

NATIONAL CENTRE FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching Evaluation Through Student Dialogue (TESD)

The Teaching Evaluation through Student Dialogue (TESD) tool (a contemporary variation of Small Group Instructional Diagnosis) provides paper coordinators, tutors and other teaching staff with a structured alternative to traditional teaching evaluations (e.g., MOST). Robust evaluation of teaching needs to draw on evidence from a number of sources and there is strong support in the literature for the added insightfulness and enhanced trustworthiness of data collected through alternative tools that engage students more in the evaluation process.

Although there is no single approach to this form of teaching evaluation, a TESP is best conducted just before mid semester as this allows staff to make adjustments in their approach for the rest of the semester, as well as serving as an ideal opportunity to remind students of the classes' intended learning outcomes. TESP are conducted only at the request of the staff member; results are shared only with the staff member requesting the service. It is up to the individual staff member whether the results are then shared more widely.

The particular variant of the TESP used by Centre for Teaching and Learning takes the students through a structured process in approximately 30 minutes to an hour. At the beginning of the session, the teaching consultant advises the students that all comments are confidential, and that a written report will be prepared for their teacher. Furthermore, the students are informed that, by voluntarily choosing to employ the TESP service, their teacher has demonstrated a high level of commitment to the quality of their education.

Process

There are various ways of conducting a TESP; the Centres for Teaching and Learning favour the process outlined below (depending on the size of the class, the first stage may be skipped). One of the major critical components of the TESP process is consultation between the Teaching Consultant conducting the TESP and the staff member. Once a request has been made and a time arranged, the Teaching Consultant will check with the staff member what special issues or areas they would like to focus on; such as:

- Assessment
- Study Resources
- Use of Stream

Please note further that the questions can vary according to the needs of the staff and students. For example, 'what can I, as a student, do to improve the course', shifts the students' focus back to their own behaviours. They are thus encouraged to see the teaching/learning endeavour as a partnership.

It is recommended that the staff member announce the TESP to their class in advance, explaining that this is a voluntary process and that the staff member is giving up class time because s/he sincerely wants student feedback at this point. Students should be given the option of participating in the process.

Stage 1

In the first stage of the TESP, the students are asked, individually, to complete a sheet containing three questions:

1. What helps your learning in this class?
2. What hinders your learning in this class?
3. What changes would assist your learning in this class?

Students are urged to be as concrete as possible and to explain why specific aspects of the course are beneficial and/or should be changed.

Stage 2

During stage two, students are assigned to small groups (3-6 people). The group then states their most important items for each question, which are recorded. This allows everyone's opinions to be on view, and tends to prevent a dominator from controlling the group's agenda. After everyone has contributed, the group discusses the possibilities and arrives at a consensus on the most important components of the course. Throughout this, the Teaching Consultant listens to these small group discussions so as to be more able to explain the results to the staff member.

Stage 3

In the third stage, the class comes together again and each group reports its consensus items from each of the questions. Ideally the Teaching Consultant puts the students' comments on a conventional OHP or set of Powerpoint slides which help to clarify what is meant and if other groups have similar comments.

Staff Feedback

After the classroom visit is completed (there is nothing preventing this process occurring online in Stream for distance papers), the staff member will receive a written report from the campus Centre for Teaching and Learning, including summaries of student comments at the various levels (individual, small group and large group and scaling if requested/appropriate). The Teaching Consultant can then meet with the staff member to discuss and interpret the results (reminding the recipient that the comments are student perceptions). If appropriate, teaching strategies and/or other possible avenues for teaching enhancement can be discussed too.

Student Feedback

After the staff member has received the results and met with the Teaching Consultant, it is very beneficial to discuss the results with the class. The staff member can use this opportunity to place the student comments in the context of his/her goals for the course, as well as announcing any changes that may have resulted or that may not be possible/suitable due to curriculum/time constraints. The TESD technique has been shown in the literature to offer a number of benefits, many of which are not available in other structured forms of peer observation and formal teaching evaluation:

TESD is a process which helps to secure the most widely held students views of what they see as the most critical issues in a paper. This significantly decreases our very human tendency to obsess over one or two idiosyncratic comments. It also provides a much more manageable range of issues to think about. At the same time, if requested, the numerical scaling system can be especially helpful in revealing divisions and by showing the strength of feeling associated with each point. By holding a TESD, the staff member is indicating to the students that their views matter. This, of course, is true to some degree of all evaluations, but giving up a significant amount of class time and conducting the process at mid-semester demonstrates a great amount of commitment.

The student sense of being heard is heightened even more if, as stated earlier, the staff member uses the results as an opportunity for further discussion of the paper's teaching/learning goals. Research has indicated that students are often seen as more cooperative and willing to work harder after a TESD. Since students are more likely to see the TESD as a sincere effort to improve teaching and learning, the feedback they provide is often much more reflective and helpful than end-of-the semester evaluations. Furthermore, since only one of the TESD questions is focused on negatives, the results are also more balanced. Both the atmosphere and the structure of the TESD thus tend to promote a focus on key issues and constructive suggestions. The open conversation/consensus-building process helps rein-in individual students or small groups who are dissatisfied with some aspect of the class. These students often believe that everyone else shares their opinion. When they discover in small or large group conversation that this is not the case, they tend to modify their views and behaviours.

Please contact your campus Centre for Teaching and Learning if you wish to discuss/request the use of this tool to enhance the quality of your teaching.