

LEARNING MATTERS at LINGNAN

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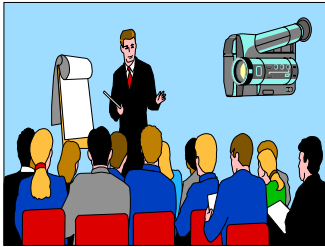


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From the Editor:

Learning Matters at Lingnan are short papers on teaching and learning that aim to provide a forum for exchange of ideas about instructional matters. You are most welcomed to contribute to the forum by writing Learning Matters at Lingnan, and/or responding to ideas that you either agree or disagree. Please send your ideas and contributions to the Teaching and Learning Centre (TLC), Lingnan College.



Using Micro-teaching for Peer Review of Teaching

University teachers these days have to make themselves accountable in their teaching. Students are certainly a good source of feedback, for after all it is students that have first-hand experience of their teachers' teaching. However, even ignoring the doubt whether all students are able to exercise impartial and objective judgement on their teachers' performance, there are plainly aspects of teaching on which students are not in a position to pass professional judgement. Indeed, "student feedback questionnaires" tend to be rather limited in scope.

Come to think of it, there are actually a number of sources in addition to student feedback, on which we as university teachers can depend for evaluating our teaching. First of all, *we ourselves* are sometimes the most reliable source of feedback --- a sort of "gut feeling" which we must be having right after teaching a class, a vague but genuine feeling about how well or how badly we have done! If only that feeling could be "externalised" and categorised or even quantified, how much more useful would that be for appraising our own performance.

Another rich source of feedback is of course our colleagues, our peers. It is precisely in the context of evaluating our teaching performance that colleagues are able to play a significant role. Peer review/observation of teaching, if handled with care and carried out systematically, is capable of yielding extremely fruitful results, because our peers can be absolutely impartial, objective and are subject specialists. Furthermore, peer review/observation of teaching may over time form a substantial part of anyone's "teaching portfolio" which may turn into an effective basis for contract renewal, substantiation or promotion.

But then all this is easier said than done. We are of course well aware of the benefits of peer review/observation of our teaching. But the crucial question is: How should we go about it?

One solution may be to happily marry a *new form of micro-teaching* to peer review/observation of teaching by using "state-of-the-art" video technology.

Dr. Dwight Allen, who was one of the founders of traditional micro-teaching back in the sixties in Stanford University, recently developed¹ a new micro-teaching model which centres around the so-called "2 + 2" feedback. It works like this

¹ Allen, Dwight W. & Wang, Wai-ping (1996), *Micro-teaching*, Hsin Hua Publishers, Beijing

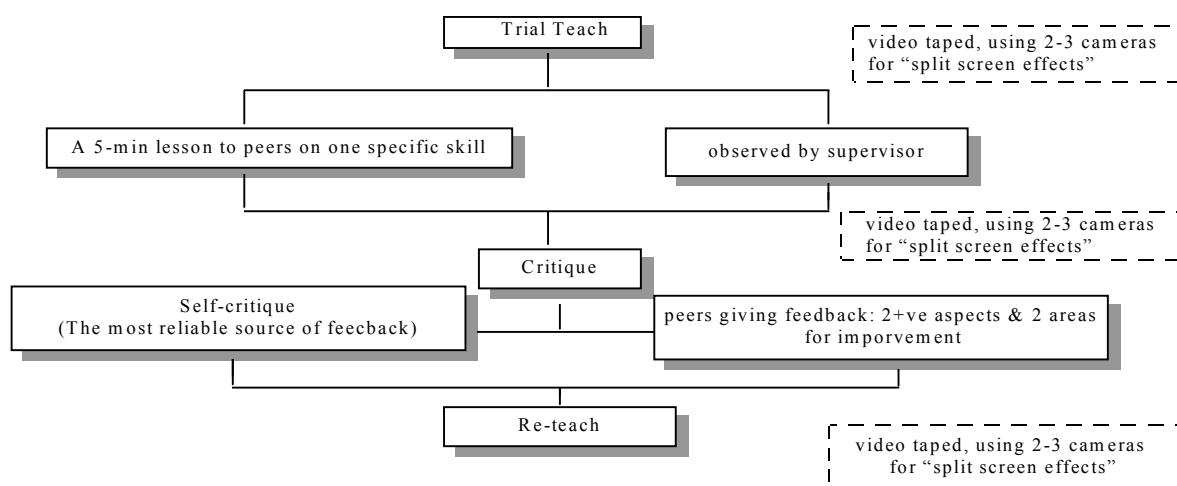
The colleague whose teaching is being evaluated, teaches a five-minute lesson to a group of peers, usually four colleagues, focusing on one particular skill or technique, e.g. questioning skill, in the presence of a supervisor who is an expert's in the colleague field. The entire session is videotaped, preferably using more than one camera, so that "split screen effects" can be achieved, capturing teacher and student action and reaction for playback viewing.

Right after the "trial teach", the supervisor will ask the teacher to self-critique his or her own performance. Then each peer will be asked to give feedback by following the "2 + 2" formula, which is actually making two positive comments and two suggestions for improvement. This way, if there are four peers present, a total of eight positive comments and eight different suggestions for improvement will be made available for the teacher's consideration. All the time, videotaping is going on, so that every one will have a live record of what is happening.

Benefiting from self-reflection on the "trial teach", coupled with useful feedback comments from colleagues, the teacher is now ready for a "re-teach" of the same 5-minute lesson segment, which will again be videotaped.

Right after the "re-teach" session, a feedback discussion again led by the supervisor will take place, culminating in an objective and systematic appraisal of the teacher's performance in teaching the specified skill, as judged by the supervisor and peers.

Graphically



This new model of micro-teaching differs from the traditional model in that it is capable of being modified for peer review in university setting, because very specific guidelines are given to the colleagues involved in the process, as to what skills or techniques should be observed, and what, if any, non-verbal signals should be taken into account for that particular session; otherwise colleagues would be at a loss as to what to take account of and what to ignore. For the teacher such micro-teaching sessions would represent opportunities for *safe* practice and useful feedback.

Colleagues may like to consider this suggestion, give it some thought and then try it out together with other colleagues. Colleagues may form "self-help groups" for micro-teaching/peer review purposes, whereby each colleague will take turns to be "observed and evaluated" and every time one colleague will act as "supervisor". It should be emphasised that not only "generic" teaching skills such as getting students motivated and interested in the lesson, but even more importantly, particular skills that are specific to a given discipline or subject area should be trained and practised.

Thanks to information technology (IT) facilities such as capturing video segments and footage, capturing sound and other media effects onto VCD's and CD-ROM's, colleagues these days can "store" their teaching endeavours and micro-teaching sessions reviewed by peers, in IT-based formats as well as in print format, making documentation of their teaching performances so much more versatile and variegated. The T&T2* Project Team is always ready and happy to offer assistance in this regard, both technically and professionally.

by Thomas Y.H. Chan, T&T2* Coordinator

*T&T2 is acronym for the UGC-funded inter-institutional project : The Consortium for the Promotion of Teaching Skills and Technology : Further Action on Teaching Development, with its operational base in Teaching and Learning Centre(TLC), Lingnan College