

SELF-EVALUATION AND COURSE EVALUATION-A CONTINUATION OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR TEACHERS

Igballe Miftari-Fetishi, PhD
ORCID 0000-0003-0008-4550
International Balkan University
i.miftari@ibu.edu.mk
Skopje, North Macedonia

ABSTRACT

This paper introduces and examines the issue of evaluation along a different perspective. It argues that feedback regarding the teaching, the learning and the materials used is crucial for the ongoing professional development of teachers. It also presents different points of view regarding evaluation such as ones' cultural awareness, level of acceptance, the issue of judging etc. The fact that others involved in the process are the ones that as so, have a say in what we do, is usually a fact that is not so easily accepted by teachers. It is either not part of the culture, part of our awareness or even part of our daily challenge. However, the level of self-improvement relies on the whole process of evaluation. As so, this paper further elaborates the issue of self-improvement through self-evaluation and student involvement in the process through course evaluation. Participants in the case study are a total of 33 third year students, registered in the course of Program Development at IBU. The instruments used tend to make a balance among the elements of teaching and course evaluation and therefore consist of both elements i.e. the teacher and the students (as the observers) along the semester. Regarding *self-evaluation* (teaching), two instruments are used: a classroom management profile questionnaire and an observation checklist on the teaching elements (the teaching, material, presentation, feedback and discussions) and in terms of *course evaluation* an additional two instruments are used: student feedback (The Exit Ticket) and the students' overall exam scores and results for the course i.e. midterm, final, makeup and upgrade exam are taken into consideration. Overall discussion, limitations and future recommendations are also provided.

Keywords: *evaluation, professional development, feedback, observation, cultural awareness etc.*

INTRODUCTION

Teacher professional development through both praise and criticism: Are we culturally aware?

There are many issues that are accepted or denied based on ones' culture. Culture is a primary element which is important in many aspects including that of language, tradition, gestures, religion and so on. The fact that other peoples' opinions in the context of teaching are relevant for most societies does not mean that it is accepted in all. A major misconception is the thought "*I was taught about doing my job. I know how it is done*" because unfortunately, this is rarely the case. There is no one ingredient in teaching and there is no best teacher. There is a variety of teachers and a vast variety of the methodology they tend to use, be it effective or not. And usually, there is little or no space for evaluation or "judgment" of this choice. The cultural awareness regarding feedback is tied to the overall general perspective in the society, namely, some only accept praise and others deny criticism. Rarely, are both accepted. Where I come from, I struggled throughout studies and then struggled when obtaining my MA and PhD due to observation(s) that I had foreseen as part of the instruments in the study. Teachers did not want to accept my presence in their classes. End of story! They were not delighted by the fact that an outsider would come into class and observe an hour of instruction; for them, it was considered as a threat and they of course felt intimidated. At the end, who was I to observe them and take notes on them and their overall teaching methodology? Was I an expert? A person who was higher in degree than them or higher on the academic level of accomplishments? As a matter of fact, I was not. I was a student struggling to finish the research at the appointed time frame. I needed all the help and advice in the world and was not in the position to *judge* anyone... Now this is the misconception towards the whole process-the judging part. Who are we to judge? And who are the others to judge us? A first and foremost step in teacher professional development is realizing that both praise and criticism are for a cause, that is, for overall improvement. The two lead us towards different questions and of course towards deeper thought about what we in fact are doing and how. They provide us with the needed changes, and honestly, when the responses are true, our intuition tells us that it is indeed as so. Apart from the cultural perspective, another thing should be taken into regard- the issue of bias and dishonest responses from peers, students, evaluation committee and so on. The most frequent cases of dishonest responses come indeed from our students. On many occasions, I have asked them why and we have together elaborated the issue of dishonesty. Usually, this is a result of students having a bad impression of the teacher, having failed the exam and blaming the teacher and at times, even thinking that the teacher is not treating them on the same equal grounds with other classmates or colleagues. During such cases, of course, the evaluation responses would be more of criticism than praise and this would result in bad overall scores for the teachers, endangering them and their teaching careers. Therefore, as much as I insist that the cultural awareness plays a role in the evaluation and feedback, other elements such as dishonesty in responses or even students' knowledge regarding feedback might leave a bad impression on the reputation of teachers, this making it quite difficult for them to cooperate any further in the process of evaluation or observation or feedback. Nevertheless, in this paper I argue FOR professional development of teachers and along the way, introduce how this can be achieved without cause of frustration nor negative feelings (in regard to the teachers).

EVALUATION, SELF-EVALUATION AND COURSE EVALUATION

In the introduction above, I mention some issues regarding the term evaluation and also provide the reader with actual evidence and personal experience along the years of academic improvement and struggle. I assert that, although teacher professional development relies on the actual evaluation process, it also relies a whole lot on the support and overall awareness of the people involved in the process (i.e. peers, colleagues, students, administrative units, parents, the institution etc.) Namely, all involved in the process should know the importance and respond to it with the needed knowledge and preparation. As so, evaluation should be mentioned and presented at the very beginning of a course or curricula, with this, preparing both teachers and students and anyone else involved in the process of the *expectations* or *criteria*. There is a call for teachers to be supported in their need to adapt constantly; this is accomplished by developing new skills and knowledge, based on intelligent professional responsibility for students' learning including democratic knowledge and skills, strong equity, and genuine collaboration with multiple stakeholders (Cochran-Smith et al., 2017). How do we define evaluation and what does it actually consist of? The matter of fact is that *any* part of the teaching (the teacher, the curricula and program, materials) can be evaluated. Accordingly, Richards et al (1985) define evaluation as “the systematic gathering of information for purposes of making decisions”. (1985, p. 98) These decisions can be based on ones' teaching methodology (self-evaluation), the course and materials (course/materials evaluation) and overall evaluation of the set goals, objectives and criteria and whether or not they have actually been achieved (evaluation). Furthermore, Worthen and Sanders (1973) state that “evaluation is the determination of the worth of a thing. It includes the obtaining of information for use in judging the worth of a program, product, procedure, or object...” (1973, p. 19) and “Evaluation is the systematic collection and analysis of all relevant information necessary to promote the improvement of a curriculum and assess its effectiveness within the context of the particular institutions involved.” (Brown 1989a, p. 223) In Fig. 1 below, evaluation is presented alongside the other elements of teaching and the process. As you may notice, all are in fact evaluated, starting from needs analysis, to setting the objectives, testing and results, materials used and of course the teaching. Evaluation as a process therefore provides the people involved with results on both the process and the product. Accordingly, it is usually thought of as involving two types: ongoing or formative evaluation and final or summative evaluation. (Thornbury, 2017, p. 96)

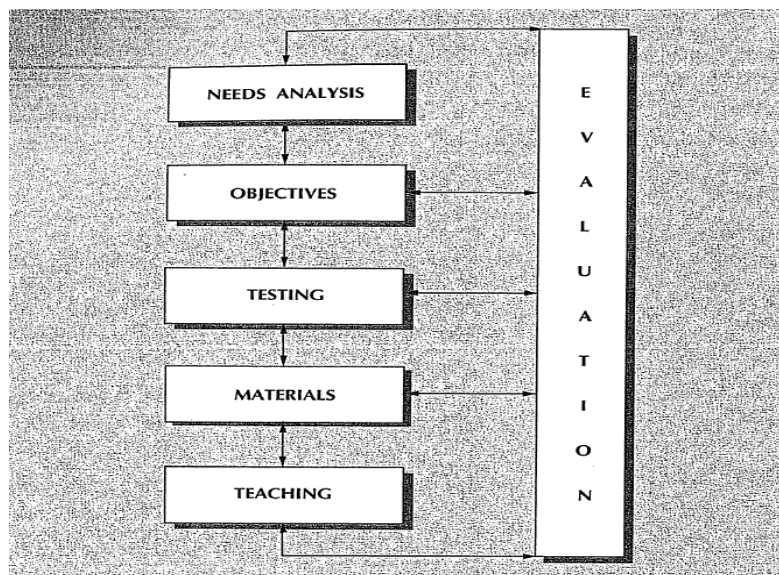


Fig.1. Systematic Approach to designing and maintaining Language curriculum (adapted from Brown 1989a, as cited by Brown 1995 in *The Elements of language curriculum*, pg. 20)

In addition, Thornbury (2017) states: “Evaluation procedures involve the use of questionnaires and interviews (of students, teachers and administrators, for example), the observation of classes and the holdings of meetings or focus groups... Teachers, too, evaluate their classes in many informal ways.” (2017, pp. 96-97)

Stake (1967) provides the following basic elements to process evaluation:

1. Begin with a rationale.
2. Fix on descriptive operations (intents and observations).
3. End with judgmental operations (standards and judgments) at three different levels: antecedents (prior conditions), transactions (interactions between participants), and outcomes (as in traditional goals but also broader in the sense of transfer of learning to real life. (Stake, R.E. (1967). *The countenance of educational evaluation. Teachers college record*, 68(7), 523-540.)

In the process of course evaluation and self-evaluation, as mentioned previously, a balance of items was made, namely, regarding self-evaluation (teaching): a classroom management profile questionnaire (see appendix) and an observation checklist on the teaching elements (the teaching, material, presentation, feedback and discussions) and in terms of course evaluation: student feedback (The Exit ticket) and the students’ overall exam scores and results.

METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURE

At the beginning of the course, a needs analysis was distributed among the students. Please note that two different programs of Faculty of Education take this course i.e. ELT and PCG (Psychological counseling and guidance). In order for the course to be successful for both programs, establishing a list of priorities is very important. Some basic questions related to this begin with that of “Why am I taking this course?” to “What do I need from it?” Accordingly, the gathered responses helped me define the course content and the materials, which I assumed would be suitable for the students. Along the course, not only did we practice lesson planning and defining aims and objectives, but students were also assigned assignments, beginning from short lesson plans to longer, more extended plans. The same methodology was implemented on both groups. During the next phase, I implemented the following evaluation of the elements of teaching (see table 1). In this section, I require a general assumption regarding the four elements. As you may notice, no comments are made on the teaching, asserting that it is well-done and effective. Regarding the materials, 25 students argue that it is suitable to their level, while 8 comment that they find it a bit difficult and beyond their level of comprehension. The overall group of students consists of three main nationalities, namely Albanian, Macedonian and Turkish, whereas the instructional language of the university is English. The main issues of difficulty follow as a result of their L1, namely, Turkish students usually struggle more with the instructional language (based upon the cultural over generalization of foreign language(s) and acquisition). The materials used i.e. the primary source in this case is “*The elements of language curriculum: A systematic approach to program development*” by Brown, J. D. (1995), which builds up the blocks of planning and thinking from the basis, however, in terms of terminology, might of course be difficult for some learners to understand (note here even students from PCG who are not ELT oriented). However, the overall results provide me with feedback on using a secondary source which is more comprehensible for the English struggling students.

Related to the presentations, the students comment that they are interesting, up to the point and comprehensible. The feedback section however asserts that more feedback should be provided and that at times, students were not aware that I was monitoring them due to lack of feedback. This might be the case due to the variety in the group and of course, due to the providing of overall feedback and not individual. The most feedback that students receive is normally their final grades at the end of the term, which might not be sufficient for them to reflect on their knowledge and overall success. This is a constraint and challenge that teachers encounter every single day.

	Overall impression	Needs improvement
The teaching	33- very good instruction, clear and to the point	/
The material	25-is suitable to our level	8-is a bit difficult to understand.
The presentations	28-are very helpful and interesting	5-need clarification
Feedback and discussions	16- the feedback and discussions in class have helped us improve in many ways.	17- sometimes feedback was not noticed. We believe that more feedback should be provided in the near future.

Table 1. Evaluation of the elements of teaching

Phase two consists of a classroom management profile (see table 2 in APPENDIX). It consists of 6 major components of classroom management and provides a detailed classification of the elements under each component. Regarding the first component, namely, that of grouping and seating, as you may notice, the students were satisfied with the way I dealt with the procedure of seating, how I used my authority in the class and how in very short time, all was managed without any issues. Regarding sequencing and setting up the activities, students replied that the whole procedure of events took place as should, instructions were clear and to the point and that the activities made sense in the order that they were given. One thing that was mentioned was that, on the aspect of monitoring, I should have monitored more frequently due to some groups feeling as if the other groups had an advantage over them i.e. that I paid more attention to some versus others, which is of course not true, however, for struggling students it might seem as if the teacher is focusing more on the higher leveled group of learners than on the lower leveled ones. As a matter of fact, the opposite should be implemented, however, it has been pointed out by teachers on many events that at times of teacher despair, it is usually the case where the teacher actually does focus more on the “good students” in order to keep the lesson at a certain flow and effectiveness. This comment results as a necessity of the teachers to help their own self-esteem and self-motivation at times of struggle. For me, this has not been the issue with this group of learners,’ however, it will be taken into consideration in the near future. As for the authority component, students are usually asserting that I am in fact, too authoritative, that I do not become friends with them and that I hold a strict reputation on this regard. I tend to believe that many factors partake in this part, namely, the age gap between me and my students, my experience (at the beginning of my career, I was demonstrator assistant appointed to my graduate friends during university). Therefore, at this point, I needed their support more than ever. When I come to think of that experience today, my closeness to my first generations of students indeed makes sense. As much as I wish to forget those days, my motivation grew with the support of my students, because at this phase, an un-experienced teacher struggles very much with the issue of *acceptance*. They are a group and you are alone, standing there in front of them. At some point, you are expecting tomatoes to be thrown at you... Afterwards and with time, you tend to change the authority part. You modify it because you now *can-* you have had many failures and success along the way and you specifically know what ingredient to give to each *different group*. You now teach them the issue of flexibility and make students aware of the fact that, if you lower your guard too much, it might be taken for granted and if you keep it too high, it may result in negative feelings about you and the course you are teaching. A balance is more than needed and keeping a balance is something that I am yet new at (after 17 years of teaching experience).

The issue of critical moments in teaching sums up anything and everything that might take part in class and during lectures. It deals with how we begin the lesson to unforeseen interruptions that might occur. It is a minute by minute decision on what to do and how to react. Students claimed that they were actually very satisfied. In this part they concluded that having the needed authority in the class helps prevent issues and keeping a nice flow.

Regarding the tools and techniques, two comments caught my interest. The first one regarded the use of gestures, and I am aware that I over use gestures. The second one regarded my language use complexity. As a native speaker of the language, yes, at times, I might be forgetting that my learners are still at the stage of learning a foreign language. In this regard, I believe that lowering my level at times and when needed, might help struggling learners comprehend the lesson more. The last item, working with people is an item I really tend to focus on. I want for my learners to feel calm and relieved and show empathy and care for them since day one. At cases when I might feel as if a certain student might be taking advantage of this, I set borders and limits. Other than this, I believe that my classroom or amphitheater is a warm and safe place for my students to be in. The comments asserted the same, which was a sigh of relief for me.

Phase 3: The Exit Ticket

During this part, an overall impression is requested regarding the course itself, what students have learned and of course, if anything needs improvement. The Exit ticket was similarly done anonymously and was requested as exit permission for students at the end of the semester. The most frequent responses regarding the first question were linked to the overall interaction in the class, namely, students were satisfied with the tasks, the group work and the vitality of the class. They believed that the tasks and the topics had really helped them understand the role that lesson planning had both for ELT future teachers and also PCG counselors. They also agreed that they liked the atmosphere in the class and that they felt safe and independent. They enjoyed being able to express themselves and also agreed that they did not feel any stress or anxiety along the way. Regarding the second question, a random number of students agreed that they now knew the difference between aims and objectives and that they had learned many aspects of time management and class management. They also asserted that they now felt more confident when thinking about a certain topic and planning for it. Another issue that was mentioned was tied to the overall accomplishment of the objectives, namely, what the learners would actually achieve by the end of the lesson or even by the end of the course i.e. long term goals versus the short term goals. Apart from this, as an Entrance ticket prior to their final exam, students were requested to plan an extended lesson, with all of the most important elements of a plan, namely from aims and objectives, to materials and assignments, to points and estimation, academic dishonesty and of course a part was dedicated to inclusive education, namely, the involvement of all learners in the plan, including students with special needs. Since this group of students does a part of their Internship at a special education center, this part was intended specifically for their level of awareness on how to treat such cases and what their conditions would be as future teachers. The last question, namely the third one, provides me with further implications on what else to add and what else to improve. The students' responses namely implied that nothing more was needed apart from adding more practice.

- | |
|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What I like about this course? 2. What I have learned? 3. What needs improvement? |
|---|

Table 2. The Exit Ticket

Phase 4: Overall scores and results i.e. the effectiveness of the course

The last phase consisted of the total scores and results of the students, namely, this served as a balance between theory and practice i.e. what they said versus the actual truth. Most cases of student evaluation, as previously mentioned, might result in dishonest feedback and responses. Students are likely to believe that even though anonymous, teachers can identify their handwriting or can guess who might have written something either real or fiction concerning the evaluation of the course, or even the teaching. This does not allow for them to write what and how they feel about an issue. They might in fact, be struggling with something and do not have the courage to say so, or might need help with something and not ask for it. In such cases, they might even fail the course. The overgeneralization of the effectiveness of the course are the scores at the end i.e. how many actually passed the course and what is the total point average. This is usually monitored since the beginning i.e. teachers tend to track student progress along the course, either through assignments, their interaction during the course, their involvement and of course, the percentage of overall scores midterm, final, makeup exam (if any). Below, in table 4 are provided the total average points for midterm, final and makeup exam session. Please note that all students are eligible for taking the midterm, only students with 72% attendance are allowed for Final exam and make up exam session is for students who for any reason could not enter the final (be it personal reasons etc.) and those that have a total of below 10 credit points altogether. The institutional policy allows also for Upgrade exam, for students who are not satisfied with their final grades. In such cases, only activity points and raw upgrade exam points are calculated (i.e. the midterm points do not count anymore and knowledge on the whole material of the course along the semester is required). One Incoming ERASMUS student applied for UPGRADE exam during this semester, claiming that she could have done better in the midterm and that those results in fact provided her with the final grade of 7/D. An upgrade exam session was of course maintained, resulting in one grade higher of overall results (8/C) for the student. She proved that she indeed could have done better and that a second chance was needed for her to prove her knowledge. The other students of the group are ELT and PCG, with an additional repeaters group of ELT. This group of students' (i.e. the repeaters) are taking the course once again, due to failing it in the previous year. The general description and information regarding the group of students serves as an indicator of the overall success and the different levels that the group actually consists of. In such groups, teachers are usually in a disproportion. It is not easy to cope with such a variety in one group (students taking the course for the first time, repeaters and incoming students of ELT plus a group of PCG who normally have other needs and a lower level of English). This combination of students differs in needs, levels, interests and experience. The same is with the overall impression on the teaching and the material: some might like the course and be successful and others might not like it as much. Again, this is tied to the actual relevance that the course has for the individual student and the overall previous knowledge that the student has prior to taking the course.

The following table (table 4) provides the reader with the actual grade results and with a description of each stage as it occurs. As you may notice, the results are fairly good. The final grades provide a balance among good grades and lower ones and the total number of students who will retake the course (7) is a potentially honest result. I do not believe that the scores actually dictate the teaching effectiveness of the teacher however, it is a basis of the overall accomplishment. At some point in our education, we are taught that the policy of grading and reflecting on those grades makes the difference between teachers. There are teachers who believe that the stricter they are and the more failures they have, their reputation will become better, hence, there are teachers like me who believe the opposite i.e. the better the overall scores, the more professional you are and the better your teaching instruction has become. I do not believe that ALL students should pass the course, nor do I believe that ALL should fail. There are certain criteria that defines our worth and greatness. It contains our teaching, the materials, the grading, our teacher-student rapport etc. Accordingly, the whole procedure gives us the most important elements of evaluation and feedback.

EXAMS	ELT (NP) 22 students in total	ELT (R) 4 students in total	PCG 5 students in total	Incoming ERASMUS 2 students in total	Total results clarification
Midterm	14 students either passed or were close to a passing grade 8 resulted in lower points	3 passed/1 un-entered	2 close to passing, 3 lower points.	1 PCG (close to passing)	The midterm consists of 4-5 chapters and is usually a form of measurement for half semester material. The midterm results are added to the activity points i.e. near passing is half of 100, namely 40-50 points in overall score.
FINAL	2 E's, 2 D's, five C's, 4 B's, 4 A's and 5 F's. (i.e. 5 students failed the Final)	2 passed/2 un-entered	4 passed/1 failed 2 E's 1 B 1 A		The final refers to the after-midterm material and confirms the whole percentage and final mark for the course.
Makeup	2 entered and failed. A total of 5 will retake the course.	1 passed/			The makeup is taken by students who could not make it to the final or did not pass the final.
UPGRADE	/	/		ELT (NP) 1 Upgrade exam Final grade C	The UPGRADE is taken by students who believe they could gain an overall better score. It includes only activity points and the whole material of the semester.
		3 passed/1 failed the course and will retake it the next semester.			A total of 7 students will retake the course in the upcoming year. 26 have successfully passed the course.

Table 3. Overall Test/Exam results

CONCLUDING REMARKS

It is indeed, very difficult to conclude on an issue, which is so important and yet so broad. Evaluation in itself is a whole process of numbers, of comments, of results. It is the very beginning of our teaching experience linked together with our personal theory and methodology, tied to our assessment and forms of assessment. During each phase, evaluation proves to be a very complicated issue but one that must, as so, exist on the different parameters of assessment and professional development. The overall scores and comments serve as indicators of what has been, the level of achievement and what should yet be done (and improved). The whole process serves as a means of measurement between theory and practice and therefore, much effort should be put into the realization of the process. I mention at the very beginning that this issue reflects very much on the level of acceptance on the cultural awareness. It depends a whole lot on the actual support that teachers receive, either from their students, their peers or colleagues etc. As a matter of fact, the whole issue is better managed and results are better when all involved in the process know of the importance of evaluation, observation and

feedback and as so, provide teachers with exact, accurate results and comments. Throughout the process, I have learned that the changes must begin within ourselves, and therefore, provide the reader with different forms of measurement, that can track progress along the semester or academic year. It is up to the teacher to implement it in different forms for the overall improvement and strategic development of teachers.

LIMITATIONS and FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

Although this paper provides different insights and forms of measurement implemented in the classroom, with overall scores and results at the end of the term, limitations are nevertheless inevitable. Some limitations might be in the number of participants, in the methodology and instruments used and in the conclusions provided. Another limitation might of course be in the actual responses of the students, namely in the honesty/dishonesty of responses or even on the level of comprehension of the requested items. However, the main aim of this paper is to present different forms of evaluation that as so, might be conducted by teachers themselves. The overall comments, suggestions and results serve as pinpointing factors of what needs change and what needs improvement along the way. Indeed, it is better to work on self-improvement while there is still time and resources, then to do something your whole life, thinking that you have made a change in someone's life and never for once, being the change to yourself when proven wrong. I strongly emphasize and believe that the need for teacher professional development is never ending. Hence, self-improvement is the core to overall success in the lifelong process of teaching and learning.

REFERENCES

- Brown, J.D. 1995. *The Elements of language curriculum*. Newbury House Teacher development. Heinle and Heinle Publishers.
- Brown, J.D. (1989a). *Language program evaluation: A synthesis of existing possibilities*. In K. Johnson (Ed), *The second language curriculum*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cochran-Smith, M., Baker, M., et al (2017). *The accountability era in US teacher education: Looking back, looking forward*. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 40(5), 572-588.
- Richards, J. C., Platt, J. & Weber, H. (1985). *Longman dictionary of applied linguistics*. London: Longman.
- Stake, R.E. 1967. *The countenance of educational evaluation*. *Teachers college record*, 68(7), 523-540.
- Thornbury, S. 2017. *The New A-Z of ELT. A dictionary of terms and concepts*. Macmillan books for teachers' .
- Worthen, B. R., & Sanders, J.R. (1973). *Educational evaluation: Theory and practice*. Worthington, OH: Charles A. Jones.

APPENDIX

How were the following items managed? Please mark with an X: Good/Needs improvement/Not noticed and add comments (if any)	Good	Needs improvement	Not noticed	Comments
Grouping and seating Forming groupings Arranging and rearranging seating Deciding where you will stand or sit Reforming class as a whole group after activities				
Activities Sequencing activities Setting up activities Giving instructions Monitoring activities Timing activities and the lesson as a whole Bringing activities to an end				
Authority Gathering and holding attention Deciding who does what Establishing or relinquishing authority as appropriate Getting someone to do something				
Critical moments Starting the lesson Dealing with unexpected problems Maintaining appropriate discipline Finishing the lesson				
Tools and techniques Using the board and other classroom equipment or aids Using gestures to help clarify of instructions and explanations Speaking clearly at an appropriate volume and speed Use of silence Grading complexity of language Grading quantity of language				
Working with people Spreading your attention evenly and appropriately Using intuition to gauge what students are feeling Eliciting honest feedback from students Really listening to students				

Table 2. Classroom management profile (adopted from *Learning Teaching*, Scrivener, J. 2005, pp. 79-80)