

Main Project: Enhancing Teaching and Learning through Assessment
Sub-project: The Development of Assessment Criteria Using the Solo Taxonomy

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Introduction/Background

Since assessment tasks form an integral part of a subject which in turn contributes to the curriculum of a programme, the assessment tasks should be geared towards achieving the goals and objectives devoted to the particular subject and the specific programme to which they belong. The assessment criteria should be explicitly spelled out with reference to the course objectives and the assessment tasks. The SOLO taxonomy is a set of assessment criteria which serve this purpose and may be applicable to subjects across disciplines.

The SOLO taxonomy is a set of assessment criteria devised by Biggs and Collis (1982).

“SOLO, which stands for Structure of Observed Learning Outcome, provides a systematic way of describing how a learner’s performance grows in complexity when mastering many academic tasks. It can thus be used to define curriculum objectives, which describe where students *should* be operating, and for evaluating learning outcomes so that we can know at what level individual students actually *are* operating”
(Biggs 1999: 37)

Learners’ performance is assessed based on their development in terms of the complexity in understanding. The SOLO taxonomy describes a student's understanding of a subject through five stages: (1) prestructural, (2) unistructural, (3) multistructural, (4) relational, and (5) extended abstract. It has been adopted by a number of universities as its assessment policy because of its applicability to almost any subject area.

The use of the SOLO taxonomy in assessment, with its underlying principles summarized in the paragraph above will facilitate both the teachers and learners to be more aware of the coherence of the various components within the curriculum.

Aims and Objectives

1. To achieve a common practice, an agreed set of criteria for the Department of English;
2. To survey current assessment practices in the Department of English;
3. To apply the criterion-referenced assessment method: the SOLO (Structure of Observed Learning Outcome) taxonomy in enhancing effective teaching and learning.

Activities

1. Focus group sessions with students to discuss assessment in ENGL;

2. Focus group sessions with teachers to discuss implementation of SOLO;
3. Workshops and seminars introducing SOLO taxonomy as an assessment tool;
4. Implementation of SOLO in various subjects;
5. Workshops / seminars to share the experience in adapting the SOLO taxonomy;
6. To build up a resource kit for the use of SOLO in future.

Stages of Activities

1. Stage One: Review of existing assessment practices;
2. Stage Two: Develop action plans to devise assessment criteria consistent with the SOLO taxonomy;
3. Stage Three: Implementation;
4. Stage Four: Evaluation.

Schedule of Activities

Activities	Jul. 2003	Aug. 2003	Sept. 2003	Oct. 2003	Nov. 2003	Dec. 2003	Jan. 2004	Feb. 2004	Mar. 2004	Apr. 2004	May 2004	June 2004	July 2004	Aug 2004
1.Planning meetings of the project team														
2. Hiring of the Project Assistant														
3. Design questionnaires														
4. Planning focus group meetings														
5. Implementation of SOLO (first batch of subjects)														
6. Initial analysis of response														
7. Implementation of SOLO (second batch of subjects)														
8. Analysis of response in second semester														
9. A workshop/ seminar to share experience														
10. Writing up report & establish a set of guidelines														

Evaluation

1. Focus groups (teachers only, students only and teacher-student mixed) before and after the implementation
2. Questionnaire
3. Evaluation from members of other departments within the umbrella project.

Dissemination of Results

1. Guidebook for the development of assessment criteria based on the SOLO taxonomy;
2. Collection of sample assessment tasks with sample scripts of all grades;
3. Resource kit of the adoption of SOLO for use in ENGL;
4. Materials for ARC (the umbrella project).

References

- Biggs, John. 1999. *Teaching for quality learning at university: What the student does*. Buckingham: SRHE and Open University Press.
- Biggs, John and Kevin Collis. 1982. *Evaluating the Quality of Learning: the SOLO Taxonomy*. New York: Academic Press.

Appendix: Detailed Schedule of Activities

- July-August 2003
 - Planning meetings of the project team;
 - Hiring of the Project Assistant
- September 2003
 - Setting up the “Student Focus Group” and “Teacher Focus Group”;
 - Tentative schedule of the meetings of these two focus groups;
 - Review of assessment criteria of individual subjects which team members teach in Semester 1 of 2003/04 (the application of the SOLO taxonomy);
 - Design questionnaires (before and after) to survey the effect of different assessment practices;
 - First meeting of both focus groups;
 - Participants fill out the “before” questionnaire
- October-December 2003
 - Monthly meetings of the project team to discuss the progress of the application of the SOLO taxonomy as assessment criteria;
 - Second meeting of both focus groups during the semester break;
 - Participants fill out the “after” questionnaire
- December 2003-January 2004
 - Initial analysis of responses from questionnaires and feedback during focus group meetings;
 - Revision of assessment criteria of second batch of subjects which team members teach in Semester 2 of 2003/04
- January 2004
 - Third meeting of both focus groups—preparing for the second semester;
 - New participants fill out the “before” questionnaire
- February-May 2004
 - The implementation of the SOLO taxonomy in another batch of subjects;
 - Monthly meetings of team members to discuss the progress of the application of the SOLO taxonomy;
 - Fourth meeting of the two focus groups;
 - Participants fill out second “after” questionnaire for the Semester 2 subjects
- May-June 2004
 - A small workshop/seminar for the whole department to attend—team members talk about how the SOLO taxonomy is applied in the subjects that they teach and whether the new assessment criteria facilitate teaching and learning;
 - Students will be invited to talk about how they view the SOLO taxonomy
- July-August 2004
 - The team will write up a brief report and suggest ways to implement the SOLO taxonomy across subjects;
 - A set of guidelines will be developed for the department to follow;
 - The team will collect sample documents of course objectives, assessment tasks, sample scripts from students, etc. for all the subjects that have tried out the SOLO taxonomy