

Faculty of Languages

1st Outcome-Based Learning Sharing Seminar

The Faculty of Languages organized its first Outcome-Based Learning Sharing Seminar on 22 September 2010. In addition to colleagues from FLAN, the Head and members of the OBL Unit were also seen at the event. Participants were engaged in lively discussions conducted in English, Cantonese and also Putonghua in a relaxed ambiance.

The discussions were divided into two major themes: (1) the most unforgettable experience in OBL implementation, and (2) the most difficult aspect in the OBL approach. In the Seminar, eight tutors who had completed their OBL try-outs shared their OBL experiences and insights with us; whereas Dr Cheung Sau Hung and Dr Wang Lixun, OBL coordinators of the two departments, reported on OBL implementation and progress made in their respective departments.

The Most Unforgettable Experience in OBL Implementation

Both traditional mode and OBL mode of teaching focus on teaching objectives and contents. However, the OBL approach put emphasis on the big picture: the programme - what qualities in the students we would like to nurture. Therefore, tutors had to review course outlines before the OBL try-out. Expected generic skills had been included in the course learning outcomes, and assessment tasks had been revised so that the generic outcomes were assessed as well.

Dr Wang Lixun from the English Department revised the assessment tasks of his course four times so that the student learning outcomes could be comprehensively and effectively assessed. Dr Marc Xu, from the same department, also revised the assessment task of his course, turning a passive 'in-class test' to an active task which required students to show how they would apply their knowledge in a 'learning portfolio'.

To apply the theory of multiple learning, Dr Ho Chi Hang from the Chinese Department increased the number of assessment tasks to four items. Although it made him occupy with grading students' assignments, he has now got used to this teaching mode and could apply the elements of OBL approach in teaching unintentionally. He smiled and said, "The most unforgettable thing was being busy all the time."

Reflection is one of the most important elements in the OBL approach. Not only does it help teachers to assess whether students can achieve the learning outcomes, but also a means to review instructional strategies. Dr Pamela Leung from the Chinese Department put this into practice by immediately reviewing her teaching with her Research Assistant after each lesson and produced 13 reflection reports during her OBL try-out. She agreed that reflection could help collating her thinking systematically, clarifying problems and improving teaching and learning at the same time.

The Most Difficult Aspect in OBL Approach

To many teachers, OBL approach has once been a challenge. When attempting the OBL approach, the most difficult aspect was to design the expected learning outcomes in the first place to balance the needs of the stakeholders. Dr Wendy Lam from the English Department pointed out that the expected learning outcomes should be clear and understandable to students. To design the course intended learning outcomes from the perspective of students, she discussed with her students to establish a consensus on the expected learning outcomes. To Dr Lee How Chung from the Chinese Department, the most difficult aspect was to deal with those unexpected but meaningful learning outcomes. As these learning outcomes were 'unexpected', there would not be related assessment tasks. He, therefore, had to spend some time in class to give feedback to these meaningful and relevant issues.

Another difficulty came from designing assessment tasks. In Dr Cheung Sau Hung's case, the two assessment tasks he designed could not cater for the diverse needs of his students. As a result, he had to make revisions by adding one more assessment task to the originals, with 3 different sets of assessment rubrics. This resulted in the problems of validity and reliability of the different assessment tasks in the same course. Dr Margaret Hui, the consultant of the Chinese Department OBL project, responded that the design of assessment tasks needs to be fair, reliable and diversified, providing students with choices relevant to their respective backgrounds. Also, teachers need to pay attention to the relationships of the OBL elements when designing the OBL course outlines and maintain flexibility at the same time, so that teaching and learning activities and assessment tasks could align with the Course Intended Learning Outcome; while the CILOs should align with the Programme Learning Outcomes, providing students with varieties of learning experiences.

In order to provide varieties of learning experiences on one hand, and multiple assessment tasks on the other, Dr Wong Leung Wo from the Chinese Department had

to enhance the capacity of his teaching and learning activities making use of one teaching issue to integrate the students' generic skills. This 'killing several birds with one stone' method could help resolving the issue of teaching time limitation.

The OBL Implementation and Its Progress in Two Departments

With the establishment of their respective OBL project teams in August 2008, both departments actively promoted the OBL approach in teaching. Her efforts include inviting overseas OBL consultants to conduct OBL seminars and to advise on the drafting of Programme Learning Outcomes and Course Intended Learning Outcomes, finalizing the Programme Outcomes of the BEd (EL) (CL) & (P) programmes and mapping those Programme Outcomes to the Institute's 4Cs Learning Framework and Generic Outcomes.

The two departments have been gaining valuable OBL experiences from the OBL pilot courses since September 2009, and started transforming the traditional course outlines to OBL format. OBL course outline templates were provided to all colleagues; in which the CILOS (mapping with the Programme Outcomes) were designed based on the teaching objectives of the previous course outlines and the course coordinators reviewed the appropriateness of the CILOs and designed relevant teaching and learning activities and assessment tasks so that students could effectively achieve the CILOs.

The Chinese Department OBL team is now inviting colleagues who have not tried out OBL to set up individual plans on adopting OBL approach in teaching before June 2012. As for the English Department, 15 colleagues are undergoing the revision of their course outlines for the second semester 2010/11. Their OBL consultant will visit the Institute in April next year to support their OBL implementation by reviewing all OBL course outlines. The BEd (EL) programme is under review this year and their newly revised OBL course outlines will be submitted for review.

Conclusion

The OBL Sharing Seminar was held on the day of Mid-autumn Festival, and frank discussions were exchanged in a relaxed and festive atmosphere. Participants had given positive feedback to the seminar, and stated that the seminar helped them to better understand the teaching mode, difficulties and challenges of the OBL approach. Moreover, they also gained a good understanding of the OBL implementation and progress made in the two departments. Individual participants also pointed out that experience sharing was valuable in enhancing the quality of

teaching, and that the seminar achieved this aim by providing a chance for colleagues to share their OBL experiences and insights across departments to enhance their teaching skills. The OBL experience in the Faculty of Languages was also a great asset to the promotion of OBL implementation in the whole Institute.

With the support from the colleagues, FLAN shall continue to organize more OBL related sharing seminars to promote exchange among colleagues, and to enhance quality of teaching and learning.