

## **BL Instruction Pedagogical Practice**

### **Institute-level TDG Project**

#### **THE HONG KONG INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION**

<b>Programme:</b>	Educational Studies	<b>Course</b>	
<b>Course</b>	Curriculum and	<b>Code:</b>	TLS3003
<b>Title:</b>	Assessment	<b>Tutor:</b>	Theresa

#### **Description/Teaching Philosophy:**

TLS3003 is a foundation course that exposes students to the basic principles of curriculum planning and design, the various approaches to assessment, and alignment between intentions, enactment, and assessment of and for learning. It situates these principles in the context of recent education reforms in Hong Kong. The course comprises two major assessment components: 1) a group presentation to analyze a local curriculum or assessment-based issue and 2) an individual reflective/critical essay showcasing their understanding of an issue related to curriculum or assessment that they were likely to encounter as teachers.

In addition to preparing students to fulfill the above components, my aim was to employ Blended Learning (BL) strategies through a constructivist approach. Social constructivists have noted that dialogic acts are a means for both speakers and listeners to clarify thinking. Similarly, social cognitive theories posit meaningful learning as occurring when it involves the activation of – and linkage to – prior knowledge. The BL-specific objectives were to encourage students to:

- a) recursively build on prior knowledge and learning experiences,
- b) engage in dialogue and collaboration, and
- c) synthesize learning as they tackled the two major assessment components.

Below, I share two BL activities from the TLS3003 class.

### Sample Activities and the Artefacts:

#### **Activity 1: On-line reflection on curriculum orientations and response to the “Learning to Learn” (LTL) curriculum policy.**

During the first three weeks of the course, students learn about orientations to curriculum, read a chapter from our textbook focusing on the LTL framework, and engage in discussions about their experiences in primary and secondary school regarding the intended, enacted, implicit, and null curriculum dimensions. Activity 1 follows-up on these activities. Students go on-line to accomplish the following:

Explore the EDB’s website by reading Chapters 2 & 3 of “LTL – The Way Forward in Curriculum”. <http://www.edb.gov.hk/en/curriculum-development/cs-curriculum-doc-report/wf-in-cur/index.html>. In addition, read the curriculum documents for your subject area. As you read, think about the curriculum orientations, your role as a teacher, the nature of subject matter knowledge, and assessment. Write responses to the following questions and submit your work on Moodle:

- 1) Based on what we have discussed in class so far, what is your definition of “curriculum”? What curriculum orientations (academic rationalist, cognitive development, etc.) do you agree with the most? Explain your answer.
- 2) From reading Chapter 3 of our textbook and Chapters 2 and 3 from the “Learning to Learn” (LTL) documents, and the document from your subject area: What curriculum orientations do the documents reflect? What do the documents say about the role of schools in society, the role of teachers, how students learn, and assessment?
- 3) Looking back at your own schooling experiences, how did your experiences reflect the principles included in the LTL documents? Do you think that your teachers were able to teach the curriculum in the way that it was intended?
- 4) As a future teacher, do you agree with the principles expressed in LTL? Will you be able to teach your subject according to the LTL policy? Explain your answer.

Verbatim responses to Activity 1 from four students:

#### Response to Question 1:

There is no particular academic orientation that I agree with the most instead, I looked into the different academic orientations and saw that each of them had good qualities and merged together would probably be the dream academic orientation. This hybrid would include the needed rigidity of the Academic rationalist view where core disciplines (Mathematics, English and Science) is present in order to provide students with a sound knowledge of the fundamentals. However, instead of being teacher-centered, this hybrid sees students as the major voice since the students will be the one on the receiving end of this orientation. Teachers will serve as facilitators of knowledge in order for the students to explore their own capabilities and discover their individual potential. In addition, society

plays a crucial role in this hybrid therefore; principles of the social Reconstructionist view will be applied in order for the students to be aware of social issues and for schools to administer activities to address such issues.

#### Response to Question 2:

For the subject English, it is very learner-centered and it involves the orientation cognitive process as well. It is very striking that the word “facilitate” is used very often in this chapter so it is very easy to know that to teach English, teachers have to help the students in their learning instead of “teaching them”. Teachers should let students to discover things in English, for instance, patterns in grammar. Also, when the students are older and more mature, which are in their form fours, they should be allowed to set their own objectives and decide what they want to learn. The curriculum involves the cognitive process orientation too as it helps students to develop their thinking skills such as evaluation and synthesis skills.

#### Response to Question 3:

My teachers, in a large extent, were not able to carry out the curriculum in the way that it was intended (learner-focused approach and cognition process orientation). Let me take vocabulary learning as an example. The learning method of English vocabulary is very organized that we will first read aloud the main text in textbook, then teacher will explain words that we are not familiar with and put much emphasis on the key words that the chapter aims to teach. Dictation is a must for every chapter. However, my English teacher taught us how to use dictionary and notebook to accumulate vocabulary. Therefore, I can still obtain words outside the textbook.

#### Response to Question 4:

As a future teacher, I agree with the principle expressed in the documents. I think it is very important to develop a self-disciplined mind set for now a days' students. As Hong Kong has become a knowledge-based economy, knowledge is very important for everyone in order to survive in this society. However, knowledge is endless, it is impossible for teachers to teach all the essential knowledge to students in few years of school years. Therefore, students should have the ability to learn how to learn so that they can keep learning through their lifetime. However, the subject that I will be teaching in the future will be English. I think for language subjects, many of the words structures, grammar or pronunciation should be explained by teachers clearly or else it is very easy to make mistakes or misunderstood by students. Students should attend lessons first before they can use the existing knowledge to further explore the subject.

Collectively, the responses provided a snapshot of the students' understanding of the course content thus far. I read through their responses and gave feedback during our next face-to-face session. Instead of responding individually, I gave the class over-all observations and discussed some unclear ideas. I also reminded students that they could draw on their on-line responses in writing their final individual essays (assessment component 2).

## **Activity 2: On-line discussion and collaboration activity using Moodle groups and Google docs.**

The first major assessment component in TLS is the group presentation, which comprises 30% of the course grade. I have noticed that with regards to group work, there remain instances when one or two people end up bearing more responsibility and/or exerting more effort compared to others. With an eye towards equitable distribution and closer collaboration in preparing for the presentation, I sought help from the BL resource person, Brant Knutzen ([brant@knutzen.se](mailto:brant@knutzen.se)), to set-up Moodle groups and to use Google docs powerpoints.

### Group Activity

The purpose of the group activity is to expand students' collective understanding of principles and practices that undergird curriculum and/or assessment policy initiatives in Hong Kong. Students will be organized into major/discipline groups and given time to prepare a 20-25 minute presentation. The presentation is comprised of two parts: actual presentation and discussion with the class. To prepare for the presentation, groups will read about the selected policy, focusing on specific aspects (for example, catering to student diversity within the "Learning to Learn" Policy). Groups will draw on the references listed in the course outline, as well as other resources, to expand knowledge of the topic. Groups will then go to their assigned Moodle group discussion forum to discuss questions, and collaborate to prepare for the presentation.

Moodle has a "group choice" function for students to select a group on-line. I asked my students to organize their groups in person and provide me with the topic of their choice. On our Moodle page, I uploaded exemplars of powerpoint slides created by groups in previous semesters. We discussed in class some pointers on "What makes an effective presentation?" and reviewed the rubric by which groups would be graded.

I also gave the groups a sheet that outlined different roles that each member could play. For example, one student could be in charge of readings, another would look at organization, etc.

The grading criteria included: Understanding of topics/key concepts (50%) and Critical thinking (30%). I emphasized that by conducting group discussions on-line, I could determine how well they understood readings from class and critically considered the issues related to their topics.

About three-fourths of the groups utilized the group discussion platform, and about one-fourth of students used Google docs to create powerpoint slides. Below is a screenshot of one of the more successful discussion forums. Based on their contributions, group members were able to delegate parts of the presentation to individuals who showed interest in specific areas. On-line discussions also became a means for students to funnel their ideas and delve more

deeply into a topic. This addressed another concern that had arisen in previous semesters: having presentations that were broad in scope but showed little analysis or criticality because of the generality of the topics.

**Re: Group 5: Liberal Studies**  
by [redacted] - Sunday, 22 March 2015, 12:15 AM

Another thing I would like to ask as well, what are the components that you think are implicit and nullified in the curriculum? I don't have to ask about the explicit ones because we could just check on the curriculum document. I am not very sure what exactly to include in the part about implicit because it seems as if there is some overlapping with the explicit as well. For example, from the explicit curriculum, critical thinking is supposed to be an outcome. Don't you think that this can also part of the implicit curriculum because it seems as if its making students value the power of critical thinking?

I like how this student is using vocabulary/ concepts from the readings.

**Re: Group 5: Liberal Studies**  
by [redacted] - Sunday, 22 March 2015, 12:21 AM

Yes sure. This is a big issue as well as a huge problem because without a clear goal of teaching LS , all the LS teachers would be lost in their teaching( and apparently they are kinda lost, according to the interview of several teachers) .

Going back to the point of what critical thinking is, I saw this very useful info from an article ,

Critical thinking is generally viewed as:

(i) as judgement; (ii) as skepticism; (iii) as a simple originality; (iv) as sensitive readings; (v) as rationality; (vi) as an activist engagement with knowledge; and (vii) as self-reflexivity.

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Follows-up on the comment above: “with no clear goal . . . teachers would be lost”. Both students are looking for ways to clarify their topic by seeking frameworks for the presentation.

**Re: Group 5: Liberal Studies**  
by [redacted] - Sunday, 22 March 2015, 12:22 AM

I think when analyzing critical thinking, we need to take a look at Bloom's Taxonomy (1956) which is the framework of the Liberal Studies curriculum. It consists of intellectual outcomes of knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation. When breaking down each of the 6 levels, it is seen that critical thinking can be developed when applying these aspects on a step-by-step basis, so we can use this framework as our reference.

Critical application of concepts to school experiences.

**Re: Group 5: Liberal Studies**  
by [redacted] - Sunday, 22 March 2015, 12:34 AM

Yes. Basically, both of your responses are parallel to the 2 components of critical thinking. It's quite perplexing to know this only now though. I don't remember a time where critical thinking was clearly defined in my secondary school. In a sense, the LS curriculum may have failed me because they would keep using this term but then some of us don't actually know what is expected of us to do when it comes to critical thinking.

The discussion forums remained on-line for three weeks. During that time, I would read the students' comments and in class, I singled-out positive aspects of the groups' discussions. We reviewed the rubric to remind students of descriptors relating to criteria of critical thinking and understanding concepts. I also met with each group once to discuss their progress.

For Liberal Studies (LS) group, I liked how they were using vocabulary from readings, looking at frameworks to organize their presentation, and reflecting on how LS was enacted in their secondary schools. They questioned how the LS framework was underpinned by critical thinking, but the concept of "critical thinking" was not made clear to them.

In their presentation, the group provided a working definition of critical thinking, then analyzed the LS framework to discuss how it played-out at the intended, enacted, explicit, implicit, and null curriculum.

According to student feedback, preparing for the presentation helped them consider concepts with "breadth and depth". The group activity also served as a springboard for some students to tackle their final individual essay. Here is an excerpt from one student who decided to write about the primary English curriculum in her essay:

In my essay, I plan to write about a fusion of curriculum and assessment due to the fact that these ideas are primarily inseparable. The essay will touch upon the difference between the intended and implemented orientations of the curriculum as a whole while also analysing the attempt to reform the assessment. Due to the rise of the IB curriculum in Hong Kong, a comparison will be made on the effectiveness of the reform against IB. In addition, how critical thinking is facilitated in English classes will also be discussed so as to articulate the idea that the curriculum in Hong Kong aims to be an integrated one as LS can be incorporated in the English classes through its modules e.g. social issues, popular culture.

Talking about what I've learnt from the group work, a lot about critical thinking has been explored hence allowing me to gain understanding in terms of breadth and depth. I think that this paved way for me to incorporate in my writing but to attempt difference, English will be the subject involved, also because it's the subject I tend to teach. Doing so would then make it more personal as it's related to my growth. Concepts regarding the definition of curriculum, its orientations and the three curricula can be easily incorporated in the essay as a comparison to be dealt with in it. These concepts can therefore enable me to give a critical analysis regarding the curriculum reform.

### **Effectiveness and Lessons Learnt:**

The two BL activities served the purpose of encouraging students to

- a) recursively build on prior knowledge and learning experiences,
- b) engage in dialogue and collaboration, and
- c) synthesize learning as they tackled the two major assessment components.

In all, I feel that the on-line reflection gave students the opportunity to build on prior experiences and synthesize learning; whereas the group activity addressed all three BL objectives. Both activities enabled me to determine students' ongoing understanding of the content and give feedback, thus, providing students with an example of formative assessment, which was one



focus of the course. I also thought that the recursive nature of these activities – requiring students to refer to our class discussions, previous lessons, readings, and their prior experiences – lent coherence to the course over-all. As one student noted, the course requirements and lessons “made sense” and “fit together.”

The BL activities, however, also posed limitations. For example, none of the groups used the “role assignment” structure that I had provided. Students also shared with me a tendency to initiate a conversation thread on Moodle, but others would reply to their ideas by starting another thread, thus, hindering the discussion’s momentum. Groups that did not participate in the discussion forums cited their partiality for other on-line platforms. Across my two TLS 3003 classes, at least two groups conducted their discussions over WhatsApp. They also shared their preference for conversing in Chinese, which I do not speak.

In the future, I will attempt to address these limitations by modelling the functions of the group discussion forum and perhaps requiring students to a) share an idea by starting a thread and b) responding to at least two comments posted by others. Another idea would be to assign the group members roles in class using the sheet provided. These ideas could make the discussion structure more clear and bring about more contributions, but I am not sure if it would stymie the organic collaboration that makes for meaningful group work.

With regards to groups that used on-line platforms other than Moodle and conversed in Chinese, these groups were able to share their progress with me during the face-to-face consultation and come up with effective presentations. Thus, although I will continue to encourage students to use Moodle groups, I will emphasize that those who do not must ensure keeping me abreast of their progress through other means.