

Part 2

Lesson Conferencing: The learning and teaching context

A main focus of discussion when conducting both pre and post-lesson conferences should be on learning and teaching. In Unit 3 we concentrate directly on asking whether the pupils have learnt anything from their lesson and whether, if they did, it was really worth learning. Novice and beginning teachers often focus on making sure that their lessons will appear interesting, perhaps also entertaining, by using a variety of teaching aids. This can be positive in helping to increase pupil motivation and gaining pupil attention, but it is only of value if the content of the lesson is actually learnt and it is worth learning. Sometimes what is learnt is trivial or irrelevant to the pupils' learning needs in one way or another. Unit 4 focuses on the relationship between intended learning outcomes and the methods used to achieve them.

Unit 3

Did the pupils learn anything and was it worth learning?



Introduction

In this Unit we focus on whether the pupils have learnt anything from their lesson and whether the lesson was educationally worth learning?

There are many factors that determine whether learning takes place in any particular lesson. Pupils' motivation to learn is obviously one key factor, as is the appropriateness of the lesson content and pedagogy, given the age and ability of the pupils. Also, whether pupils are able to keep pace with the lesson, the extent to which pupils are able to relate what they are expected to learn to their previous learning, and whether they are aided in constructing their own thoughts and ideas about the lesson topic.

These factors provide important clues when conducting pre-lesson conferences to judge whether learning is likely to take place. They are also helpful indicators when conducting the post-lesson conference immediately after a lesson, before the results of tests and student interviews are able to provide more solid evidence.

One major reason why pupils fail to learn is that the object of learning is not clear. Put simply, the 'object of learning' seeks an answer to the basic question: "*what precisely are the pupils meant to learn in this lesson?*" An important aspect of mentoring and supporting novice teachers is to help them articulate their answer to that question as clearly and unambiguously as possible. Experienced teachers also need to be constantly aware of this question, lesson by lesson. It is therefore an extremely important question to ask when conducting pre and post-lesson conferences.

Once the object of learning has been clearly formulated, we are in a much better position to ask whether it is educationally worthwhile. Whether, for example, the lesson content is relevant to the pupils' age and ability levels, whether it clearly relates to the curriculum context, including its place within the overall scheme of work, whether it is academically sound, of practical importance, or whether it is really quite trivial.



Objectives

1. To consider, in the context of pre and post-lesson conferencing, strategies for raising supportive but also probing questions about the extent and depth of pupil learning in a given lesson.
2. To alert participants to the need to discriminate between the appearance of a 'good lesson' in terms of its presentation, and the issue of whether pupils are actually learning or not.
3. To consider some of the indicators that may be used when discussing a lesson to help decide, in a preliminary way, whether pupil learning is likely or has actually taken place.
4. To raise the issue of whether what is learnt in a lesson is educationally worth learning.



Video Description 1

The setting is a P.5 mathematics lesson. The intended learning outcome of the lesson is for the pupils to be able to calculate the area of a triangle. During the lesson, the pupils were very responsive and were keen to answer the teacher's questions. The lesson flowed very smoothly and the lesson teacher had reason to feel that this has been a successful lesson. However, one of the observing teachers asked whether *all* the pupils were actually learning.



Preparation for viewing

When watching the video try to focus on the following:

- the flow and pace of the lesson;
- the participation and response of the pupils; and
- any indications that pupils who have not put up their hands are really following and learning.

Approximately 4 mins



Now Watch Video Sequence 1

Unit 3_Video 1

10 mins



Activity A

Small group discussion

Sometimes the enthusiastic response and active participation shown by some pupils can mislead a teacher into believing that the lesson has gone well, when, in fact, only a small number of pupils responded and she/he

has provided the main answers to the questions posed in the lesson. This is a subtle but important issue to consider when conducting post-lesson conferences.

In small groups discuss your responses to the video, in particular:

- the flow and pace of the lesson and the participation and response of the pupils. Consider whether these can be used as reliable indicators that all pupils are learning.

Then, share your ideas and experience on:

- effective ways to evaluate whether pupils have actually gained an understanding of the subject matter during a lesson, and
- how best to raise this issue in the post-lesson conference.



Video Description 2

This video sequence shows a number of extracts, totalling about 13 minutes, from a P.3 lesson that lasted an hour. It is a Chinese language lesson on writing memos, and the difference between a memo and a letter. We join the lesson at the point when the teacher is beginning to clarify the form and structure of a memo. The lesson proceeds to identify occasions when a memo might be written. Following that, the teacher divided the class into four sub-groups and set tasks for them to do. Two groups are asked to change a letter into the form of a memo. The other two groups have to complete the missing parts of a sample memo.

(If you revisit Unit 1, Video 1, you will be able to see part of the post-lesson conference that followed this lesson, though it is not necessary to do so in order to complete this Exercise.)




Preparation for viewing

When you watch the lesson, focus on whether you think the pupils are learning anything. Is there any evidence of the following factors, which might be raised for discussion in a post-lesson conference?

- pupils' motivation to learn;
 - the appropriateness of the lesson content and pedagogy, given the age and ability of the pupils;
 - whether pupils are able to keep pace with the lesson;
 - the extent to which pupils are able to relate what they are expected to learn to their previous learning;
 - whether they are aided in constructing their own thoughts and ideas about the lesson topic?
-


These factors are given as a table in the Appendix of this Unit. It can be used when viewing the video to assist with note taking.

Can you think of any other indicators you might be able to use in deciding, in a preliminary way, whether pupil learning has actually taken place?

Approximately 12 mins 

Now Watch Video Sequence 2

Unit 3_Video 2

20 mins 
Small group discussion

Activity B

In your small group discussion, consider your individual answers to the five questions raised under “preparation for viewing” and listed in the table provided in the Appendix.

Now apply these same questions to your own teaching.

On your own, think of the last lesson you taught and imagine that a mentor or a peer reviewer is raising these questions about *your* lesson. How would you answer? Give yourself five minutes to reflect and then share your reflections with others in your small group.



Video Description 3

This is a General Studies lesson on the theme of ‘My Home’. The lesson is based on a textbook activity in which the pupils were asked to place furniture into the overall floor plan of a flat. In this lesson, each small group had been asked to concentrate on furnishing one room. The teacher explains the function of each room.


(Facilitators may find it helpful to identify this lesson, as it is provided in one of the mainstream textbooks used in Hong Kong.)



Preparation for viewing

In viewing this video, pay particular attention to the content of what is being learnt, rather than the approach used to teach it. The teaching approach is clearly capturing the attention of the pupils, but:

- Is the lesson content really worth learning?
 - Is it appropriate content, or is it rather controversial, given the range of homes pupils come from in Hong Kong?
-

Approximately 2 mins 

Now Watch Video Sequence 3

Unit 3_Video 3

20 mins 

Small group discussion

Activity C

In your small groups, imagine you are going to conduct a post-lesson conference with this novice teacher. He has been given a textbook topic to teach, and he has made the lesson interesting for the pupils.

- In the post-lesson conference, how will you go about raising the issue of whether the content of this lesson is educationally worthwhile?
- What points will you make about what makes learning worthwhile?
- What advice would you give to novice teachers on how to use textbooks imaginatively and with professional judgement?

Each small group can try to identify the five main issues they will raise in response to these three questions.

20 mins 

Whole group sharing

Use a flip chart or OHT to make a checklist of all the main issues that have emerged so far from your discussions regarding pupil learning. These issues will be among those you will want to include in pre and post-lesson conferences when discussing pupil learning. They will also help in the role play exercise that follows.



Video Description 4

In a previously taught P.5 mathematics class, the pupils have learnt how to calculate the area of rectangles. In this lesson, a teacher aims to build on the pupils' previous learning and apply it in teaching some problem solving skills, related to calculating the areas of rectangles.



Preparation for viewing

As you watch her lesson, focus particularly on whether the pupils appear to be learning. How do you know? You may write down some notes for your own reference, which can be used in the role play activity that follows.

Her lesson plan is briefly the following:

P5 Mathematics Lesson


Topic: Revision of Area

Objectives:

By the end of the lesson, pupils should be able to use problem solving skills to calculate the area of irregular shapes, using the formula for the area of rectangles that they have previously been taught.


Plan:

1. Greetings and introduction (*not seen on the video*)
2. Revision of the formula for finding the areas of rectangles
3. Pose the problem of irregular shapes and ask students to suggest different strategies for solving the problem
4. Whole class questions and answers using blackboard and visual aids to find out the area of the figure by using two different strategies
5. Individual work: using different strategies to solve the problems shown on the worksheet
6. Conclusion and reinforcement (*not seen on the video*)

Approximately 13 mins 

Now Watch Video Sequence 4

Unit 3_Video 4

30 mins 
Small group role play

Activity D

This is a role play activity. The main purpose of the role play is to think carefully about how best to conduct a post-lesson conference with this teacher. Imagine that you have just observed this lesson. The main issue you want to focus on in your post-lesson discussion is whether the pupils have actually learnt anything in this lesson, though of course there may be other issues that you wish to raise.


In your small groups, brainstorm the issues that you would like to discuss with the lesson teacher in the post-lesson conference. Make a list of the questions that you think are important, and the order in which they should

be raised in the discussion. Try to anticipate the answers that you might receive and plan follow-up questions in response. (*In a way you are planning a script for part of your role play while still keeping the responses open.*)

Then decide how you are going to conduct the conference such that it is supportive, critical and developmental – in that it leaves the teacher with something meaningful to work on for his or her future professional development. (*These criteria are given in more detail in Unit 2, Activity D and in Appendix 3 of Unit 2*)

Consider whether you are going to portray the lesson teacher as a novice teacher being mentored, or a more experienced teacher being reviewed by her peers. (15 minutes)

You now need to decide, in the remaining 10 minutes of preparation, who in your group will actually play the part of the lesson teacher and perhaps two or even three mentors/peer reviewers in the post-lesson conference. Once the roles have been allocated and the list of issues to be discussed has been decided, the group can plan the presentation of the role play. For this activity, imagine that it is only a portion of the lesson conference that will be performed. So keep the time to around 5 – 7 minutes for your role play.

30 mins 
Whole group sharing

Each small group can now perform their chosen role play. In addition to enjoying each performance, try to notice any important issues that need further consideration in discussion after the role plays have been completed.

In the light of role playing this post-lesson conference, what lessons have you learnt about the best strategies to use, as mentor or peer reviewer, when raising questions on the extent and depth of pupils' learning?

Unit 3 total time: 153 mins

Unit 3 Appendix 1



Observation Task and Activity B (Small group discussion)

Checklist providing evidence of:
pupils' motivation to learn:
the appropriateness of the lesson content and pedagogy, given the age and ability of the pupils:
whether pupils are able to keep pace with the lesson:
the extent to which pupils are able to relate what they are expected to learn to their previous learning:
whether they are aided in constructing their own thoughts and ideas about the lesson topic:
others:

Unit 4

Are the teaching strategies able to bring about the intended learning?



Introduction

It is always possible to find alternative and potentially better methods of teaching any topic. The ability to consider alternatives methods, and provide sound reasons for choosing one approach rather than another, is one of the most important professional teaching skills. As such, it requires thorough consideration when conducting pre and post-lesson conferences.

A key consideration is whether the methods and strategies used are consistent with the object of learning. Other key considerations include the age and ability of the pupils and pupils' possible motivations. These and other relevant issues (such as the resources that are, or could be, made available and the available time for the lesson), have to be kept in mind and balanced one against the other as the teacher decides what she/he believes to be the most suitable method for that particular lesson and that particular class, on that particular day.

The need to consider all the many variables suggests that there is no 'one' correct method of teaching a particular lesson or subject, though for any particular lesson some methods will be better, more appropriate, more challenging, and more likely to deliver the intended learning outcomes than others. When mentoring or conducting peer review, the aim should be to discuss the use of methods in a productive and creative way, such that it encourages a continuous awareness of the need to question the methods we are using and the reasons for our preferences.

In the context of conducting a Learning Study, considerable importance is placed on using variation as a pedagogical tool. Learning occurs when we see something in a new and/or unexpected way. This is greatly aided when some aspects of a topic or exercise are kept constant while others are varied; these are then kept constant while others are varied. Using variation as a pedagogical tool is therefore similar to the strategy used by researchers when conducting a controlled experiment in a laboratory.



Objectives

1. To examine, in the context of lesson conferencing, some of the factors related to pupils' learning that need to be taken into consideration when discussing the best methods and strategies to achieve intended learning outcomes.
2. To encourage participants to consider the pedagogical importance of establishing a relationship between teaching methods and the setting of intended learning outcomes.
3. To briefly introduce the use of 'variation' as a pedagogical tool.



Video Description 1

This is a Chinese lesson in which pupils are being asked to think about the things they look for when choosing friends. The lesson went according to plan. However, in the post-lesson conference, the experienced teacher suggests that there may be a problem with the lesson.



Preparation for Viewing

When watching the video, which begins with a short extract of the lesson, notice the strategies used by the experienced teacher to help the novice teacher reflect on the lesson and improve her methods.

Approximately 4 mins



Now Watch Video Sequence 1

Unit 4_Video 1

25 mins



Activity A

Small group discussion

- Identify the three main questions asked by the experienced teacher in this lesson conference. You can follow the transcript of this conversation, provided in Appendix 1 of this Unit. Consider carefully the way these questions are phrased. Can you think of better ways to ask the same questions?
 - If you were participating in this conversation, what points might you make on how to deepen the learning outcomes and improve the methods? Can you think of a concrete example to illustrate your suggestion?
 - Look back to the second paragraph of the Introduction of this Unit, and you will see a number of factors listed that have a bearing on the choice of methods and their relevance to the intended learning
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outcomes. From your own practical experience, do you agree with these factors and are some more important than others? Also, are there additional factors that you would add to the list?

(Perhaps you would like to write the responses of your group members to these questions on an OHT, for presentation in the follow-up discussion.)



Video Description 2

The video for this exercise is part of a longer extract that will be used for this exercise and the one following.

The novice teacher has just taught a mathematics lesson on 'Time', focusing on 'AM' and 'PM'. He has used two activities to teach these two concepts. In this video extract, we see the first activity in which he asked pupils to count the 24 hours, naming the first 12 hours as 'AM' and the second 12 hours as 'PM'.



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 4 mins



Now Watch Video Sequence 2

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 4_Video 2

30 mins



Small group discussion

Activity B

- What skills did you notice the mentor using in helping the lesson teacher to reflect deeply about his lesson?
 - Think carefully about the questions asked by the experienced teacher. What are her purposes in raising these particular questions?
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(Facilitators may now use the lesson analysis provided on the video, where the possible intentions behind the mentor's questions are provided. This can be used to further analyse the lesson conference, digging deeper into what was actually occurring.)

- Think of conferencing skills that you may have used in the past, which would be useful and helpful in stimulating the lesson teachers' reflection?



Video Description 3

Following his first activity, the novice teacher used a game to highlight the importance of using 'AM' and 'PM' and identify the time difference. He produced the names of several television programmes and their showing times, and asked the pupils to match the programme name with the correct time.



Activity C: Preparation for Viewing

The novice teacher has carefully selected 2 examples to illustrate the importance of using 'AM' and 'PM' to differentiate the time difference. The Theory of Variation is being applied here. In the first example, the programme name is kept constant while varying the time. In the second example, the time (number) is kept constant while varying 'AM' and 'PM'. In your small group, discuss how these two examples help bring out the critical features of this lesson, where pupils are being asked to discern the difference between 'AM' and 'PM'?

Without realizing it, the novice teacher is actually intending to use variation as a pedagogical tool. Using the two examples together is important to help pupils' notice the difference between 'AM' and 'PM'. In the lesson, however, the novice teacher ran out of time and so simply used the first example. The mentor thought this was not the best example to choose.

(The television programmes and their showing times are given in Appendix 3 of this Unit)

Approximately 4 mins



Now Watch Video Sequence 3

Unit 4_Video 3

30 mins




Activity c

Small group discussion

- Given the benefit of using both examples as a way of helping pupils see the difference between 'AM' and 'PM', can you re-draft the mentor's questions so that it helps the novice teacher to recognise the

learning potential of his implicit use of variation in the exercises he was intending to use?

- Imagine that you are a third voice in the discussion. What contribution would you make to this lesson conference if you had been present?

30 mins 
Whole group sharing

Finally, use a flip chart or OHT to make a checklist of all the main issues that have emerged from your discussions in this Unit, regarding teaching strategies and their impact on student learning. These issues will be included in those you need to raise in pre and post-lesson conferences.

Unit 4 total time: 131 mins

Unit 4 Appendix 1



Activity A (Small group discussion)

Transcript for discussion of Activity A

Mentor	After the first activity, what was the purpose of the next part of the lesson?
Lesson Teacher	To think how they've chosen friends. I asked them what personality traits attract them.
Mentor	What personality traits?
Lesson Teacher	People with certain personality traits attract them to be friends. Pupils can give some examples. And other personality traits put them off. Pupils can also give examples.
Mentor	I noticed that you put them under category A and B. What effect does this create? Is what you are trying to do desirable?
Lesson Teacher	It's so, so. For example, under category A, some mentioned "honest". Others gave "dishonest" as the opposite. Their thinking is a bit restricted.
Mentor	Category A is the personality that appeals to them. Category B, the personality that puts them off. It seems that you have to remind pupils about this repeatedly. If you teach this again, would you consider labelling these categories differently?

Unit 4 Appendix 2



Activity B (Small group discussion)

Transcript for discussion of Activity B

Mentor	How are you going to teach AM and PM?
Lesson Teacher	I will use a clock. The day starts at 12 midnight. I will turn the clock ... I will put this chart up. First round is 12 midnight till 12 noon. I'll call this part 'AM'. The next round is 12 noon till 12 in the evening. The second part is this segment. Then I'll give it another name.
Mentor	The whole class was very attentive. All pupils counted the time with you. This part was very successful. You counted 12, 1, 2..and then completed your first round. You moved onto the second round. Were pupils simply counting? Or did they understand the differences between the two rounds?
Lesson Teacher	So I emphasised 1 o'clock at night. Then 1 o'clock in the daytime.
Mentor	So you used the terms "daytime" and "night", to illustrate the difference.
Lesson Teacher	Right, emphasising the differences between day and night.
Mentor	Have you considered using daily examples as illustrations?
Lesson Teacher	Yes, that would be good ...I thought about saying sleeping time, waking up...



Activity C (Small group discussion)

Television programme for Activity C

	Time	Programme name
Example 1	9:00 a.m.	NET Kids
	4:00 p.m.	NET Kids
Example 2	7:45 a.m.	Good morning HK
	7:45 p.m.	Qin Dynasty
