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Assessment Criteria for Second Language Microteaching Lessons

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***ABSTRACT*:** Microteaching, a technique used to help pre-service teachersprepare for real-world classroom settings and situations (one that enables them to learn about, develop, and improve their overall teaching skills in a cooperative and collaborative manner), is an integral part of teacher training programs around the world. It was invented by Dwight W. Allen in 1963 at Stanford University, and continues to be an effective avenue for improving student outcomes to this day. In its original form, pre-service teachers were asked to prepare a short-lesson (approximately 20 minutes) for a small group of learners (who could have been their classmates), which was recorded on video. Afterward, the pre-service teacher, learners, and master teacher viewed the recording together and commented on what they observed. While microteaching can be as short as five minutes, wherein asingle activity (or even part of one) is taught, this paper will focus on abbreviated lessons (much like microteaching's roots) and, specifically, how to assess or evaluate them, which involves four suggested categories and twenty criteria.
Keywords:*microteaching, assessment, lesson planning, observation, feedback, self-reflection*

I. MICROTEACHING: LESSONS

Microteaching is an effective technique and collective learning experience, originally developed by Dwight W. Allen in 1963 at Stanford University [1]. It helps provide a link between the academic courses that students have studied in ateacher-teaching program and the real world of language-learning classrooms [2]. For complete lessons (versus activities or parts of them), this skill-building approach that helpsstudentsbetter understand the two-way process of teaching and learning can involve a briefing by a teacher on how and what to do (to include checklists, previously recorded demonstrations, and/or a discussion), planning and teaching a short (e.g. 20 minute) simulated, shortenedlesson to classmates, and is followed by feedback from the teacher and, possibly, student or peer observers [3]. This sequence of brief, plan, teach, and feedbackusually requires self-reflection via video [4], which involves examining or analyzing what students did well (the most successful aspects; what they would do the same way again) and what they need to work on or improve (the least successful aspects and challenges; what they would do differently next time).While video self-observation is certainly challenging in several regards, it can help raise awareness and pinpoint strengths and weakness, and, ultimately, hopefully, enhance competencies and pedagogical skills, and make significant contributions to self-confidence, attitudes, beliefs, and professional development [5], as well as strong connections between theory and practice.

As effective as microteaching can be, it's important to note that planning a lesson and teaching it, evenin an abbreviated manner, are two very different things. In fact, teaching is much more than enacting a lesson plan as during the process of teaching many individual (interactive) decisions have to be made that shape the nature and progress of it, and not all of these can be planned for in advance. In other words, there are several criteria that teachers need in order to successfully and fully assess student demonstrations. On the example evaluation form that I use below, these are grouped together under the following categories: *teaching methodology*, *classroom*, *teaching technique*, *teacher's attitude*, and *proficiency of classroom and general English*. In fact, there are five criteria per category (twenty in total) that are rated on 2 to 5 scale (i.e. 2 = poor, 3 = average, 4 = good, 5 = excellent), with 100 being a perfect score.

	Criteria	poor (2)	average (3)	good (4)	excellent (5)	Score
Appropriacy of teaching methodology	Context (age and level of students)					0
	Lesson plan (structure and execution)					0
	Activities (sequence and variety)					0
	Student learning objective (clarity and achievement)					0
	Assessment (opportunities and effectiveness)					0
Efficiency of classroom teaching technique	Classroom management (organize, facilitate, guide, and monitor; pacing and use of time; PPT and WB; student errors amd problems)					0
	Instructions (model/show/demonstrate > CCQs > materials > task vs. tell)					0
	Materials (quantity, quality, and usage)					0
	Participation (focus, attention, interest, motivation, and STT vs. TTT)					0
	Learning styles (visual, auditory, kinesthetic, tactile) and multiple intelligences (spatial, musical, kinesthetic, linguistic, logical, interpersonal, intrapersonal)					0
Attractiveness of teacher's attitude	Rapport (comfortable environment for learning)					0
	Personality (pleasant, engaging, and joyful)					0
	Voice (loud and clear)					0
	Poise (confidence and control)					0
	Support (praise and encouragement)					0
Proficiency of classroom and general English	Accuracy (lexis, grammar, and pronunciation)					0
	Fluency (speed of delivery)					0
	Use (easy to understand, comprehend, and follow)					0
	Authenticity (real world, everyday language and communication)					0
	Body language (gestures and eye contact)					0

Courtesy of Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, Graduate School of Education and TESOL Professional Education Center

II. TEACHING METHODOLOGY

One important area for evaluation is teaching methodology. It is comprised of: *context* (age and level of target students), *lesson planning* (structure and execution), *activities* (variety and sequence), *student learning objective* (clarity and achievement), and *assessment* (opportunities and effectiveness).

First of all, as a simulation of a real classroom environment, context can be challenging for traineesbecause they are often teaching their classmates – not the target students as stated on their lesson plan. But this is a very important issue, especially in terms of design, pacing, lexis, and overall interaction. In other words, the age and level of the target students must match with all of these. Common contextual issues include a lesson that is either too easy or over challenging,moving at a pace that is either too slow or fast, using language that might not be appropriate or suitable, and/or an inability to envision or pretend for practice teaching purposes. In terms of teacher observations, any or all of these can be problematic and negatively affect other criteria on the evaluation form. For this reason, it is absolutely vital to stress the importance of context ahead of the demonstration in an effort to help ensure that everything is properly aligned beforehand and executed well later.

Next, lesson planning is obviously a critical part of the process, particularly as microteaching largely boils down to its structure and partial execution.Prior to microteaching demonstrations, teachers should (in this order) provide model lessons with explicit analysis, have students design and develop their own, and then provide detailed feedback about what was done well and what could be improved according to the framework.

Some of the most common three-stage lesson frameworks used for microteaching are: PPP, PDP, TBL, and TTT. Two lesser known examples are: EIFand ARM. When creating a lesson plan template, there is overview information that could possibly be common to all six of these: *title* (of the lesson), *context* (level and age of students), *time* (approximation), *language focus* (target language and specific language skills students will learn), *aim* (student learning objective), *materials* (e.g. handouts, PPTs, etc.), *assessment* (to check understanding), *students' background knowledge and abilities* (what they know and are capable of doing prior to the lesson), and *challenges and solutions* (parts of the lesson that will likely be the most difficult and support to address these in advance) [6,7,8]. Additionally, all of the frameworks have three stages, and generally follow Gagnés nine events of instruction:

1. *Gain attention of students* (create interest and ensure that students are ready to learn and participate)
2. *Inform students of the objective* (state what students will learn and be able to do by the end of the lesson)
3. *Stimulate recall of prior learning* (relate new information to what students already know)
4. *Present the content* (clearly and concisely model instructions)
5. *Provide learning guidance* (prepare any necessary scaffolding)
6. *Elicit performance* (help students process and practice)
7. *Provide feedback* (give immediate feedback of students' performance to help facilitate learning)
8. *Assess performance* (check if the learning outcomes have been achieved)
9. *Enhance retention* (help students internalize new knowledge) [9]

PPP, or Presentation >Practice >Production, is an oft criticized deductive framework that has been around since the mid-1970s – first appearing in Donn Byrne's "Teaching Oral English." Research over the years has shown that it might not be the best way to teach or learn a language, but it's easy for new teachers to learn and plan for, is fairly flexible, allows for a fair amount of variation, has a logical progression, and works in a wide variety of contexts. To illustrate, in the presentation stage (where the teacher, according to Byrne, is an informant), there is a quick lead-in followed by an explicit presentation of the target language (to include focusing on form, meaning, and use). This is followed by the practice stage (where the teacher is a conductor), which gets the students to use the target language in a controlled way (e.g. split sentences, gap fill exercises, substitution drills, sentence transformations, scrambled sentences, etc.). After three or four of these, the lesson progresses to the production stage (where the teacher is a guide), which gives students two or three opportunities to use the language in a more open, freer way – that is, for themselves, even if mistakes happen (e.g. discussion, interview, role-play, problem-solving, game, etc.) [10].

PDP, or Pre >During >Post, is a terrific framework for receptive skills (i.e. listening and reading). Like PPP, its simplicity is the key to student understanding and implementation. The "Pre" stage is typically comprised of three to four tasks (e.g. warm-up questions, brainstorming, predicting, visuals, etc.) that help establish rapport, create interest, activate background knowledge, and focus on key lexis– all of which support students as they prepare to encounter the text. The "During" stage is all about comprehension and task sequence (i.e. easy to difficult, general to specific, concrete to abstract, which simply means that there is a gradual increase in challenge with each subsequent task – main idea > details > deeper level of detail > comprehensive understanding or language focus). Some common tasks are comprehension questions, true/false statements, note-taking, and use of a graphic organizer. The "Post" stage helps students move beyond the text, to include doing activities that reinforce and extend on what was learned (e.g. lexis review), providing opportunities for students to interact with one another and personalize the content (e.g. discussion), springboarding to other language skills (e.g. writing), and giving students a chance to do something creative and fun in an effort to wrap up the lesson in a memorable, meaningful way (e.g. design a poster, present it to the class, and then vote on the best one) [11].

TBL, or Task-Based Learning, also has three stages: pre-task>task cycle>language focus. Obviously, the lesson is built around a task – that is, a goal-oriented activity with a clear purpose(e.g. solving a problem). In the pre-task stage, the teacher explores the topic with the class, highlights useful words and phrases, and helps learners understand task instructions and prepare. Following this, in the task cycle stage, students do the task (in pairs or small groups), summarize what they did, and then report their summary in turn to the class. In the third stage, language focus, the teacher draws attention to the target language, and then students practice with the clarified forms [12].

TTT, or Test >Teach >Test, isan approach to teaching in which learners first complete a task or activity without help from the teacher (i.e. the first 'test'). Then, based on observed problems, the teacher plans for and presents (or teaches) the target language. Finally, the learners do another task to practice the new language (i.e. the second 'test').This three-part structure enables teachers to identify the specific needs of their learners and effectively address these [13].

EIF, or Encounter > Internalize > Fluency, is an inductive framework that is useful for teaching (communicative) grammar and lexis. In the 'Encounter' stage, students demonstrate what they know or are able to do through two to four guided discovery tasks. At this point, the teacher is simply a facilitator or guide who assesses students' knowledge and abilities (i.e. there is no explicit teaching of the target language). As a transition towards the next stage, a final task is completed, at which time the teacher asks questions about the grammar or lexical item, and then clarifies understanding as necessary. From here, the 'Internalize' stage begins, in which students do three to four controlled to semi-controlled practice tasks. In the ‘Fluency’ stage, all target language support is removed, and students are given a chance to demonstrate whether or not they have acquired or mastered what has been taught via one or two more free practice tasks. While doing so, the teacher monitors, checks, and then provides final feedback [14].

ARM, or Activity Route Map,is an activity-based structure found in “Learning Teaching” by Jim Scrivener [12]. In the textbook, there are six steps, but I’ve reduced them to three: lead-in > set up and run the activity > close the activity, feedback, and post-activity. The purpose of the ‘lead-in’ is to create interest, activate background knowledge, and (if necessary) focus on key lexis. After one to three tasks towards these ends, students move on the second stage, which focuses on the main skill of the lesson, and the number of steps is dependent on this. For a speaking activity (e.g. role-play), there is preparation for and execution of it. Writing has several more as it adheres to the steps of the writing process (i.e. generating ideas to the final draft). Both listening and reading mirror the ‘during’ part of PDP. To wrap up, in the third stage, it’s important to bring the activity to a close, get feedback on work done in it, and end with a brief productive task that helps review the lesson in some capacity.

For observation purposes, all six of these frameworks shouldhave a clear-cut structure, to include coherent activity or task sequence and variety across the three stages. To ensure this, teachers need to consider both the partial lesson that is being demonstrated and the lesson as a whole that’s on the page in front of them. This involves checking if the student learning objective is not only clear, but also on the way to being achieved. As for assessment opportunities, these are built into a properly designed lesson at different points (e.g. checking student understanding in multiple ways during the second stage of PDP), but their effectivenessis sometimes hard to gauge based on microteaching time limitations.

III. CLASSROOM TEACHING TECHNIQUE

A second important area for evaluation is classroom teaching technique. It is comprised of: *classroom management* (i.e. the wide variety of skills and techniques that teachers use to keep students organized, orderly, focused, attentive, on task, and productive), *instructions* (which need to be simple, clear, and explicit), *materials* (quantity, quality, and usage), (active) *participation*, and *learning styles* (visual, auditory, kinesthetic, tactile).

Classroom management is clearly a huge area to consider, especially for short teaching demonstrations. But, it’s essential and has a significant impact on the entire process (much like the lesson plan). While teachers can’t consider everything (as it would be overwhelming, impossible, and unrealistic for this singular criteria), there are a wide range of possibilities. One of these is the classroom, to include layout, desk or seating arrangements, and use of the board and computer or other technological resources (if available). Then there is the trainee, specifically his or her positions and movement within the classroom, voice (volume, projection, and vocal variety), eye contact, and body language[16]. More broadly, the way he or she organizes (students and their interactions), facilitates, guides, and monitors throughout the lesson is an equally vital component.

Instructions alsoimpact every step of the lesson, so they need to be simple, clear, and explicit. Whenever possible, this is a recommended sequence: model the task (via the screen, whiteboard, paper, etc. and/or with a student or students)> ask comprehension check questions (which requires students to repeat all modeled instructions back to the teacher to ensure clarity)>hand out any materials (so attention is squarely on teacher versus what’s directly in front of them up to this point)> students complete it [17]. In other words, itboils down to showing versus telling. Much more often than not, trainees tend to quickly tell their classmates what to do and follow this with questions like “Got it?” “Clear?” “Understand?” or simply say “Okay, go!” It’s rare fortheir classmatesto ask for clarification at this point, even if they don’t understand. Instead, they tend to proceed with the task and either try to figure it out on their own or ask questions along the way when confused. To help avoid this throughout the lesson, and possibly carrying over to their (future) classrooms, teachers need to emphasize and reemphasize the instructional sequence at some point in class before microteaching begins, as well as when giving individual feedback after each lesson. Repetition and reinforcement definitely help with retention in this regard.

Although only used in a partial way, materials are absolutely vital as well. According to Tomlinson, materials (i.e. anything which is used by teachers or learners to help facilitate the learning of a language – e.g. PPTs, handouts, flashcards, pictures, videos, gameboards, etc.) should achieve impact, be perceived as relevant and useful, maximize learning potential, provide opportunities for outcome feedback, and help learners feel at ease, develop confidence, expose them to language in authentic use, and take their different learning stylesand affective attitudes into account [18,19].Despite the prevalence of materials design and development courses in teacher training programs (to include possible awareness of these principles, as well as skill development and improvement), some common issues tend to persist (which teachers need to be on the lookout for), to include handing all materials out at once (which compromises the instructional sequence as noted above), grammatical errors (on the page and/or PPTs/screen), poor layout and design, and unnecessary technical hindrances (that could easily be resolved by checking ahead of time).

Active student participation is yet another key factor to consider, as it has a big impact on focus, attention, interest, and motivation. To maximize this, trainees need to quickly establish rapport and create a welcoming, fun atmosphere for learning. Then, in the first stage of lesson, they should create interest and activate background knowledge. And, all the way through, trainees should effectively organize, guide, and facilitate to the best of their ability (to include breaking learning into small manageable pieces and avoiding excessive explanations), maximize opportunities for cooperative and collaborative pair and group work (before checking together as a class) and personalization (to enhance meaningful communication), and utilize authentic materials (in an effort to help connect the classroom to students' lives outside of it) [20]. Combined, these are generally a recipe for success.

Despite the fact that there is no evidence to support the idea that the matching of instructional methods to the supposed learning styles of individual students helps improve learning overall [21,22,23,24], learning styles must be considered in at least one crucial regard: presentation of materials. Simply put, not everyone learns in the same way, and students could benefit from different forms of instruction. In other words, it's not about pigeonholing, but rather about effective approaches to teaching (in unique contexts). Mixing up visual content (e.g. screen or page) with auditory input (e.g. video), kinesthetic methodology (i.e. TPR – Total Physical Response), and/or tactile engagement (e.g. scramble exercise) can be quite engaging. Again, this is specific to short teaching demonstrations versus (long term) courses of study (which current research focuses on).

IV. TEACHER'S ATTITUDE

A third important area for evaluation is teacher's attitude. This comprised of: *rapport* (friendly, harmonious relationships in the classroom that help create a comfortable environment for learning), *personality* (pleasant, engaging, and joyful), *voice* (loud and clear), *poise* (confident and in control), and *support* (praise and encouragement).

Establishing and maintaining rapport is undeniably paramount. It's an indefinable magic that is both tangible and real – one that certainly helps learning to happen and helps prevent any unnecessary obstacles. The keys are being respectful (non-judgmental), empathetic (be able to see things from another person's perspective), authentic (genuine), a good listener and interested (in what students have to say and their responses), and flexible(which necessitates building time and space for some unstructured talk versus cramming and rushing through a lesson, even if an abbreviated one), as well as avoiding sarcasm and anything that might be deemed inappropriate for whatever reason [25].

As for personality, trainees should make every effort to embrace and enjoy the microteaching experience. True, easier said than done given the potential for anxiety, but this can be managed by being well prepared and practicing as much as possible. Joy is contagious, infectious, and powerful, and should be harnessed throughout the lesson. This will result in the type of engagement both the trainee and his or her students crave, and greatly facilitates all that transpires in the classroom.

Voice projection and vocal variety (to include articulation, inflection, pace, and pausing) can help convey confidence, ensure clear understanding and attention, and achieve impact, as well as allows personality to show and shine. Conversely, speaking too softly can suggest uncertainty or timidity, which could undercut the strength of delivery throughout the demonstration.

Teaching with poise can be troublesome, especially for those trainees who don't have any classroom experience. Together with a joyful personality, trainees definitely have the potential to effectively battle their nerves. The keys are knowing their lesson and materials very well (to include, again, preparing as much as possible ahead of time), practicing positive visualization, arriving to the classroom early to ensure that the room is set up in the desired way and there are no technological impediments, channeling any jitters into positive energy(which involves focusing on the lesson – not themselves), being natural and passionate, keeping things in perspective, and thinking about thriving rather than simply surviving the experience [26].

Praise can and tends to be incredibly beneficial in the classroom, but it needs to be effective. While it can condition students to respond positively to tasks, encourage them to pay more attention to detail, and give them more incentives to try harder, praise needs to be perceived as sincere, earned, and truthful, specific (to a given task), non-directive, focused on process rather than ability, immediate, and unexpected [27]. If these occur in some form, trainees can easily see their classmates light up and express appreciation, which keeps things rolling along in a very positive way.

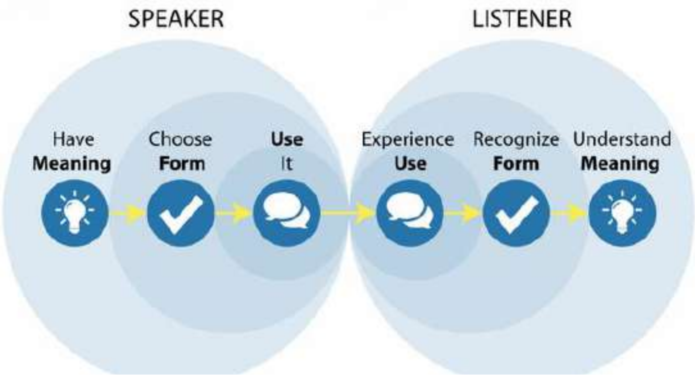
V. PROFICIENCY OF CLASSROOM AND GENERAL ENGLISH

The final important area for evaluation is proficiency of classroom and general English. This is comprised of: *accuracy* (lexis, grammar, and pronunciation),*fluency* (speed of delivery), *use* (easy to understand, comprehend, and follow), *authenticity* (real world, everyday language and communication), and *body language* (gestures and eye contact).

Accuracyrefers to how correct the trainees' use of the language system is – that is,lexis, grammar, and pronunciation [28]. This can have a significant impact on all aspects of the microteaching lesson (to include delivery, materials, and student output), especially in terms of both the required lesson framework and those at lower levels of proficiency. In terms of the latter, it's important for teachers to pay close attention to how all three of these intersect and how it potentially affects classroom results. For higher level students, it's a matter of careful attention to details. In both cases, trainees should thoroughly and repeatedly check all materials, particularly to ensure that student output reflects and carries out the student learning objective in a correct way. Delivery obviously necessitates practice, which there can never be enough of.

Fluency is the ability to use the spoken or written form of the language to communicate effectively and meaningfully. For language learners and microteaching students, the key is often times finding the right balance with accuracy. The two go hand in glove. For observations, teachers need to consider how the two work together to produce desirable and stated lesson aims.

Together with accuracy and fluency, proper use is vital. Simply stated, they are a triumvirate for successful, meaningful communication. In other words, it all starts with meaning (i.e. what we want to impart or convey to others). To help with this, the speaker chooses and then uses forms to represent this. The listener hears and tries to process the input, to include, hopefully, recognizing the forms. As the negotiation for meaning process continues in a tennis-like fashion, ideally, the meanings of these forms become clear based on the situation or context. In his book, "Real Grammar: Understand English. Clear and Simple," Carl Eldridge has a terrific visualization of this process:



As teacher observers, this is exactly what we want to see occur throughout the microteaching lesson.

Authentic materials provide real-life examples of language used in typical everyday situations, which can be used to add more interest for the learner, serve as a reminder that there are a lot of people who use the target language in their everyday lives, and provide information about the target culture and that culture's perspective on an issue or event. Moreover, the rich language found in authentic materials provides a source of input language learners need for acquisition [30].

Body language is the way we use our bodies to communicate without the use of words. It combines hand gestures, posture, facial expressions, and movements that tell others what's going on inside of our heads, which can happen consciously and unconsciously. For trainees, body language can help engage and connect with students, as well as allow them to be confident and relaxed during the lesson. Things that can help in this regard are smiling, avoiding slouching, assuming a power pose (to establish authority as a teacher), making good use of classroom space, using appropriate facial expressions, and maintaining eye contact [31]. All of these are important for observational purposes.

VI. CONCLUSION

As far back as 1969, microteaching has faced criticism as an outgrowth of behavioristic psychology. In other words, as Earl Seidman, once noted, "Micro-teaching trains teachers to perform in ways those who are running the program think are good." [32] Agreed. The goals are set by those in charge of the program, and then analyzed in terms of their component parts like those outlined above. Clearly, there are potential drawbacks of devising patterns that are intended to lead students to teach in desired and constructed ways, to include rewarding and reinforcing behaviors which approximate skills we are trying to teach and criticize those that deviate from these in some way. Through specified criteria, it's readily apparent what our expectations are, to include some degree of molding and shaping. But, decades on, the qualities of a good language teacher are much more evident, which helps us be more consistent with the aims of educational experiences, especially those our students' face or will face on a regular basis. While certainly not perfect, microteaching criteria can be easily be adjusted to reflect the realities of today's classrooms, no matter where in the world they may be. This is just one example; something I hope other educators can build off of and refine.

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