

1.3 Evaluation of Classroom Teaching in Liberal Studies

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Evaluation of classroom teaching is an important process in teacher development. It helps a teacher to reflect on his/her own classroom practice and think of ways of improvement. This process is usually guided by a set of protocols which focus on what a teacher says, does, or fails to say or do in a lesson, and we often end up with a record of the presence or absence of particular teacher and student behaviors observed in lesson. From such a list of observations, we may conclude whether a teacher is competent or not in his/her teaching.

However, it often turns out that a teacher who demonstrates or masters the skills listed in the protocols may not produce actual learning. For example, a teacher may have prepared a well-planned lesson, conducted engaging activities and lively discussions, or the students may have participated actively in discussion or debate. But the learning of students may be superficial and they may end up with very little understanding of the concepts taught or the process of reasoning involved.

To evaluate the effectiveness of a lesson, we need to look more deeply into the complex dynamics of the lesson, so as to diagnose the strengths and weaknesses of the teacher, and the actual learning outcomes of the students. This is particularly important for the evaluation of Liberal Studies (LS) lessons, which often involve a lot of student-student and student-teacher interactions, and the learning outcomes are less clearly defined or identifiable than in other school subjects.

To help teachers evaluate the effectiveness of their classroom teaching in LS, a Classroom Observation Scale for Liberal Studies (COSLS) has been developed for evaluating the effectiveness of teaching and learning in LS lessons. This Scale can be used by LS teachers, their peers or their supervisors. It helps to diagnose the strengths and weaknesses of a LS

lesson across different stages of exploration of an issue, such as analyzing a newspaper article, identifying an issue, discussing the views of different stakeholders, reaching an informed decision on an issue, conducting a group discussion, role play or brainstorming activity.

Each instrument of the Scale consists of a set of indicators of good practice of teaching, each supported by a list of “examples of evidence”. It can be scored during a lesson or when watching a videotaped lesson. The evaluator, who can be the teacher or his/her colleague, looks for concrete examples of evidence in the lesson before assigning a score for a specific indicator. The examples of evidence help the evaluator to diagnose any problem areas and form a clear picture of what good practice looks like. The examples of evidence listed for each indicator are not prescriptive or exhaustive. They can be modified or re-written by the evaluator as necessary.

The information collected from these instruments provides useful and concrete feedback to the teacher. It is hoped that in the long run, the teacher will develop the capacity to review and reflect on his/her own practice, resulting in pedagogical improvement and professional growth.

The instruments of the COSLS shown in the Appendix cover different aspects of LS lessons. Teachers are encouraged to construct their own instruments according to the specific nature of their lessons. Each indicator of good practice listed in the instruments is scored on a five-point scale. The evaluator first considers the number of examples of evidence covered by the lesson and then estimates the degree of presence or absence of each indicator with the following scores:

1. No evidence
2. Little evidence
3. Moderate evidence
4. Consistent evidence
5. Extensive evidence

Appendix: Classroom Observation Scale for Liberal Studies

Key: T stands for teacher; Ss stands for students.

Instrument 1: Understanding and identifying issues

Indicator	Examples of evidence
Introduction to the lesson	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ T gains the attention and arouses interest of the class promptly. ■ T presents concisely the objectives of the lesson. ■ T gives clear guidelines on class activity. ■ Ss get into the activity promptly.
Teacher demonstrates confidence as a facilitator of learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ T explains fluently and in depth about concepts. ■ T allows student questions and can expand on topic as necessary. ■ T demonstrates ability to adapt the task as necessary to guide and deepen student learning. ■ T encourages Ss to actively construct concepts.
Periods of teacher-student interaction are probing and substantive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Questions expose and draw on students' prior knowledge. ■ Questions and dialogues emphasize higher order thinking. ■ T probes with challenging questions. ■ T consolidates students' ideas in identifying issues for discussion.
The activity and pace of the activity is appropriate for the student level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The reading material is adequate in terms of quantity, language and level of difficulty. ■ Ss have time to engage in the tasks, and there is adequate time to practice new skills. ■ T adjusts time to accommodate students if necessary. ■ Time is available for students to review, reflect on, and articulate what has been learned, either through class discussions, journal writing, completion of data sheets, or presentations.
Periods of student-student interaction are productive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Ss have opportunities to collaborate in small groups. ■ Ss engage actively in group activity. ■ Student discussion demonstrates thinking and learning. ■ Ss listen to each other.
Teacher shows an understanding of the concepts related to the issue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ T can articulate clearly what concepts are intentionally contained in the activities. ■ T provides accurate information. ■ T asks questions that reflect substantive understanding of the topic. ■ T elicits more than just facts or introduces confounding factors to deepen thinking. ■ T encourages students to question, probe, explain answers, and extend knowledge.
Understanding and identifying the issue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ There is evidence students possess adequate prior knowledge to help understanding of the issue(s). ■ The activities and instructional strategies are crafted to lead to the understanding of the issue(s). ■ Ss are able to construct their own understanding. ■ Ss are able to identify relevant issue(s) by themselves.

Instrument 2: Exploring views and values of different stakeholders

Indicator	Examples of evidence
Teacher demonstrates skills as a facilitator of learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ T gives clear guidelines to students before activity, including time of discussion and division of labour within groups. ■ T demonstrates ability to adapt the task as necessary. ■ T encourages Ss to actively construct concepts.
Periods of teacher-student interaction are probing and substantive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Questions expose and draw on students' prior knowledge. ■ T probes with challenging and high-order questions. ■ T consolidates students' ideas in exploring the ideas of different stakeholders. ■ T suggests points missed but does not take over.
The activity and pace of the activity is appropriate for the student level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Sufficient guidelines are given to students to facilitate learning/discussion. ■ Ss have adequate time to engage in the task. ■ T adjusts time to accommodate students if necessary.
Periods of student-student interaction are productive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Ss have opportunities to collaborate in small groups. ■ Ss participate actively in group activity. ■ Student discussion demonstrates thinking and learning. ■ Ss listen to each other and show respect to different views. ■ Ss show ability to search for further information.
Teacher shows understanding of the issues/concepts involved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ T can guide students to understand the concepts/views involved in discussion. ■ T asks questions that reflect substantive understanding of the topic. ■ T elicits more than just facts and / or introduces confounding factors to deepen thinking. ■ T encourages students to question, probe, explain answers, and extend knowledge.

Instrument 3: Making informed decision/judgement

Indicator	Examples of evidence
Teacher demonstrates confidence as a facilitator of learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ T guides students to comment and evaluate the ideas of other groups. ■ T motivates passive students to comment and express views. ■ T summarizes key points or decisions. ■ There is adequate time for wrap-up and closure of the lesson.
T expands on students' views	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ T supplements student presentations with other views missed. ■ T guides students to resolve conflicts and reach consensus. ■ T guides students to think about related issues.
T coordinates group presentations effectively	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ T creates a relaxed atmosphere for group presentation. ■ T controls the timing of student presentation effectively. ■ T guides students to clarify points made, or identify misconceptions. ■ T promotes group-to-group contributions by encouraging friendly competition between small groups.
T evaluates learning objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ T asks Ss to summarize key points, or put down their decisions with justifications ■ T asks questions or conduct written tests.

Instrument 4: Brainstorming

Indicator	Examples of evidence
Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ T introduces the rules clearly and sets a time limit.■ T ensures every student understands the topic.■ T explains activity clearly to students.
Teacher-student interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ T encourages student participation and students give ideas actively.■ T writes down the ideas of all students.■ T promotes imaginative and creative thinking.■ T sums up and consolidates the ideas.
T coordinates group presentations effectively	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ T creates a relaxed atmosphere for group presentation.■ T controls the timing of student presentation effectively.■ T guides students to clarify points made.■ T promotes group-to-group contributions by encouraging friendly competition between small groups.
T evaluates learning outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ T asks Ss to summarize key points.■ T asks Ss to write down their decision, with justifications.■ T asks questions and gives written tests.

Instrument 5: Role play

Indicator	Examples of evidence
Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ T sets clear rules for allocation of roles and sets a time limit. ■ T provides adequate stimulus and background information. ■ T ensures adequate time for preparation by students.
Teacher demonstrates confidence as a facilitator of learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ T guides students to comment and evaluate the ideas of other groups. ■ T motivates passive students to comment and express views. ■ T summarizes key points or decisions. ■ There is adequate time for wrap-up and closure of the lesson.
T coordinates role play effectively	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ T creates a relaxed atmosphere for group presentation. ■ T controls the timing of student presentation effectively. ■ T summarizes and consolidates student presentations (debriefing). ■ T evaluates student learning after debriefing.