in school contexts prevails, merged with reflection and criticism.

As such, I will recall my experience as an Observer, recruited and trained by a well-recognized institution for one of the activities of the National Bilingual Program. This study deals with the systems of reasoning, power-knowledge observation and control which are applied to EFL Teachers in order to make their classes effective. As a trained Observer, I set out to explore the decolonial option ⁵ in order to problematize classroom observation practices and their utility for normalizing English teaching, teachers and even Observers in an English as a Foreign Language Program.

5 Decolonial option becomes the horizon to imagine and act toward global futures in which the notion of a political enemy is replaced by intercultural communication and towards an-other rationality that puts life first and that places institutions at its service, rather than the other way around. (Mignolo & Escobar, 2010)

I would also like to analyze the Observers' discourses about the training they receive from other institutions; and what these teachers feel when trained with a specific and primordial parameter and when they are observed by an expert trainer/observer. My decolonial perspective will enable me to reveal what the canonical method of observation ignores in its formats and reports.

Introduction

I would like to start by drawing the readers' attention to a scene in the movie *The Bone Collector* which depicts a conversation between an expert detective (he has had many years of experience and major professional achievements) and his assistant (a nurse, with little education or experience). The expert detective asks the assistant, "What do you see there in this crime scene?" Then he adds, "You have the ability to see farther than the regular eye..." After analyzing, thinking, and observing, she gives him a fundamental lead for his investigation; in a few words, with a deep/reflexive observation she sees what the expert failed to see even though they were both looking at the same thing and he, as the "expert", had far more professional training and experience.

This, an example of how a non-expert may disrupt what has been naturalized and taken for granted, equally applies to classroom observation practices. There is an "expert" (Observer) who observes some things but fails to see others and so requires the support of another person to follow the guidelines of his or her work. This means that the Observer is not a machine (a thing like a magnifying glass, microscope, or telescope); he or she is a subject like any other, granted this title because of his or training and experience and whose expertise is taken for granted and is solely responsible for the observation, even though he or she cannot have a whole view of the classroom. Despite his subjectivity, the system fosters the belief that his eyes can see all and arrive at the ultimate truth. In view of this situation, I would like to problematize the Observers' practices and reactions in terms of aspects like obedience, resistance, solidarity, interactions between the observer and the observed teacher, the role of the "expert" and the formats of bilingualism/language strengthening, all in order to better understand the heightened instrumentalization of bodies, objects and practices which take place in this context.

Whenever I have had the opportunity to work closely with EFL teachers in public schools in Bogotá, many tell me that they do not feel comfortable when they are observed by an “external” person. Teachers understand that the Ministry of Education and Secretariats of Education (2019) need to employ classroom observations to assess, measure and evaluate their classroom practices. In fact, the Bilingualism Education Program in Bogotá offers a package of training materials and resources (including human ones) meant to help public school teachers to give “effective” classes. As part of this package, classroom observation plays an important role. It is no secret that it is one of the most useful tools for getting information about classroom practices. The EFL teachers themselves sometimes welcome these observations in the belief that it will “improve” their teaching and provide them with a valuable feedback. Although forced on them, many teachers rise to the challenge of following official procedures and step by step, adhere to the recommendations made by the experts in order to improve their classes.

On the other hand, there are teachers who refuse to be observed. They argue that there is no need to be observed by a person who does not know the context in which they work – the reality of the school, its students and daily routine. In their opinion, this “expert” will not know what “a good class” is because he or she is an outsider and does not understand the environment of the school. But in general terms, my role as an observer, as an “external” person, as an evaluator, is not questioned because I am a member of a prestigious institution and they believe that my social and professional credentials have given me the authority to act as a “trainer”. Despite this privileged situation, however, I acknowledge that, as a former teacher of EFL, I am not “superior” to them. Rather, my training as an Observer has furnished me with a multifaceted approach to my work.

Nevertheless, the observed teacher becomes an object for me, an object who needs to be analyzed in terms of the different facets of its performance: the attitudes, environment, strategies, goals/aims and materials/resources seen in the class; the behavior of the students; and the job of assessment and feedback. In doing so, some questions arise, such as: What about the teachers’ opinions and feelings? What does the Mentor-Observer feel at the time of observing? These situations come into play (...But these are in my mind). In this sense, I became an instrument, another object, with a trained eye, but which eye? And what for?

Normalized Practices in Classroom Observations

The classroom observation aimed at creating a “good teacher” has normalized the emphasis on the idea that teachers are responsible for the effectiveness of a class. Many procedures have arisen to normalize the definition of a good teaching practice. Moreover, observing a teacher has been accepted in society as a necessary practice that serves many purposes. A recent study by Murphy (2013) highlights various aspects of classroom observation (CO). For instance, it offers a method for supervisors to assess the teachers’ “styles”, classroom management and other skills which elude other forms of evaluation.

Moreover, CO allows teachers to receive a constructive feedback on their techniques in order to further improve. In a nutshell, CO is one of the most common ways of analyzing pedagogical practices (Farrell, 2011) and it can help teachers to spot their strengths and weaknesses (Choopun & Tuppoom, 2014), serves as alternative assessment of their performance (Campbell & Duncan, 2007), is an important staff appraisal mechanism (Lam, 2001), a tool for self-monitoring (Wichadee, 2011) and unique device for supervision (Hismanoglu & Hismanoglu, 2010). These aspects are also mentioned by Merc, related to the dynamics of observing teachers in English classes, (2015). It means that observation is centered on the teacher. In fact, the observed teachers are sometimes told about the procedures beforehand. To further develop to this point, several authors such as Wang and Seth (1998), Waijnryb (1992) and Williams (1989) have proposed the Classroom observation should get some stages (pre-while and post).

As can be seen, there are discussions in a pre/post classroom observation which are important to problematize. There is evidence that a teacher-centered approach is one of the major components of this observation. The automatized procedure is also taken for granted when the different situations in the class are evaluated. A class observation also requires a rubric in order to follow the specific patterns and these become the disciplinary technologies which measure the program’s success. Behind these technologies, there is a canonical logic which EFL teachers must follow. The teachers’ compliance is a prerequisite for guarantying the success of the procedures.

In our local tradition, Classroom Observation Practices (COP) have been teacher-oriented (as was said above). The success of a class is entirely the responsibility of the teachers, even if they are handicapped by administrative problems caused by others. The students must react differently in every class

or the EFL teacher will not feel good at all. As a consequence, we have normalized rituals for the achievement of a good class and we have also normalized CO as an effective technique. This technique involves demanding patterns, and the teacher must follow specific rubrics, step by step procedures; this is one of the many normalized facets of COP which I have discussed but they raise many disturbing questions which require a guiding thread from here on.

Classroom Observation in Relation to Effectiveness

In a review of studies of EFL/ESL, we have found that coupling observation and effectiveness has been overused, for example, in one, done at the King Abdul-Aziz University, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, 2014, of EFL teachers' perceptions of a classroom observation system in its English Language Institute. It states that the classroom observations, which are originally intended for the teachers' professional growth, are usually more evaluative and less developmental, leading to teacher burn-out and less-effective classroom performances. The author also points out how instructional supervision is a "ubiquitous mechanism in teachers' professional lives", used to collect data about what goes on in classrooms through a box-ticking exercise, and based on judgments made in both Western and non-Western contexts.

Another study, "Keeping SCORE': Reflective Practice Through Classroom Observations" (Farrell, 2011), discusses a short series of classroom observations which the author, acting as a facilitator, made to a novice teacher to help her negotiate her first year of teaching. What I learned from the article is that observation tools and patterns are important aspects of classroom observation. Those low-inference tools may be more useful because they focus on separate features of classroom interaction, including verbal, paralinguistic, non-linguistic, cognitive, affective, and discourse features (Chaudron, 1988). The SCORE tool (the one used in this study) is useful for assessing "teacher and student talk; at task and movement patterns" (Farrell, 2011, p. 267). The effectiveness of the COP in the previous study is related to some procedures the observer should carry out. The procedure: First class and Second class (Pre-class discussion- Class observation- Post-class discussion- Follow up Process). This procedure offers one way of facilitating reflective practices in EFL teachers and encouraging them to engage in classroom observations as part of their training.

Another relevant article is “Classroom observation: desirable conditions” by teachers David Lasagabaster and Juan Manuel Sierra (Spain- 2011), which examines the attitudes towards observation of a wide range of teachers in terms of three components: the cognitive, the affective, and the conative. The authors state that the observation has to be systematic, to avoid obtaining a distorted view of what happens in class and so that its benefits are tangible: ‘It needs to be followed through properly, not something which is done once and leads nowhere’ (p. 459).

In relation to the conative component, in figures 2 and 3, there are some questions about the study that were mentioned before, and a list of the observed teachers’ perceptions of the procedures. It shows that most teachers agreed to be observed, understanding that it is an effective way to improve their teaching so long as the observation is done by a colleague or in some cases, a teacher trainer.

Figure 1. Is observation an effective way of improving teaching?

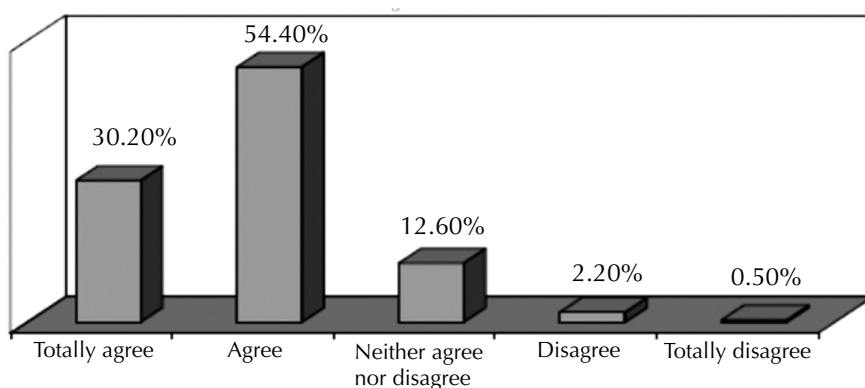
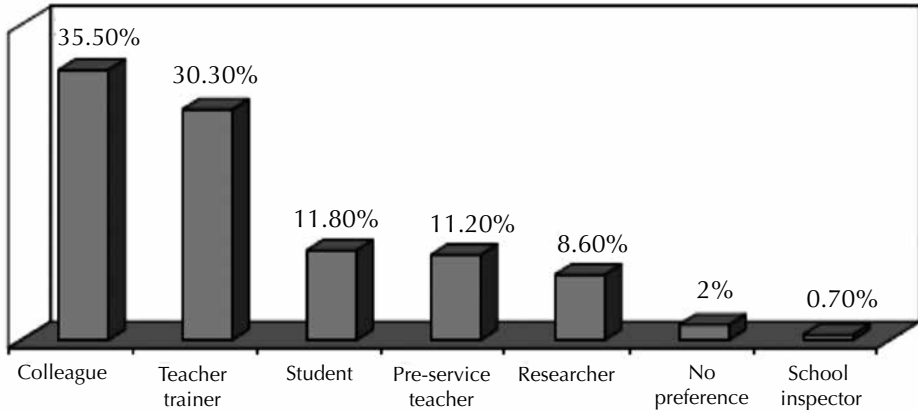


Figure 2. Who would you prefer to be observed



Source:

Appendix 1. Figures are taken from an article called "*Classroom observation: desirable conditions*" established by David Lasgabaster and Juan Manuel Sierra, (Spain- 2011)

I mean that when a practice is used to set an order, to impose a monolithic view of teaching, it seems to be a "rigid" and "scripted" practice. I found that an instrumentalization of COP in ELT is a flaw and for that reason, I again wonder if there is a lack of rigor and correct formats and rubrics in this method of assessment.

Little has been said about the conversations between the Mentor Observer and the EFL Teacher. I also know that these conversations entail a kind of negotiation, which means that the social relationship between the two subjects should be analyzed and shown in the reflective teaching practices and feedback procedure. I have had to deal with these "negotiations" myself: unfortunately, there is not much information about them. Perhaps they need to be silenced and invisible.

The Direct or Indirect Effects of Classroom Observations on Teachers' Behavior

One of the first psychological studies of observation was Watson's Manifesto⁶ (1913), which found that the traditional methods of observation carried out in the home, hospital, nursery, school, research laboratory or other locations were done by relatively untrained observers such as parents (mainly mothers) or observers with some degree of training.

Observation is regarded as direct if done in the natural environment of the subject with no intervention or intrusion other than the presence of the observer(s), and without the use of questionnaires, interviews, standardized tests, and experiments (Wright, 1960). Observation is a practice that has been validated in, for instance, a. the laboratory, to verify the phenomenon that is faced and to establish a diagnosis, b. hospitals, to assess the progress of a patient's treatment, and c. education, to gauge the behavior of students and teachers. In other words, it is a technique that has been accepted and widely used in different fields and disciplines.

Classroom observation is used in teacher-training programs. Indeed, it has been institutionalized as a way to train or assess the effectiveness of teachers. These results are used to evaluate the teachers' performance, reward them when it is correct or inform them of the mistakes in their methodology. For in-service EFL teachers, CO is crucial, since educational administrators believe it is "trustworthy" when they evaluate their performances and indicate mistakes and areas in need of improvement. Many teachers do not agree to participate in these COPs, but if they do not, they may be misjudged or penalized. Teachers are naturally aware that their refusal to participate may hinder their careers, but the subject is a taboo that is not spoken of aloud.

COP is organized and based on principles. As Schatzki points out: "Orders are arrangements of entities (e.g. people, artifacts, things), whereas practices are organized activities. Human coexistence thus transpires amidst an elaborate, constantly evolving nexus of arranged things and organized activities" (2002, p. xi). It would thus seem that COP consists of a regular, fixed activity in which the participants interact in a certain space. This sense of a social order marked by regularity, stability and interdependence can be found in observation practices. One sees it, for example, in the daily routines

⁶ John B. Watson's 1913 article "Psychology as the Behaviorist Views It" is widely known as the "behaviorist manifesto" that initiated behaviorism as a discipline and academic field of study.

of teachers, faculty meetings and the observation of classes. It is here where teachers construct an unconscious sense of regularity which give them a feeling that their activities are based on principles and norms. However, the social order in COP is irregular; there are some ruptures which we need to be aware of.

A characteristic of classroom observations I have mentioned is the control of the time and space of ELT teachers. In the COP it is important to organize the teacher's performance into a sequence of activities that must be fit into the correct time and space. It represents a mechanism of control, power and subjection in which the discursive and non-discursive components are subject to that mechanism. In Foucault's view, power and knowledge are inextricably linked. The control of space and movement is built into the architecture of the classroom. In some cases, the COP changes the social relations because there is an interaction between the observer and the observed teacher in the classroom.

This situation may have an effect on the teachers' behavior. This conversation between the two subjects (Mentor and Teacher) has been made invisible in the method of classroom observations of English teachers devised by the Ministry of Education and non-governmental institutions for public schools in Colombia. Similarly, the subjective feelings of the Mentor observers during the COP should be taken into account. Some of us do not want to evaluate teachers' performances, others don't feel comfortable with the assessment rubric and still others just want to criticize and show their superiority to the teachers. The Mentor observers' narratives thus form a subjective universe(s) which will help us to understand the events inside the classroom.

Classroom Observations based on Local Assumptions

After reading about CO, I found that some academics in South America have been researching this subject as well. I learned that these studies focus on the evaluation of teachers, teacher training methods, improving the effectiveness of teachers, and evaluating educational programs. Furthermore, most claim that COP provides a useful feedback to teachers and may strengthen their overall effectiveness. The first study I discuss here, "Through the looking glass: can classroom observation and coaching improve teacher performance in Brazil?" (Bruns, Costa & Cunha, Brazil, 2018), is of "a program in the northeastern

Brazilian state of Ceará designed to improve teachers' effectiveness by using a method of information "shock" (benchmarked feedback) and expert coaching to promote professional interactions among teachers in the same school." (p. 1). However, what is suitable to highlight in this research is the implementation of three meaningful and trustworthy tools in the program of classroom observations which serve to predict differences in a teacher's ability to improve learning in the classroom.

Other US researchers have likewise found that children who are taught by teachers with higher scores on the CLASS measurement learn more, are more self-disciplined and have fewer behavioral problems. (Grossman and McDonald, 2008) (p. 2). The results of this strategy suggest that COP may help to maximize the planning of classes, provide more feedback and coaching to teachers and serve as follow-up teachers and administrators. The program also appears to have helped schools to attain more consistent teaching practice and increased their teachers' use of more interactive techniques, like question and answer. (p. 35).

A Colombian study discusses the effect of classroom observations in on the quality of teaching and learning in secondary education. Specifically, it proposes a methodology, called "classroom observation in context" (CoC), to deal with many of the epistemological limitations of mainstream input-output models for the professionalization of educators. (Parra & Hernandez, 2019). One of the interesting aspects of this study (which perhaps reveals an "unseen" situation in COP) is the importance it gives to observing in context, as shown in the following excerpt:

To observe in context entails working with a non-structured observation strategy to spot patterns in classroom events and the subsequent opening of opportunities for collaborative dialogues (among observers and between the observer and the observed teacher) about the mechanisms behind these patterns. The results of an exploratory study of CoC in northern Colombia indicate the potential of such a strategy in shaping debates about educational policies which go beyond the classroom. (p.1)

There are some parts of this study which echo my own concerns. For example, I would like to find out more about the narratives that emerge from the dialogues between the observer and observed teacher. I think it might throw light on the ontological situation of subjects who share a common space, the classroom, and participate in the same observation. The challenge I see

here is to unveil these “hidden” dialogues between these two subjects and determine the change in the position of the subjects during the observation, which, in turn, may explain how some practices are ignored by the norms of CO or suppressed in order to meet the “high quality goal” of government programs.

As shown in the previous research studies, classroom observation techniques are a major concern in discussions of the quality of education. There are different implementations of mainstream observation techniques to measure the professional skills of teachers and help policymakers and practitioners to improve teaching practices. Finally, these two South Globe studies confirm that COs are standardized tools which are meant to help teachers to organize their work and innovate in the classroom. Acknowledging that such tools do lead to real improvements in teaching and learning, I nevertheless insist that more research needs to be done into these “other” methods of observation, because there are certain practices in the field of ELT which have not been sufficiently analyzed or questioned.

Local Bilingualism Policies

Another important source in relation to CO, locally speaking, can be found in some documents of Bilingualism policies in Colombia. The documents were chosen since they offer a wide picture of the Classroom Observation. The Bilingualism policies in Colombia have focused the education projects in reinforcing the teachers’ professional development, assessment procedures and curriculum design. I would like to examine the objectives of the policies and their models of classroom observation as a tool for assessing teachers.

1. The first document is called “Plan de Bilingüismo Municipal de Mosquera”. (Mosquera Bilingualism Plan) Mosquera is a small town near Bogotá, Colombia’s capital. The following Bilingualism Plan was created: “Mosquera Lives English 2012-2021”. was drafted there. The Plan seeks to promote the professional development of EFL teachers through several strategies. The Secretary of Education of Mosquera states that CO is a valuable tool for improving the performance of teachers since the SWOT matrix it uses assesses all its aspects and provides them with feedback about the quality of their teaching. (2012).

2. The second document, a national program, called “Colombia Very Well- 2015-2025”. Its objective is to strengthen the communicative skills of Colombians who speak English, since this language “empowers citizens and allows the country to enter into global cultural dynamics and the knowledge economy.” One of the methods for improvement are Peer Observations. (2014).
3. The final one is “EFMMa Teacher Training and Teacher of Teachers”, a joint effort of the British Council and Colombian Ministry of Education in 2017 that seeks to make teacher training a fundamental device to improve the quality of teaching. It is based on a number of observations of trainee EFL teachers and it includes a class observation guide to assess the methodology of teachers, their activities and the materials they use, among other indicators.

When one reviews the main assumptions about CO on the part of academics and policymakers, it becomes clear that it serves as a tool for monitoring the quality of educational projects or strategies. This methodology may provide valuable information to policymakers about class dynamics and the environment in schools.

The Role of External Institutions in ELT Observation

It is important to note that this study includes the British Council (BC) as an agent in relation to the implementation of the National Bilingualism Plan in favor of the English Language. This institution, along with public and private-universities and publishing houses, among others, has been involved in bilingualism education projects in Colombia. The British Council trained me as an observer: it taught me about several standardized practices that can be used in CO. The guidelines a trained Mentor observer should follow consist of rather rigid rubrics which do not allow the observer to step out of that “frame”: adherence to this step-by-step approach is the mark of a “good” observer. In its defense, however, I found the British Council to be well organized and influential since its services have been used by many local governments in Colombia for teacher training and guidance on COP for EFL teachers.

Despite criticism and bias, I cannot avoid the previous scenario, but my focus will be unpacking the relationship between when EFL teachers are the topic of discussion. I nevertheless remain critical of its abovementioned methodology,

but for my purposes here, I will focus on untangling the relationship between the BC/NBP/and local agencies. The role of the BC in EFL projects is well known and some local governments rely on it to implement statistical measures of teachers' performances. Several Colombian government bodies have consulted external entities to strengthen bilingualism in the country and the BC is the one most often chosen to assess ELT projects.

In my opinion, it is very important for us -- teachers, academics and local education administrators – to play an active role in this field... since we know the context, understand students' needs more closely and are excellent professionals. As mentioned above, this discussion can be left to the future; for now, my interest centers on the reality of the BC as an agent for power and the control of educational projects in the country and especially in the COP.

The core of the BC program in Colombia is that "We connect people with learning opportunities and creative ideas from the UK. Whether you want to learn or teach English, take an exam, study in the UK or find out about our forthcoming events, this is the place to start" (BC, Colombia home page). Also, the BC seeks to strengthen teachers' potential skills, "through our teacher training courses, expert advice, teaching tips, materials and support networks, we're here to help you become a more effective English teacher." (BC, Colombia, Professional Development Intro page).

As noted, the BC has supported the professional development of teachers, students, and administrators in Colombia for more than 80 years. To explain my point of view, I would like to detail its work in the COP area. It is no a secret that the plans of the government include improving the knowledge of students and teachers in public schools and, with the help of the BC, achieving the bilingualism plan. As a participant in these programs, I know that its training of Mentor observers is demanding.

The BC leaders (Seniors) use different strategies for forming a "good" class observer; they provide us with the rubrics, guidelines and step by step formats, we need to correctly observe a class. This approach seems to encapsulate the characteristics of a "high quality" COP.

Understanding the BC's pedagogical support

During the training of the CO, the Senior is more than a classroom observer: he or she provides “pedagogical support” to a certain group of trainee observers in different situations. I will now mention some of the parameters of this training I observed:

General information about the school and the class (number of students, average age of students, hours of the class, and date, among others)

Class preparation (the observer checks if the teacher has a class plan and if the objective is in accordance with the level of the students)

Use of the language (does the teacher use English to teach; do the students use English? is the use of English encouraged in the classroom?)

Class development: Is the topic of the class clearly presented? Is there an introductory activity or warm up? Are there transitions between activities? Is the class centered on the learners? Is there a clear objective? Does the teacher use strategies to catch the attention of the students? (The observer notes whether the teacher promotes collaborative work and uses digital tools for.)

Evaluation and feedback (the teacher offers constructive feedback, the teacher welcomes different types of feedback (self-assessment, peer feedback) and the teacher accepts the use of rubrics for evaluation.)

Materials and resources (The materials used in class help to meet the objective and encourage the participation of the students.)

There is not anything in these parameters about the personal relationship between the Observer and the observed teacher. That is to say, about whether the conversation between the “expert” observer and the teacher throws light on a series of epistemological and ontological concepts that may improve the procedure. A number of teachers feel that engaging in this small talk would be much more helpful than invading their spaces or having a magnifying glass / microscope inside the classroom. I am pretty sure that such a talk would give the teachers a chance to explain the awkwardness of being observed and, in terms of fairness, put the Mentor observer in the shoes of the teacher, so the observer becomes familiar with the reality of his or her daily life in the school. This interaction would build what I would call a “bridge of dialogue”;

it would make the voice of teachers heard and should appear alongside the figures, numbers, and statistics in the National Bilingualism Plan (BNP).

That there are many public schools where the CO is not used is a cause of constant concern for me, as is the exclusion of such conversations from the CO guidelines. For example, what happens when a teacher does not let me observe his or her class? What happens if the students do not show up for the class? And if I (as observer) cannot enter the school? I would like to know much more about the role of COP in public schools. I am also worried about observers who, like myself, sometimes do not want to follow an evaluation rubric. Does it make me a bad observer? I have seen many classes where teachers do not follow a step by step method, and/ or do not have an advanced level of proficiency but their classes are amazing, the students enjoy and learn from them... but the CO format only leaves room for notions like “excellence” “the follow-up of rubrics”, “ideal teaching” or “needs to improve” and the observer is forced to evaluate the teacher in accordance with the narrow guidelines found in the BNP. These COPs clearly reveal the imbalance of power between the observer and the teacher. I will go more deeply in this problem in the following section.

Top-down Observation by an External Actor

To do that, I employ social theory, specifically certain ideas about social organization found in Tollefson, (1991), Habermas (1986), Foucault (1977) and Giddens (1990), which provide a useful framework for analyzing the impact of the National Bilingualism Program.

Power

From my contact with EFL teachers and time as EFL teacher in public schools, I have seen how State and private institutions employ their power to determine the nature of “quality” education and implement programs in line with their criteria (without consulting the observed teachers or their students). I have likewise noted how these institutions sometimes are not aware of the context in which teachers (and their schools) work. The State currently gives these external institutions the power to implement their programs in schools: this is

the result of the political, economic, and administrative relations between the State and the “recognized” external institution, which reflects the dominant position of the two parties. Tollefson (1991) argues that:

Government implies a group of individuals sharing equally in the exercise of power, whereas State refers to the apparatus by which dominant groups maintain their power. Also, the State is an independent source of power with an interest in retaining and expanding its dominance. Although power implies dominance, individuals in subordinate position[s] in social relationships are never completely powerless, as they may carve out specific areas of control over their daily lives. (p.46)

This power is seen in schools, where teachers do not always decide on the type of training, the methods employed or the particular needs of the school. During this evaluation, the power relations are seen in the interaction between the observer and observed teacher, where the “expert” Mentor observer asks questions, assembles information, and gives an analysis of the activities he or she observed. The EFL teacher knows that this “expert” Mentor observer works for a well-known institution and this is one of the reasons why the teacher obeys the Mentor and follows the activities in the COP agenda.

I keep in mind that power is expressed in terms of regimes of truth; in this case, the CO. These formats of truth are sets of guidelines that define what is true or real at any given time in the COP. This idea of power is seen when the external observer arrives and assumes a superior position towards the teacher, who accepts observer’s top-down observations because of the latter’s power.

Knowledge

The theories of training which underlie classroom observation are totalitarian, imposed on minority groups as a unitary discourse. This discourse is that teachers must be observed by a Mentor who stipulates the rules for improvement and gathers data about their performance. Canagarajah (1999) believes that: “such grand theories are regarded as totalitarian in that they impose the dominant groups’ world view and intellectual tradition on other communities who have their own local bodies of knowledge.” (p.47)

The good teacher may also be regarded as the receptor of canonical knowledge which is then reproduced. I have noticed that when these dynamics of knowledge are imparted to teachers, some EFL teachers only copy a model lesson and this enters into the evaluation of teacher and feedback from the Mentor.

Marginalized Subjectivity

From the standpoint of a constituted subject, the practice of thinking [of] oneself as [a] subject of English teaching practices implies paying attention to the ways that English Language Teachers perceive themselves and how they are affected by the ways that society in general perceives them and, as well, the ways that they face the roles, duties and tasks that are demanded of them and what they accept, adapt, or impose upon themselves to accomplish them (Mendez, 2016).

The heterogeneous and conflictive nature of discourses open the possibility that the subject may enjoy a range of positions in accordance with the different discourses and that subjectivity is always fluid and negotiable. This provides the subjects with the possibility of forming new identities and obtaining a critical awareness by resisting the dominant discourses. (Canagarajah, 1999, p. 30).

Some discourses about how to have a successful English class, or how to be an effective teacher, have been preferred for many years. The picture of a “good” English class is ordered through structural patterns that must be followed. EFL teachers have developed different techniques and strategies to teach a good class and they can also change them at their convenience. The teacher may change his or her role during the observation in order to achieve a “good” class; here is when the observer runs into some problems because this COP is scripted... this is an exceptional situation.

I would say that once you are trained as a Mentor observer, you are invested with a new role and a body of knowledge you can act on; sometimes this new information contradicts your previous views about teaching, and sometimes it complements it. Likewise, the subject position of the Mentor observer only acts in a multifaceted way whereas the social interaction in the COP may

improve his or her point of view and offer more insight into the observation procedure.

The Subject Trainer

This subject trainer is molded and trained to be a coach of teachers; in other words, as an “expert” in his field. The task of the subject trainer is to provide the appropriate tools for the success of the project. The preparation of this subject trainer is fundamental and will help to form a subject capable of following precise and rigid guidelines to comply with the proposed objectives.

In the words of Wajnryb (1992): “the task of the trainer is to help trainees understand the various processes involved in the teaching and learning of a language and the complex array of activities that occurs in a language classroom. The classroom, therefore, should play a role in the training process.” (p. 5). The trainer subject needs a skilled and trained eye to perceive, understand and benefit from his or her observation of the class.

It would be useful to delve into the hidden narratives of Observers and find out what they think about COP and how their subject position changes as they exercise their profession and likewise, analyze the points of view of teachers who have been observed, judged, and evaluated by external institutions. I am sure that something important would come out of it. Of course, these questions are about power relations and a deeper exploration of them would throw light on the relationship between the observer, teacher, and “expert” in CO.

With that in mind and as an initial effort, I propose the following research questions:

How have classroom observation practices been used to regulate EFL teachers and establish a monolithic approach to English teaching in the Bilingualism National Plan?

What kinds of teaching practices and subject positions are ignored by this approach?

What mechanisms of power-knowledge are responsible for the notion of “expertise” in COP?

Trying to answer these questions will help us to understand the subjectivities of trained Observers. In COP the characteristic of the subject position is constant change; in that respect, it would also be useful to explore the practices which are not evident during the observations: the conversations between the observer and observed, their negotiations before and after the CO, and the uncertainties or unstated positions of the ELT Observers.

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