

# Part 1

## Lesson Conferencing: Some generic skills

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Learning is the very essence of education, and teaching is the major means to achieve it in schools. The ability to talk about learning and teaching, in an informed and reflective manner is a key attribute of a professional educator. Teachers who are fully engaged with their professional practice are learners and often they learn most by talking with other teachers. Lesson conferencing is one of the major ways in which teachers engage in professional conversation. It is used in mentoring, peer review and when conducting learning studies in school. Units 1 and 2 provide opportunities to focus on some of the generic skills of lesson conferencing. Facilitators not able to use both Units may like to choose sections from each to make up their own Unit, tailored to the needs of their own school.

# Unit 1

## Talking about teaching and learning

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### Introduction

An important indicator of an effective school, operating as a learning community, is the readiness of the teaching staff to actively engage in open ended professional conversation about teaching and learning.

The purpose of this Unit is to begin to set some of the parameters for critical and yet supportive professional conversation. The approach is based on the recognition that all participants in the conversation about classroom practice are learners and that while there are no right or wrong ways to teach, some ways are better or more appropriate than others in encouraging pupil learning, given the particular circumstances of the lesson. This requires that each participant is able to respect the views of the others.

In this Unit we begin to develop the kinds of routines and language that will help contribute to the professional development of both novice and experienced teachers, when observing and discussing their own or other colleagues' practice. The activities focus on:

1. Establishing a productive learning environment for professional discussion
2. Accepting and dealing with differences of opinion
3. Handling personal feelings in a positive and supportive way
4. Allowing space in the discussion for all involved to participate

These four activities are intended to progressively deepen discussion on the topic of teachers' professional conversation about classroom practice. However, as in all Units in this pack, facilitators are encouraged to devise additional or alternative activities as they see necessary. They may also wish to vary the instructions and timings given for each phase of the Unit, to suit their own group's needs.

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## Objectives

1. To explore ways of establishing suitable environments and appropriate routines for conducting a professional dialogue about teaching and learning.
2. To encourage participants to begin to think themselves imaginatively into the role of observer and reviewer of a lesson, where the aim is to provide critical but also supportive comment about lesson performance.
3. To begin to focus on the professional language and personal skills required when discussing teaching and learning.
4. To examine a number of ways in which lesson observation and feedback can contribute to the professional development of teachers.



## Video Description 1

A beginning teacher has just taught a Chinese Language lesson. Two experienced teachers have observed her lesson and are giving her feedback on their observations.

*(More of the actual lesson can be seen in a 13 minutes extract as video 2 in Unit 3. This may help the facilitator by providing additional information about the lesson. )*



## Preparation for viewing


This video clip has been chosen to open up the question of what it means to conduct a good professional discussion.

When watching the video try to focus not only on the detail of what they are saying, also pay attention to the:

- physical setting as a suitable environment for the discussion;
  - indications of mutual respect of each other as professionals;
  - atmosphere and tone of the conversation;
  - flow of the discussion, and the extent to which all participants are able to contribute to the flow;
  - communication skills displayed by each participant in expressing their points.
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Going deeper into this clip, what do you think the beginning teacher is feeling while this conversation is taking place, and what impact might it have on her as she reflects on this experience later?

*You can make use of the checklist provided at the end of this Unit to jot down your opinions.*

Approximately 5 mins 

## Now Watch Video Sequence 1


### Unit 1\_Video 1

20 mins   
Small group discussion

## Activity A

In your small groups, focus on each of the bullet points, above, and then make a list of words that you would choose to describe each of the five aspects of the discussion you witnessed on film. Try to identify the positive aspects, remembering that it is always easy to be negative. It takes a wise person to notice the positive elements and see how they can provide a foundation for further development.

*(Perhaps you would like to write your selection of words on an OHT for presentation in the follow-up discussion. You do not have to agree with each other on your choice of words, for it is important that everyone's viewpoint can be represented.)*

20 mins   
Whole group sharing

Each small group can now report back to the whole group on the words they chose. As you listen, notice any descriptive words that you feel are particularly interesting or surprising and raise these for further debate.



## Video Description 2

In this video sequence we move to consider a conversation in which two experienced teachers engaged in peer discussion soon discover that they hold very different views. One of the teachers has just taught a lesson in which she was attempting to integrate music into the teaching of Chinese.



## Preparation for Viewing

This time, imagine yourself as an additional participant in this discussion.

Consider what you might add to the conversation, as the two teachers express their views and seek to resolve their differences.

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Approximately 4 mins



## Now Watch Video Sequence 2

Unit 1\_Video 2

30 mins



Whole group sharing

## Activity B

As a whole group, consider the following questions:

- How and to what extent are the two teachers maintaining a pleasant and productive conversation, even though disagreeing with each other?
- Can you recall any situation in which you were involved in this kind of professional dialogue with another colleague? In recounting the situation, were you content with the ways in which you resolved your disagreements?
- Give yourself a few minutes to consider the situation in your own school. In what ways does your overall experience in school and your role as a subject teacher provide you with opportunities to engage in this kind of professional dialogue? Are there ways in which you, as an individual, and the school as a whole, could create more opportunities for this kind of professional dialogue in the future?



## Video Description 3

In this sequence we meet a student teacher who put a lot of effort into preparing her lesson, but she is not at all pleased with how it worked out. It is not unusual for student teachers to give a negative assessment of their performance. In fact, her lesson had achieved her main intended learning outcomes, but she was focusing on one small aspect of the lesson and her intuitive feelings that things were not as she wanted them to be.

Mentors and supervisors need to handle student teacher's feelings in a positive and supportive way, as you will see demonstrated in this clip.



## Preparation for Viewing

When watching this clip, pay particular attention to the way in which an apparent transformation takes place in the student teacher's feelings.

- What clues do you observe that indicate her change of feelings? As mentors and supervisors we need to be very alert to such signals.
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- Also notice the impact of the questions asked and statements made by the experienced teachers. Which statement made the most impact, and why do you think that proved to be so crucial?
- In the previous video only two teachers were engaged in the discussion. In viewing this next sequence, notice the advantage of involving additional colleagues when discussing a lesson.

Approximately 3 mins



### Now Watch Video Sequence 3

Unit 1\_Video 3

20 mins



Small group discussion

### Activity C

In your small groups, discuss the way in which one teacher's identification of the core problem contributed to the apparent transformation of the novice teacher's feelings about her lesson.

- What was this core problem and what was special about the way in which the mentor pointed it out?
- Do you think that the questions raised at the start of the conversation were helpful in opening up the discussion? Can you think of alternative questions to start the conversation, given the circumstances?
- Frequently, only one observer conducts lesson observation and feedback. In what ways do you think having the third person in the discussion made a difference?
- What other advantages may there be in having additional 'voices' in a professional conversation? (*For example, in situations where the observer and the person observed are unable to agree, or have missed an important point in considering an issue.*)



### Video Description 4

Three teachers are discussing a Chinese Language lesson. The lesson teacher (a novice teacher) had planned many activities for the lesson. You may recognise one of these teachers from the previous activity. At that time she had taught a lesson which was being analysed in the context of peer conversation. In this sequence she and another experienced teacher are mentoring the novice teacher (seated in the middle).

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## Preparation for Viewing

As part of your preparation, we suggest you take a look at the questions that will be asked about this clip in the following Activity E. You may also like to follow the transcript of this discussion, which is provided in Appendix 2 of this Unit.

Approximately 4 mins



## Now Watch Video Sequence 4

Unit 1\_Video 4

20 mins



## Activity D

Small group discussion

Considering the following questions:

- What do you notice about the participation of the two mentors in this conversation? How does it compare with what normally happens in mentoring, in a one-to-one relationship of mentor and mentee?

*(In answering this question, take a look at the notes provided on The Learning Community Model presented at the start of this manual)*

- Do you agree that all involved in this discussion are potential learners? What do you notice about the enthusiasm they are bringing to the discussion?
- What issues relating to the improvement of teaching and learning are being raised by the experienced teacher in this short discussion? Do you feel they are discussing them at an appropriate level of professional analysis? What evidence can you give to support your opinion?

If you were participating in this discussion, what might you want to say?

20 mins



Whole group sharing

In this final plenary, each small group can report their thoughts and ideas on the questions asked in this activity. As each group presents their ideas, try to think of additional points you might like to make or questions you might want to ask.

Finally, consider any additional points that colleagues wish to make on any of the items covered in this Unit. You might also like to review some of the key points that emerged in discussion. Or, you may revisit the Introduction and Objectives as a way of drawing the Unit to a close.

Unit 1 total time: 146 mins

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## Unit 1 Appendix 1



### Activity A (Small group discussion)

#### **Personal Reflections related to the discussion for Activity A**

What are your impressions of the physical setting, mutual respect for colleagues, atmosphere of the conversation, flow of the discussion, communication skills, etc.

What do you think the beginning teacher is feeling while this conversation is taking place, and what impact might it have on her as she reflects on this experience later?

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## Unit 1 Appendix 2



### Activity D (Small group discussion)

#### Transcript for discussion of Activity D

Mentor A :	Yes I think it goes back to our lesson planning. We have to take into consideration all the minor details. You also raised the point that the instruction wasn't clear. The relationship between the incidents and the sentiments wasn't clearly explained. So time was wasted earlier, although the time for the activity was adequate.
Mentor B :	I also thought we had enough time when I looked at my watch. It was 25 minutes past when they started the exercise but the lesson ends at 50 minutes past. I thought at that time they should have enough time. But when I looked at the materials, they have been given too much in some cases and the instruction wasn't clear enough. They were pondering what to do.

## Unit 2

# Getting started on lesson conferencing

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### Introduction

Unit 1 provided a basic introduction to teachers' professional conversation as they engaged in lesson conferencing. This Unit takes the idea of lesson conferencing further, in discussing pre and post-lesson conferences and in identifying some key hallmarks of a good conference.

Lesson conferencing is structured professional conversation aimed at analysing and improving learning and teaching. It is often used in the contexts of mentoring, peer-review and when conducting learning studies. The key idea is that each participant in the conference is involved in a mutually beneficial professional dialogue. Moreover, each member is engaging in professional development as he or she reflects deeply and analytically on the content of the lesson and the teaching methods employed.

There are two main types of lesson conference. The first type is conducted prior to the teaching of the lesson and is called a pre-lesson conference. The other type occurs after the lesson and is called a post-lesson conference. Both kinds of conference can involve a number of participants. In the context of mentoring a student teacher, where the student teacher, mentor (supporting teacher) and supervisor are involved, the conference is called a tripartite (three-way) conference. Preliminary notes are provided on both pre-lesson and post-lesson conferences as background to the activities.

In addition to introducing the two main types of lesson conferencing, the Unit covers the importance of:

1. rehearsing the lesson, to make certain that the teacher has a very clear appreciation of the learning content and the methods that she/he will use;
2. appreciating and responding tactfully to different personality types when acting as a mentor;
3. getting the lesson conference off to a good start, so that it leads to a productive conversation;
4. producing a good lesson conference.

The Unit also highlights the important contribution of the school mentor when supporting novice teachers. School mentors have 'situated knowledge' of the actual school and the pupils, which means that their contribution to the novice teacher, both generally and when participating in conferencing, is contextualised in the actual practical situation.

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## Objectives

1. To understand the nature and purpose of pre- and post-lesson conferences.
2. To explore how best to begin post-lesson conferences.
3. To consider the hallmarks of a good post-lesson conference.

Within the context of mentoring and supervising novice teachers:

4. To emphasise the importance of being responsive to the different needs of the persons being mentored or supervised, including their different levels of confidence.
5. To emphasise the important contribution that a school-based mentor can make to the tripartite lesson conferencing of student teachers.

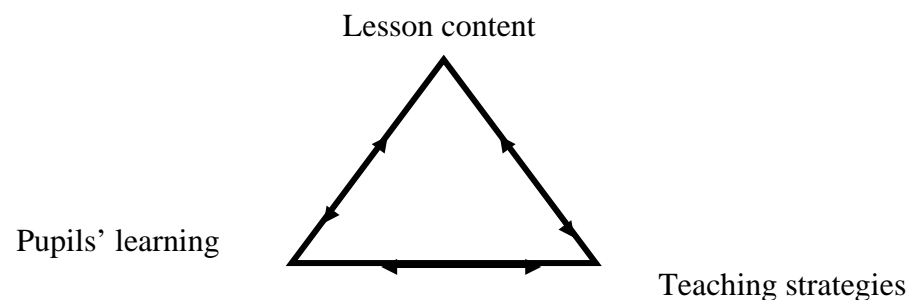


## Pre-lesson conference

### *Some preliminary notes*

Pre-lesson conferencing can be used in the context of mentoring, supervision, peer review and when conducting learning studies. The main aim of a pre-lesson conference is to ‘walk through’ the intended lesson in order to clarify its main features, thereby allowing the lesson teacher to rehearse the focus of the lesson and what he/she intends to do.

Pre-lesson conferencing is not co-planning a lesson. It is more like a dress rehearsal of a play or a ballet. Even if the mentor has been involved in helping to plan the lesson, there is still value in formally asking the teacher to spell out clearly the main lesson content and the main teaching strategies that will be used, including the key questions they will ask the pupils and the overall learning sequence (timeline) of the lesson. The lesson teacher also needs to be clear about how they will monitor pupils’ learning during the lesson. It is important that the lesson teacher is able to articulate their thinking on these issues, and thereby bring them to awareness. We can summarise the three main areas of focus as three points on a holistic triangle.



In planning a pre-lesson conference, timing is an important consideration. If it is conducted well in advance of the intended lesson, there is plenty of scope for discussing and recommending changes. If it is just before the lesson some small changes may be possible, but the mentor or peer reviewer needs to consider carefully if a late change may lead to other unintended problems.



### Video Description 1

In this video we see a short extract of the overall pre-lesson conference, which occurred about half an hour before the actual lesson.

A novice teacher is going to teach a P3 General Studies lesson. The topic is 'Shopping in a Department Store'. He is having a pre-lesson conference with an experienced teacher, who is helping him to consider the main aspects of the lesson he is going to teach.



### Preparation for viewing

In viewing this clip, pay particular attention to the questions asked by the experienced teacher (mentor). This will be used in the follow-up session.

*Facilitators may find it helpful to show the video a second time while participants follow the transcript provided in Appendix 2 of this Unit.*

Approximately 7 mins



### Now Watch Video Sequence 1

*Facilitators are strongly advised to stop the video immediately the lesson conference ends and NOT to show the analysis of the conversation that follows the lesson conference. The analysis is given as a breakdown of the conversation, highlighting the skills used by the mentor.*

Unit 2\_Video 1

20 mins



Small group discussion

### Activity A

- Think carefully about the questions asked by the experienced teacher. What are her purposes in raising these particular questions?
  - Do you feel this pre-lesson conference will make a positive contribution to how this lesson will be taught? Were the questions sufficiently searching so that they allowed the novice teacher to re-consider his lesson?
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- Given that this conference was conducted shortly before the lesson, is this an appropriate moment to raise these important issues? If not, how long before the lesson should they be raised?
- In addition to raising issues and potential problems, are there practical things that the experienced teacher could do to help the novice teacher respond to her questions, or is it up to the novice teacher to sort out the problems?

*(You will be able to feed back the results of your discussion later in the Unit.)*



## Video Description 2

In this video sequence, you will see the beginnings of two pre-lesson conferences. In both cases the novice teacher is discussing the lesson that she will be teaching with the same mentor.



### Preparation for viewing

When viewing the video sequence:

Notice the different approaches taken by this mentor when she is conducting a lesson conference with these two novice teachers.

Focus, also, on how the two novice teachers are approaching their forthcoming lesson. How well prepared do you feel they are and how confident do they seem to be when articulating their plans for the lesson?

Are there any indications provided by body language? Is body language a reliable indication of a person's feelings, or does it simply indicate personality type?

What strategies would you use if you were conducting a pre-lesson conference with these novice teachers, to ensure you were dealing tactfully with their needs and personalities?

	<b>Indicators of preparation and confidence</b>	<b>Possible lesson conferencing strategies to use with this novice teacher</b>
<b>Clip 1</b>		
<b>Clip 2</b>		

*You may like to use the above table provided in Appendix 2 of this Unit.*

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Approximately 6 mins



## Now Watch Video Sequence 2

Unit 2\_Video 2

15 mins



Small group discussion

## Activity B

In your small groups

- Many novice teachers appear to lack confidence when they begin to teach. Partly this is a matter of personality, as some speak up more readily than others. What strategies can mentors use to cater for different personalities?
- When engaged in peer review, what strategies can be used when dealing with experienced teachers who either:
  1. lack confidence; or
  2. are over confident?

30 mins



Whole group sharing

## Review of Activities A and B

This feedback session provides an opportunity to consider, as a whole group, your responses to Video Sequences 1 and 2, and Activities A and B.

Based on your small group discussions, what points would your group like to share with the whole group regarding pre-lesson conferencing? For example, what thoughts do you have about the timing of a pre-lesson conference and the kinds of advice and support that would be most helpful to the lesson teacher? How should we deal with the issue of personality?



## Post-lesson Conference

### *Some preliminary notes*

A post-lesson conference is held when one teacher has taught a lesson that the other participants have observed. The main aim of a post-lesson conference is to review the main features of the lesson just taught, in terms of the lesson content and methods, focussing particularly on the degree of pupil's learning. The discussion will consider ways in which this lesson could be improved if taught to another group.

A key idea is that each participant in the conference is involved in a mutually beneficial professional dialogue. Each member is engaging in professional development, as he or she reflects deeply and analytically on the lesson and

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evidence of pupils' learning. This is very different from situations in which a rather trivial conversation, based on surface impressions such as 'this was a good lesson...' or 'you did well...' follows lesson observation.

The approach through conferencing recommended here is based on the belief that there is no one 'correct' interpretation of a lesson and no single 'correct' way of teaching it. Nevertheless, some methods are more appropriate to the learning context and therefore more powerful, given the intended learning outcomes. Also, some interpretations are richer in practical insight and in theoretical and conceptual content. Lesson conferencing is therefore not simply casual talk about teaching. It should provide an opportunity for teachers to reflect on their practice, and deepen and enrich their professional insights.



### Video Description 3

In this video we focus on getting the post lesson conference off to a good start. You will see just the beginnings of five post-lesson conferences and part of the subsequent discussion.



### Preparation for Viewing

It is important to get the post-lesson conference off to a good start, by asking questions or making statements that can lead to a productive discussion. There are no right or wrong ways to start a conference, but when viewing this video, you are asked to judge whether some beginnings are potentially more productive than others.

Take special note of the words used by the experienced teachers in starting the post-lesson conference. Also, try to consider what impact these words have on the novice teachers (by noting facial expressions, for example) and the extent to which they help to produce a productive environment for further discussion.

As each beginning is short, you will need to watch carefully to catch all the words. To help with this, a transcript is provided in Appendix 3 at the end of this Unit.

*Approximately 3 mins* A small icon of an eye, indicating a video sequence.

### Now Watch Video Sequence 3

Unit 2\_Video 3

*30 mins* A small icon of a grid, representing an activity.  
*Small group discussion*

### Activity C

In your small groups, discuss what impact you believe these opening

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statements had, or could have had, on the novice teachers and the way the discussion might have developed. Briefly explain your reasons.

You will notice none of the beginnings by the experienced teachers were in the form of an evaluation. For example, they did not say “I think it was a very good lesson” or “Your lesson had some obvious problems”.

In your discussion, briefly consider what impact these kinds of evaluative statements might have on the:

- novice teacher, if used to begin the discussion (e.g. producing certain kinds of feelings, generalisations, limitations on reflection);
- further development of the post-lesson conference (e.g. possible limits on the breadth and depth of the discussions, etc).

Each small group can produce three opening statements that they believe would be very productive and three that they feel would possibly be negative in starting a post-lesson conference. (*You may like to write them up on a flip chart for presentation so that the groups can share their suggestions and their ideas.*)

Consider whether you think there are factors other than opening statements or questions that are important ingredients in starting a post-lesson conference. (*e.g. establishing the right ‘atmosphere’, building a productive rapport between participants, etc.*).



#### Video Description 4

Two experienced teachers are discussing a Chinese lesson recently taught by a novice teacher, and giving her feedback. We begin with a short extract of the lesson.



#### Preparation for Viewing

We now focus more specifically on trying to identify the factors that contribute to a good conference. When watching this video, see if you can spot any clues that may help you identify possible factors. Note them down while viewing the sequence. They will be used in the follow up session.

Approximately 5 mins



#### Now Watch Video Sequence 4

Unit 2\_Video 4

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15 mins



Small group discussion

## Activity D

Each member of your small group should provide a list of the factors she/he noted as important in creating a good lesson conference. Discuss any that you feel need further elaboration or that you disagree with.

Turn to the list provided at the end of this Unit, which comes from the Field Experience Handbook for pre-service courses at the Hong Kong Institute of Education. In the light of your discussions, do you agree with this list? Are there any important items missing? Explain your reasons for the answers you give. For example, what about the numbers of people involved in the post-lesson conference?

*(You may also like to consider the statement on The Learning Community Model provided at the start of the manual)*

Then:

Would the extract of the post-lesson conference you observed meet your criteria of a good lesson conference?

Would it meet the criteria given in that Handbook? In other words, was the conference:

- supportive?
- interactive?
- critical?
- focused?
- developmental?

Give evidence of the presence or absence of each.

15 mins



Whole group sharing

Using the same video as that used for the previous activity, focus on the role of the school mentor (the male participant in the discussion)

- What comments do you have about the mentor's participation in this tripartite post-lesson conference – in terms of the points he makes and his style of participation?
  - It is important to be both critical and supportive. Do you feel that the mentor was sufficiently critical and sufficiently supportive in his
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comments? Give reasons for your answers.

- Finally, in what ways might each of these participants in the discussion be learning? How might this conversation be contributing to the professional development of the mentors?

Unit 2 total time: 140 mins

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## Unit 2 Appendix 1



### Activity A (Small group discussion)

#### Transcript for discussion of Activity A

Mentor	..... When you designed your lesson, what features of the department store were you focusing on? What aspects of the department store do you want pupils to learn?
Lesson Teacher	Three main aspects: 1. The main characteristics of a department store. 2. The division of departments and their floor levels in the store. 3. The reasons for this design.
Mentor	Why do you want pupils to learn about the reasons for the design?
Lesson Teacher	I want them to think from different perspectives. For example, from the consumers' point of view and from the owners' point of view.
Mentor	Okay, so will you use the words "consumer", "owner" or just make it more general?
Lesson Teacher	I think I will ask if they were the person buying, how would they design it? And if they were the person selling, how would they go about it?
Mentor	What about the methods you will use in conducting the classroom activities? Will they be whole-class or in groups?
Lesson Teacher	They will get into pairs. I will show them the directional signs of a five-storey department store .....
Mentor	As your class is only Primary 3, they are not merchants. What is the purpose of designing this chart? What are you trying to teach them?
Lesson Teacher	In actual fact, I want them to think from different perspectives .....to broaden their thinking.
Mentor	You have mentioned it earlier ... This is a technical issue. What about the actual content that you want to teach in this lesson? The reasons for the distinctive design of department stores? If they learn this, what relevance will it have to their everyday life?

## Unit 2 Appendix 2



### Preparation for viewing for Video 2

#### Possible lesson conferencing strategies used in Pre-lesson conference

	Indicators of preparation and confidence	Possible lesson conferencing strategies to use with this novice teacher
Clip 1		
Clip 2		

## Unit 2 Appendix 3



### Activity C (Small group discussion)

#### Transcript for discussion of Activity C

The 1 <sup>st</sup> clip	Which part of the lesson do you feel most satisfied with?
The 2 <sup>nd</sup> clip	... compared with the previous lesson, which areas have improved?
The 3 <sup>rd</sup> clip	... The lesson seems to have gone smoothly ... Perhaps we can look at the pupils work...
The 4 <sup>th</sup> clip	You were trying to consolidate the pupils' learning in this lesson, right?
The 5 <sup>th</sup> clip	... You have worked very hard. ...Can you tell us first about how you feel about the lesson?...

## Unit 2 Appendix 4



### Activity D (Small group discussion)

#### Checklist for use with Activity D

The following list, taken from the Field Experience Handbook for pre-service teacher courses at the Hong Kong Institute of Education, provides some key factors that constitute a good lesson conference. It says:

*A good conference is one that is:*

- supportive of the novice teacher, such that it builds confidence;
  - interactive between participants, such that it is a true dialogue
  - critical, and constructive in analysing important features of the lesson
  - focused on the key learning points, the intended learning outcomes, the pedagogical approaches in the lesson, and the students' learning outcomes;
  - developmental, in that it leaves the novice teacher with something meaningful to work on for their future professional development.
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