

Guidelines for Effective Teaching – A Guide for Classroom Observations

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Frequent Peer Observations of your teaching can be the best way to share ideas about how to teach, and to get insights from your colleagues about your teaching. These observations are most useful if your classroom observation includes a thorough pre-class discussion, and a set of guidelines and topics that you and your peer observers review before the class session. In the pre-class observation, be sure to alert your observer about any issues you feel need special attention and also discuss your goals and learning objectives both in the semester-long course and in the class session to be observed.

The guidelines below are intended to provide an outline for observers and instructors to help guide their discussion about effective teaching. These guidelines are not exhaustive but include some recommendations from educational research and from peer institutions about what constitutes effective teaching. We hope that you find these guidelines helpful please let us know if there are additional topics or points that should be included.

Outline of Effective Teaching – in Four Components.

In our discussions about effective teaching and peer observation, we found that a focusing on a small number of discrete components of teaching can help structure the feedback for more constructive input to the instructors. Four key components of effective teaching include:

- **Goals and Learning Objectives for the Class** – Were they clearly developed and communicated to the students? Were the learning objectives appropriate for the time available and for the student’s preparation?
- **Preparation for the Class** – Was the instructor well-prepared for the class? Did the instructor have command of the materials being discussed and presented?
- **Teaching Methodologies** – Did the instructor use appropriate and effective pedagogy? Were these methods sound and well implemented?
- **Student Experience in the Class** – Were the students engaged? Did they participate and demonstrate learning within the class? Did they interact effectively with each other?

In sections below we provide more details about what highly effective and effective teaching looks like in each of these four components.

Goals and Learning Objectives: A learning goal is a description of what students will be able to do at the end of the class lesson and/or course. It is based on the intended standards and curriculum that are related to the overall course, and the Major(s) for which this course is listed.

- 1. Highly Effective: Learning Objectives:** The teacher has established challenging and measurable goal(s) for student learning that aligns with Yale-NUS College standards and reflects the range of student learner needs. The teacher clearly describes how the class goals articulate with into the broader unit, course, and Major-related learning goals. **2. Resources:** Instructional materials and resources are well aligned with instructional activities, are varied and appropriate to ability levels of students, and actively engage the entire class, giving them in ownership of their learning.
- 2. Effective: 1. Learning Objectives:** The teacher demonstrates a focus on students with appropriate learning objectives for the lesson that include measurable goal(s) for student learning aligned with the Yale-NUS standards. The teacher demonstrates the importance of the goal and its appropriateness. **2. Resources:** Instructional materials and resources are aligned to the instructional purposes and are appropriate for students' learning styles and needs, actively engaging most of the students.

Questions to consider:

- a. What goals and learning objectives do you currently have for your class?
- b. How are you checking if you are meeting those goals and objectives?
- c. What resources do you use to engage the students with the course material – this can be readings, handouts, discussion boards, videos, guest speakers, field trips, lab exercises etc.
- d. What additional resources could you use to better get at learning objectives in your classroom?

Preparation for Class: The following criteria include a list of possible attributes of Highly Effective Lesson Planning and Preparation for a given class lesson. The planning and preparation are most visible for instructors who are able to anticipate student questions and reactions, and to be able to adapt to questions and events within the class period.

- 1. HIGHLY EFFECTIVE: Unit Lesson of the Course:** The unit lesson was prepared with excellent and engaging questions, and offers a well-balanced mix of content and skill development addressing learning goals covering multiple higher order thinking levels (such as from Bloom's taxonomy). **2. Assessment:** Class included some diagnostic assessments to monitor student learning in the lesson. **3. Anticipation:** Anticipates students' misconceptions and confusions and develops multiple strategies to overcome them. **4. Lesson Plan:** Designed the lesson with clear, measurable, achievable goals closely aligned with standards and unit outcomes. **5. Materials:** Lesson deployed an effective mix of high-quality learning materials and technology. **6. Experimentation:** Instructor demonstrates originality and finds new and inspiring connections to students' questions and responses.

- 2. EFFECTIVE: 1. Unit Lesson of the Course:** Planned the unit lesson with essential questions, knowledge, skill, and non-cognitive goals. **2. Assessment:** Class included on-the-spot and unit assessments to measure student learning. **3. Anticipation:** Anticipates misconceptions that students might have and plans to address them. **4. Lesson Plan:** Designed the lesson with measurable, achievable outcomes aligned with course or Major goals. **5. Materials:** Designed lesson that uses an appropriate, multicultural mix of materials and technology. **6. Experimentation:** Instructor demonstrates some original approaches and some connections with students' questions and responses.

Questions to consider:

- a. How do you prepare for class?
- b. Do you use a lesson plan?
- c. How do you measure student learning of course material?

Teaching Delivery & Methodology: The delivery of the class should make connections to students and the lesson plan. The lesson plan should be executed with clarity and with a chance for students to reflect and question, and in an environment that respects the multicultural nature of our student body. This requires going beyond the traditional exclusive lecture, one-way information flow, to alternative ways of engage a student-centered learning environment.

- 1. HIGHLY EFFECTIVE: 1. Connections:** Hooks virtually all students in the lesson by activating knowledge, experience, reading, and vocabulary. **2. Clarity:** Presented material clearly and explicitly, with well-chosen examples and vivid, appropriate language. **3. Methods:** Uses a wide range of well-chosen, effective strategies, questions, materials, technology, and groupings to accelerate student learning. **4. Closure:** Consistently has students summarize and internalize what they learn and apply it to real-life situations and future opportunities. **5. Respect:** Encouraged a climate of intercultural (both people and ideas) respect and buy-in such that positive interactions and social-emotional skills can develop.
- 2. EFFECTIVE: 1. Connections:** Activates students' prior knowledge (in particular from the common curriculum) and hooks their interest in the lesson and new vocabulary. **2. Clarity:** Uses clear explanations, appropriate language, and examples to present material. **3. Methods:** Orchestrates effective strategies, questions, materials, technology, and groupings to foster student learning – trying new approaches. **4. Closure:** Has students sum up what they have learned and apply it in a different context. **5. Respect:** Fosters positive intercultural interactions and routines among students and teaches useful social skills.

Questions to consider:

- a. What strategies do you use to engage the students?
- b. How often do you deliberately apply “closure” to your lesson plan?

- c. What intercultural challenges do you anticipate in your classroom? How might you address them?

Student Experience in the Classroom: The environment of the class should be well ordered, engaged, and respectful with a lively pace that maximizes learning and incorporates an awareness of student difference in learning styles and cultural backgrounds.

1. HIGHLY EFFECTIVE: 1. **Routines:** Students respond well to a set of activities that are well established and orderly. Student-centered learning was encouraged 2. **Engagement:** Nearly all students involved in focused activities, actively learning and problem solving, losing themselves in the work. 3. **Transitions** are seamless as the teacher effectively maximizes instructional time and combines independent, collaborative, and whole-class learning situations into the lesson. 4. **Environment.** The classroom environment has been designed, implemented and adjusted with student input and is appropriate for the classroom and individual student needs, with students taking ownership of the learning and their behavior. 5. **Intercultural issues** provide a source of strength for the course, and the teacher is proactive in making certain students are in a safe and inclusive learning environment.
2. EFFECTIVE: 1. **Routines** and procedures run smoothly throughout the lesson, and students assume responsibility for the efficient operation of the classroom. Student-centered learning was encouraged. 2. **Engagement:** Has students actively think about, discuss, and use the ideas and skills being taught 3. **Transitions** are efficient and occur smoothly. There is evidence of varied learning situations (whole class, cooperative learning, small group and independent work). 4. **Environment.** The classroom environment has been implemented that is appropriate and responsive to classroom and individual needs of most students, with students behaving responsibly and respecting the environment. 5. **Intercultural issues** are addressed at some point in the course, and students are in a safe learning environment.

Questions to consider:

- a. How do you perceive the student experience in your classroom?
- b. In what ways do you encourage student-centered learning in your classroom?