

To develop creative, articulate, respectful and resourceful young people
able to contribute positively to the global community

Instructional Rounds Handbook

Semester II: 2017

Professional Learning Communities Initiative

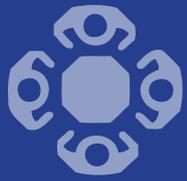


Name:

Task predicts performance.

If you can't see it in the Instruction core, it's not there.

Framework for Improving Student Outcomes. Excellence in Teaching and Learning Priority



Principal's Forward

Instructional Rounds and PLC's

When the Portland Secondary College Professional Learning Community PLC team set out to define what we wanted to achieve during Semester II 2017, we used an understanding by design approach. We had already identified that whatever the focus for the work of the PLC be during this first phase, that it should assist us to determine the optimum learning for teachers and then of course our students.

For a number of years, we have been observing trends with our Year 7 and 8 cohort data; with some marked differences between boys and girls, and also in the transition from Year 7 into Year 8.

Like many secondary schools, the focus on establishing the best possible transition for the Grade 6 students from our eight feeder primary schools into Year 7 has been a priority.

We have two open 'double rooms' in one wing where most Year 7 and 8 general classes are held. We staff them with a blend of experienced, and younger teachers delivering English, Maths and Humanities in a fairly typically structured ten-day timetable with two to three double 100-minute sessions, and a single 50-minute session, per subject, per cycle.

All other classes in this wing are conducted in traditional style classrooms where one teacher and up to twenty-five students work. Year 7 class sizes are often kept in the 'low twenties', and the Form Group Mentor teachers usually teach their class for one, maybe two subjects. Specialist subjects such as Design & Technologies, Health & Physical Education, Science, Performing Arts and Visual Arts are taught in specialist rooms; LOTE Indonesian has now been located in this wing but taught in single classrooms.

Portland Secondary College has a long running Peer Support Program where a volunteer group of up to twenty Year 9 students undertake mentoring training in Term 4 each year, all in readiness to mentor the new Year 7 cohort the following year. A Personal Development Camp is held for all of our Year 7 classes in the first weeks of Term 1 and the Year 10 Peer Mentors attend along with the core teachers. In looking at the data for Year 8, we have been grappling with how to ensure appropriate 'rites of passage' into that year level, and to maintain a similar approach with regards staffing.

Portland Secondary College was allocated \$2m in the 2016 May Budget for Capital Works. Through the Asset Management Planning Phase 1 stage, the wing where Year 7 and 8 classes are predominantly taught has been identified as no longer fit for purpose, that is, to enable pedagogical approaches to shift improvement in students' outcomes. As a consequence, this wing is to undergo a refurbishment.

This leads me back to the purpose of the focus for the PLC team's work in Semester II, 2017. With the unofficial motto for the Portland Secondary College's PLC team being 'Task Predicts Performance' we set about using the Instructional Rounds approach to a series of Year 7 and 8 classroom observations that would give us the baseline data to address the problem of practice and to answer the *Essential Question*:

'If you were a student in Year 7 or 8 at Portland Secondary College, and you did everything that was asked of you, what could you do?'



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Principal's Forward

Having committed to using the Instructional Rounds approach for our classroom observations the Portland Secondary College PLC team, Kirsten Mitchell, Andy Harris and Chris Dixon all enthusiastically agreed with my proposition that we should include students in these observational rounds.

We have a commitment to strengthening and privileging Student Voice in our school improvement journey. It was unanimous and six Year 9 students were invited to be a part of our PLC Instructional Rounds Team.

Together, we have knuckled down to understand *what* and *how* to make observations that would assist us to answer our *Essential Question*; we have learned to suspend judgement and to use descriptive language and to challenge each other to be the best classroom observation team ever so far at Portland Secondary College.

In order for us to additionally validate our findings, we plan to undertake Instructional Rounds in Year 7 and 8 classes in at least two 'like schools' whose data has shown improvement; and, as a stepping stone, visit a local primary school and participate in a Network Principals' Learning Walk.

We are excited about providing our final recommendations to Portland Secondary College's School Improvement Leadership Team SILT.

We are committed to the Framework for Improving Student Outcomes priority Excellence in Teaching and Learning and so, encouraging teachers to use the High Impact Teaching Strategies HITS best suited to our students' learning.

This Instructional Rounds Handbook has been developed by us to ensure other PLC's, who may like to establish baseline data as we did, have some tools and protocols to get them started.

Much of the information in this Handbook is not new. However, what we believe is new, is the important inclusion of students in our classroom observations team. Their insights have been invaluable as to what can be seen and heard in classrooms and in looking at and interrogating the tasks students' are being asked to complete as a matter of course every day.

On behalf of the Portland Secondary College Instructional Rounds Team, I highly recommend you consider this approach.

Toni Burgoyne
Principal

August 2017



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Section 1 Overview

Participants

PSC Professional Learning Communities (PLC) Project Team

Name	Position
Toni Burgoyne	Principal
Kirsten Mitchell	Leading Teacher – Director, Junior Secondary Transitions, PLC Team Leader
Andy Harris	Curriculum Action Team Leader, Humanities
Chris Dixon	Year 8 Level Leader
Flynn Roberts	SRC Representative, Y9 Student, <i>Instructional Rounds Participant</i>
Willem Ciechowicz	SRC Representative, Y9 Student, <i>Instructional Rounds Participant</i>
Harrison Lipscombe	SRC Representative, Y9 Student <i>Instructional Rounds Participant</i>
Zarli Sanders	SRC Representative, Y9 Student <i>Instructional Rounds Participant</i>
Ella Sandow	SRC Representative, Y9 Student <i>Instructional Rounds Participant</i>
James Smith	SRC Representative, Y9 Student <i>Instructional Rounds Participant</i>



Toni Burgoyne



Kirsten Mitchell



Andy Harris



Chris Dixon

Instructional Rounds Participants



James Smith



Flynn Roberts



Willem Ciechowicz



Harrison Lipscombe



Zarli Sanders



Ella Sandow



Overview, Rationale and Methodology

Professional Learning Communities – DET Overview

Evidence demonstrates that high-quality teaching and effective school leadership are essential to improving student learning outcomes. Research also shows that increasing teacher effectiveness is the most critical in-school driver to improve outcomes.

The Professional Learning Community (PLC) model is currently being implemented in over 200 Victorian government schools with scaling up across further Victorian government schools to be implemented by 2020. Schools participating in the prototype will focus on the *Excellence in Teaching and Learning Priority of FISO*. Regional support teams will work with schools and across schools to assist with the establishment of PLCs. In schools, teachers will work in teams to improve each other's practices by undertaking regular reflection, monitoring and evaluation.



Enduring Understanding

The relationship between two concepts that summarise important ideas and core processes that have lasting value [beyond the classroom]. They synthesize what we should understand, not just know or do.

Increases in student learning only occur as a consequence of improvements in the level of content, teachers' knowledge and skill, and student engagement.

We learn to do the work by doing the work, not by telling other people to do the work, not by having done the work at some time in the past, and not by hiring experts who act as proxies for our knowledge about how to do the work.

Big Idea

If you can't see it in the instructional core, it's not there.

It is the relationship between the teacher, the student and the content – not the qualities of any one of them by themselves that determines the nature of instructional practice.

Task Predicts Performance.

What predicts performance is what students are actually doing; the instructional task is the actual work that students are asked to do during the process of instruction – not what the teachers think they are asking students to do, or what the official curriculum says that students are asked to do.



Section 1 Overview

Overview, Rationale and Methodology

What knowledge and information will our PLC Team need to be able to answer the Essential Question?

Learning to see, unlearning to judge.

When we visit classrooms we know we will have an idea of what we want to see based on our past experiences and what we know of effective classrooms. But, by way of contrast, undertaking Instructional Rounds, the emphasis is for the need to suspend judgement and gather evidence of what is happening in classrooms.

In order to make non-judgemental observations and collect evidence for discussion it is necessary for the Team to decide:

- what is to be observed in advance
- how the observation will be undertaken
- how to discuss what is seen

The need for being descriptive requires:

- the ability to be articulate about the relationship between teaching and learning
- a common language for describing what is seen
- the language to be grounded in shared evidence and dialogue

The evidence is a description of what can be seen. Some evidence is more useful than others.

The goal of our Instructional Rounds is for us to learn about teaching, not to focus on teachers

To focus observations, the PLC Team will use three key questions to provide a platform for observations:

1. What are the teachers doing and saying?
2. What are the students doing and saying?
3. What is the task?

Identifying the problem of practice so the PLC Team can observe the practice

The PLC Team will base this on a current dilemma facing the school that comes from our data, dialogue and current work within the school, so instead of referring to it as a problem of practice, we decided it more useful to frame an *Essential Question*.

When developing an *Essential Question*, we want one that:

- focuses on the Instructional core
- is directly observable
- is actionable
- connects to a broader strategy of improvement
- has high leverage.

The more specific the *Essential Question*, the more specific and helpful the observational data and the recommendations in the next level of work will be.

Essential Question / Problem of Practice

How can undertaking Instructional Rounds improve our PLC Team's understanding of what our data is showing us at Year 7 and 8 so that we can identify the High Impact Teaching Strategies that will improve student outcomes?



Overview, Rationale and Methodology

Observing the practice

The PLC Team will identify one rich problem based on students' learning as opposed to the classroom teaching; that is, we will focus on the students not the teacher.

We need to collect meaningful data without disrupting the learning. We will focus on what the students are actually doing, not what the teacher has asked them to do. We have to see how students are engaging with the task.

The Observation Debrief

The purpose of the Debrief is to consider and discuss the collected evidence of the group and to come to an agreement on what we saw and what learning arises from the Observation.

The PLC Team will follow the following three steps:

- 1. Description** – describe not judge; use descriptive voice; focus on the data that is relevant to the problem of practice; listen and learn from each other.
- 2. Analysis** – organise the data gathered; discuss and ask questions of the data; look for patterns to emerge; use frameworks to assist the analysis.
- 3. Prediction** – this step links to teaching and learning. It tackles the central question: 'If you were a Year 7 or 8 student at this school and you did everything you were expected to do, what would you know and be able to do?' This will help us to identify areas of difference and potentially indicates, from what we gather, a focus for the next level of work.

The Debrief will allow the PLC Team to describe the specific behaviours and structures we see that cause, enable, or at times, diminish learning.

Recommendations for the next level of work

The PLC Team will focus on the resourcing required to move instruction to the next level. We will provide solutions and recommendations for actions to address the stated *Essential Question*.

The focus for the PLC Team is on improving teaching and learning in the classroom by developing clarity about good instructional practice and how the School Improvement Leadership Team SILT can support this practice.

The next step could be to apply what is learned by the PLC Team through this process, to enable other groups in the school/Network to apply it in their contexts.





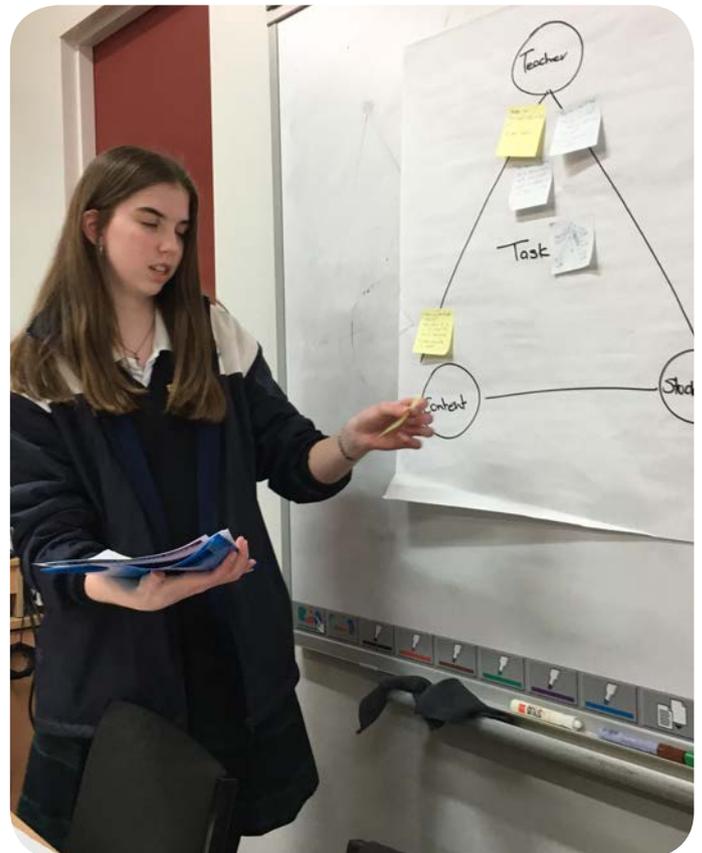
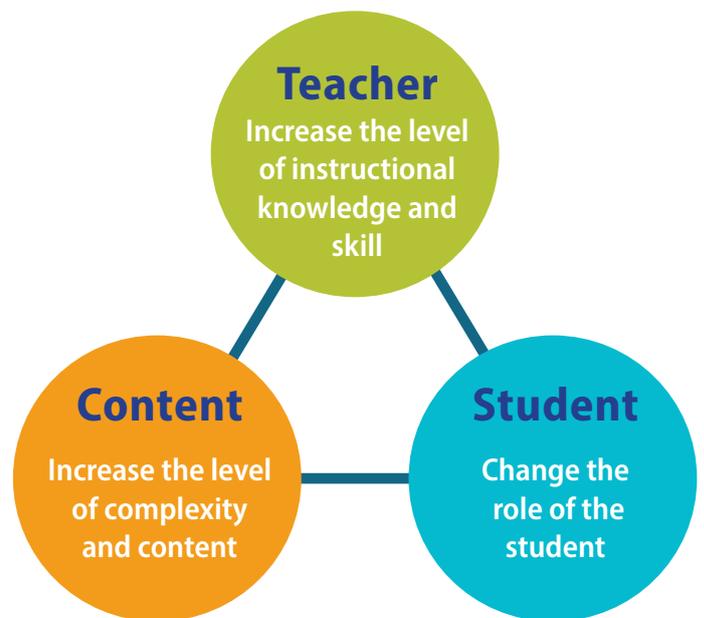
Section 2

Background

The Instructional Core

The Seven Principles of the Instructional Core

- 1** Increases in student learning occur only as a consequence of improvements in the level of content, teachers' knowledge and skill, and student engagement.
- 2** If you change any single element of the instructional core, you have to change the other two.
- 3** If you can't see it in the core, it's not there.
- 4** Task predicts performance.
- 5** The real accountability system is in the tasks that students are asked to do.
- 6** We learn to do the work by doing the work, not by telling other people to do the work, not by having done the work at some time in the past, and not by hiring experts who can act as proxies for our knowledge about how to do the work.
- 7** Description before analysis, analysis before prediction, prediction before evaluation.





The 4 Elements of Instructional Rounds

1. Essential Question (*Problem of Practice*)

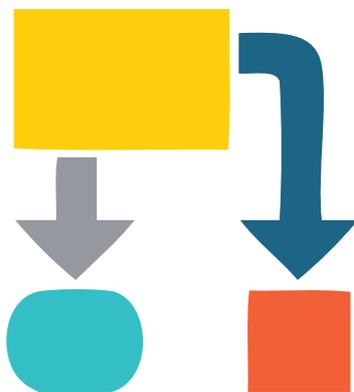
The School Improvement and Leadership Team and the *Professional Learning Communities* (PLC) identify a problem of practice that:

- Focuses on the instructional core;
- Is directly observable
- Is actionable (is within the school's control and can be improved over time);
- Connects to a broader strategy of improvement (school, system)
- School adopts the problem of practice as the focus for the PLC's meetings.

2. Observation of Practice

Observation teams collect data that is:

- Descriptive not evaluative;
- Specific
- About the instructional core;
- Related to the *Essential Question*.



3. Observation Debrief

Observation teams discuss the data:

- **Describe** what you saw;
- **Analyse** the descriptive evidence (what patterns do you see? How might you group the data?)
- **Predict** what students are learning. If you were a student in this class/school and you did everything the teacher told you to do, what would you know and be able to do?

4. Next Level of Work

Brainstorm the next level of work:

- Share system theory of *Framework for Improving Student Outcomes*;
- Share system context, including resources, professional development, and current initiatives;
- Brainstorm the next level of work for this week/next month/by the end of the year;
- Brainstorm suggestions for school level and for system level;
- Tie suggestions to the system (and school's) theory of action.

Reference: *Instructional Rounds in Education*, E. City, R. Elmore, S. Fiannan & L. Teitel Harvard, Cambridge MA, 2009, p. 101



Section 2 Background

Typical Format of an Instructional Round

The PLC Instructional Rounds team, based on a brief from the Principal, will determine their problem of practice prior to the visit. This needs to be developed and agreed at least one week prior to the round.

1	Essential Question (Problem of Practice)	Time:	8.30am - 9.15am
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Principal outlines the school's <i>Essential Question</i> and the evidence used to arrive at it. The Principal also provides some background to the current school achievement and the challenges the school faces. Questions and answers. Facilitator re-visits protocols and procedures. Facilitator groups the participants and explains times and classrooms to be visited. Usually groups of 3 and, if necessary, a group of 4 (pairs are too small). Each group visits three classrooms for 20 minutes each. Map of school provided if required. 		
2	Observation of Practice	Time:	9.20am - 10.20am
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Classroom visits. Changeover time at 9.40 and 10.00 am. Please observe protocols as provided at the start of the session. 		
3	Observation Debrief	Time:	10.30am - 11.30am
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Affinity protocol used to debrief. In your groups of three. Start by individually writing between 5 to 10 different observations on individual post-it notes. Next, share your observations with the group and try to group them into patterns, trends or themes across the classrooms you visited. Place post-its on butchers paper in your groupings. Facilitator gathers all groups together and explains gallery walk. Gallery walk. Each group then explains its groupings of observations. As presentations unfold, try to group the combined observations into common patterns, trends or themes across the school. 		

Remember

**your evidence should be around
the school's problem of practice
wherever possible**



Typical Format of an Instructional Round

4	Next Level of Work	Time:	11.30am - 12.00pm
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Whole group discusses possible actions the school could do to support development to address the <i>Essential Question</i>.• Short term, medium, long-term actions.• List of actions provided to Principal of host school.		
5	Reflection on the Rounds Process and Your Learning	Time:	12.00pm - 12.20pm
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Step 1: individual reflection. Each participant note 3 or 4 observations or personal learnings they gained from the round.• Step 2: Move back into groups of three and discuss one each (each person one reflection only to begin with then a second and third if time permits).• Step 3: Whole group share (depends on amount of time available)		
6	Close of Session	Time:	12.20pm - 12.30pm
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Facilitator provide feedback to Principal.• Reinforce that there is no individual feedback to teachers.• It is expected that the Principal and coordinator will take the group feedback to the staff for discussion. Reminder re: confidentiality.• Thank hosts and participants.		





Section 2 Background

Protocols for Classroom Visits

1	When entering the classroom, do so quietly. Teacher does not stop to introduce or greet you.
2	Allow the teacher to continue teaching without interruption.
3	Do not talk to each other whilst in the classroom.
4	Speak to students but don't interrupt the teaching.
5	Ask the students to explain what they are doing, what they are learning, do they find the work challenging. Ask some students to rate the work out of 10 with: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 1 = very, very easy,• 5 = about right and• 10 = really, really hard.
6	Record your observations using descriptive language of evidence. (<i>'I saw ...' 'I observed ...' 'I heard ...'</i>) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What is the teacher doing and saying?• What are the students doing and saying?• What is the task?• What is the content? Observations are guided by the school's problem of practice.
7	On departure from the classroom, say 'thank you' to the teacher if opportune, but do not make any comment such as ' <i>that was great</i> ' or ' <i>terrific lesson</i> ' (<i>comments such as these are judgments</i>).
8	Do not make comments to your group upon exiting the classroom. Move to your next classroom or back to the central meeting spot.



Observation Sheet: *example*

Date:		PSC PLC Team Member:	
Time:		School:	
Essential Question/Problem of Practice:			
What is the teacher doing and saying?		What are the students doing and saying?	
What is the task?			
		What is the content?	
If you can't see it in the instructional core, it's not there.			



Section 3 Workbook

Traffic Lights Survey

Instructions

Using the information below, make an on-balance judgment as to your current level of knowledge and skills in each of the four aspects of instructional rounds.

Use the following 'traffic lights' criteria:

 **Very challenging. Still a new concept for me. Need lots of work on this.**

 **I have some understanding of this and need more to become proficient.**

 **I am confident of my knowledge and skills in this area of instructional rounds.**

You can then place a coloured dot on four posters around the room to signify your level of knowledge and skills in each area.

Areas of Instructional Rounds

1. Essential Question/Problem of Practice

I am confident in my knowledge and skills to identify an *Essential Question* for my school which:

- Focuses on the instructional core
- Is directly observable
- Is actionable
- Connects to a broader strategy of improvement such as Network, Region or State
- Is high-leverage.

2. Observation of Practice

I have the knowledge and skills to collect data during an instructional round that is:

- Descriptive not evaluative
- Specific
- About the instructional core
- Related to the *Essential Question*.

Refer: Judgement or Evidence group activity on page 15.

3. Observation Debrief

I am confident that during the instructional rounds observation debrief I can:

- Describe what I saw
- Analyse the descriptive evidence, showing the patterns and grouping of the data
- Predict what students are learning i.e. if you were a student in this class and you did everything the teacher told you to do, what would you know and be able to do?

4. Next Level of Work

I am able to use the information gathered during an instructional round to brainstorm the next level of work which:

- Provides suggestions for the school
- Provides ideas for the next level of work for "this week, next month, by the end of this year"
- Ties the school and system *Excellence in Teaching and Learning* FISO priority together.



Problems of Practice: *examples*

1. What strategies do teachers use to support students' thinking?

Our problem of practice is related to the focus of our work this year and linked to an improvement strategy in our AIP. Our aim is to make learning and thinking explicit to the students (thinking tools, strategies, inquiry process)

2. What opportunities for extension and stretch are we providing for our students, particularly differentiated learning tasks to support and extend all students?
3. Is the work that students are engaged in, focused on meeting their individual needs?
4. Who is doing the work in the classroom?

5. Relationships: teacher and student relationships in classrooms - catering for the needs of all students.
6. We need to look at the type of tasks the student are being asked to complete and how the students are learning to transfer their thinking and reflect on their learning. What types of mathematical tasks are our students being asked to do?
7. We would like to know if our students are experiencing enough success to keep them motivated, interested and learning. How do students transfer and apply their mathematical skills to a specific problem?
8. How is the work influencing student learning?



**For guidance in
developing
Essential Questions
refer to page 30**



Section 3 Workbook

Judgement or Evidence? Group Activity

Which of the statements below contains a judgment and which is descriptive evidence of the observed behaviour?

Place a tick in the appropriate box <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		Judgement	Descriptive Evidence
1	Mary responded favourably to your suggestion		
2	You divided the staff into four groups and set tasks for each group		
3	You spoke for ten minutes at the beginning of the meeting		
4	I liked it when you asked each staff member to respond		
5	You asked Peter to take notes from the discussion		
6	It frustrated you when Peter took too long with the feedback section of the meeting		
7	You asked each group leader to provide one piece of evidence		
8	You were anxious to complete the meeting		
9	You dominated the meeting		
10	Your powerpoint presentation was good		
11	Each person in the group contributed to the discussion		
12	You were poorly prepared for the meeting		
13	Your powerpoint presentation included goals, actions and outcomes.		
14	The student said "This work is too easy for me."		



Lesson Observation Process

1	Before the lesson	<p><i>Focus</i> on a particular aspect of the lesson that will be observed most explicitly. This focus could be classroom oral interactions such as questioning, feedback, giving instructions or on the organisation of physical space and class participants. It may be on the content and tasks students are given.</p>
2	During the lesson	<p><i>Describe don't judge.</i> Make specific and detailed descriptive notes avoiding judgmental terms such as good, great, weak, bad. The <i>evidence</i> you describe/note may be direct quotes from a classroom interaction, or a diagram representing the classroom space, teacher and students. Your descriptions should focus on the following 3 questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the teacher doing? • What are the students doing? • What is the task? <p>Refer to pages 17 to 26 in this Handbook for some tools to assist your PLC team with recording your classroom observations.</p>
3	Protocols for classroom visits	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. When entering the room, do so quietly. Teacher does not stop to introduce or greet you. 2. Allow the teacher to continue without interruption. 3. Do not talk to each other whilst in the classroom. 4. Speak to students but don't interrupt the teaching. 5. Ask the students to explain what they are doing, what they are learning, do they find the work challenging. Ask some students to rate the work out of 10 with <i>1 very, very easy; 5 about right; and 10 really, really hard.</i> 6. Record your observations using descriptive language of evidence ('I saw ...' 'I observed ...' 'I heard ...'). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the teacher doing and saying? • What are the students doing and saying? • What is the task? • What is the content? <p>Observations are guided by the school's problem of practice.</p> 7. On departure from the classroom, say <i>thank you</i> to the teacher if opportune but do not make any comment such as <i>'that was great'</i> or <i>'what an exciting lesson'</i> (comments such as these are judgements). 8. Do not make comments to your group upon exiting the classroom. Move to your next classroom or back to the central meeting point.
4	During and after the lesson	<p><i>Analyse any patterns that emerge</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look for patterns that emerge from your notes and record these under your notes.
5	After the lesson	<p><i>Discuss your observations</i> Share recommendations for actions and focus on clear goals for future teaching Refer to pages 27 and 28 in this Handbook for some tools to assist your PLC team with sorting your observations.</p>



Descriptive Lesson Observation Notes

Date:		Time:	
Teacher:		Year Level:	
Subject and Topic:		Room:	
Observer:		Class Size:	

1. Observation Focus *e.g. use of oral language, management of dynamics, materials and space, etc*

	Sketch of room:
--	-----------------

2. Descriptive Notes:

What is the <i>teacher</i> doing/saying/making/writing?	What are the <i>students</i> doing/saying/making/writing?
---	---



Section 3

Workbook

Descriptive Lesson Observation Notes

2. Descriptive Notes:	
What is the <i>teacher</i> doing/saying/making/writing?	What are the <i>students</i> doing/saying/making/writing?



Verbal Flow Diagram

This is a diagram that aims to capture verbal interaction in the classroom. This is a way to observe the way students and teachers engage in discussion during a lesson.

- You need a diagram or map of the classroom layout. If that isn't possible a quick sketch will do.
- On this graphic clearly mark key areas in the room (boards, teacher's desk, student seating etc.).
- Use a key or legend to define particular aspects of the room.
- Using the diagram draw arrows to indicate who is speaking to whom.
- Another possibility is to do this for some of the lesson and for the other part, note down what is being said.

KEY:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'T' in circle = Teacher • Student initials in square = name of student (optional) • arrows point out the direction of the communication flow
-------------	--

Date:		Teacher:		Time:		Class:	
--------------	--	-----------------	--	--------------	--	---------------	--

	<p>Sketch your Verbal Flow Diagram here:</p> <p>Sketch of room:</p>
--	--

What is the <i>teacher</i> saying?	What are the <i>students</i> saying?
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Section 3 Workbook

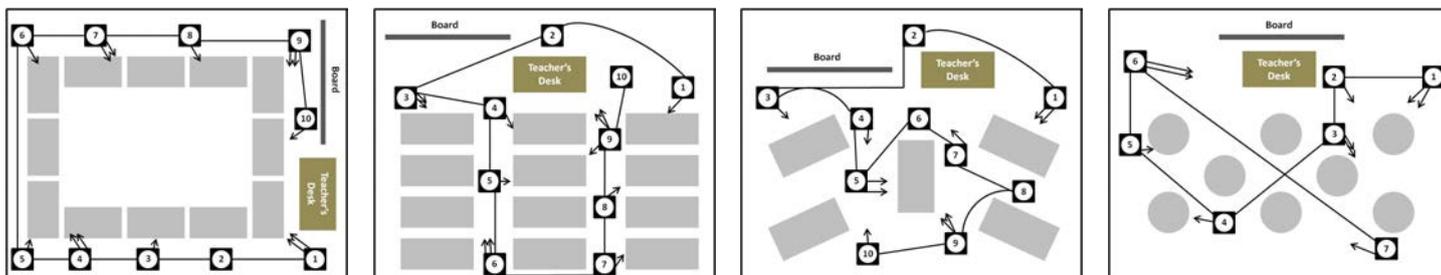
Proximity Analysis and Verbal Flow

Proximity Analysis Diagram

This is a diagram that aims to capture teacher movement around the classroom, and what that reveals.

How does it work?

- You need a diagram or map of the classroom layout. If that isn't possible a quick sketch will do.
- On this graphic clearly mark key areas in the room (boards, teacher's desk, student seating etc.).
- Use a key or legend to define particular aspects of the room. You use arrows to draw the teacher's movement within that lesson.
- Stops can be designated by a numbering system, it is also possible to record the time that stop took.
- Other symbols can be developed to record whatever is considered an important focus.



KEY:

- circle represents teacher's stops in movement
- a double arrow represents teacher talking directly to one student
- a single arrow represents teacher talking to the whole class

Date:

Teacher:

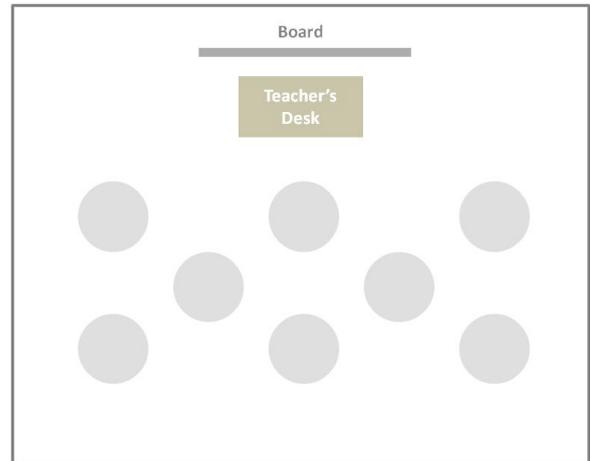
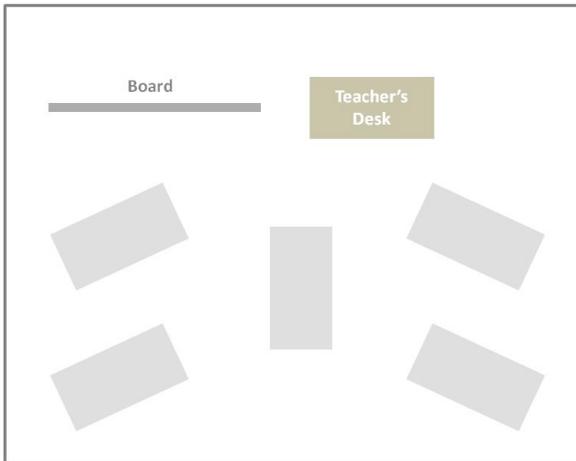
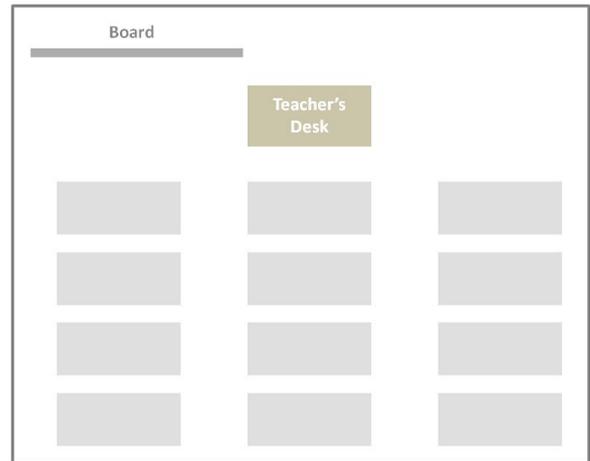
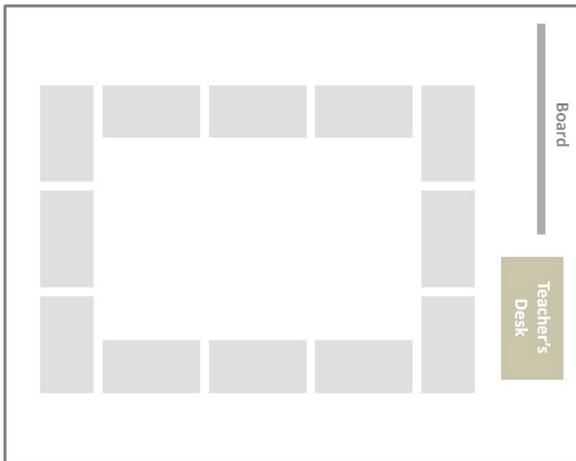
Time:

Class:

Observer's sketch:



Proximity Analysis Diagram



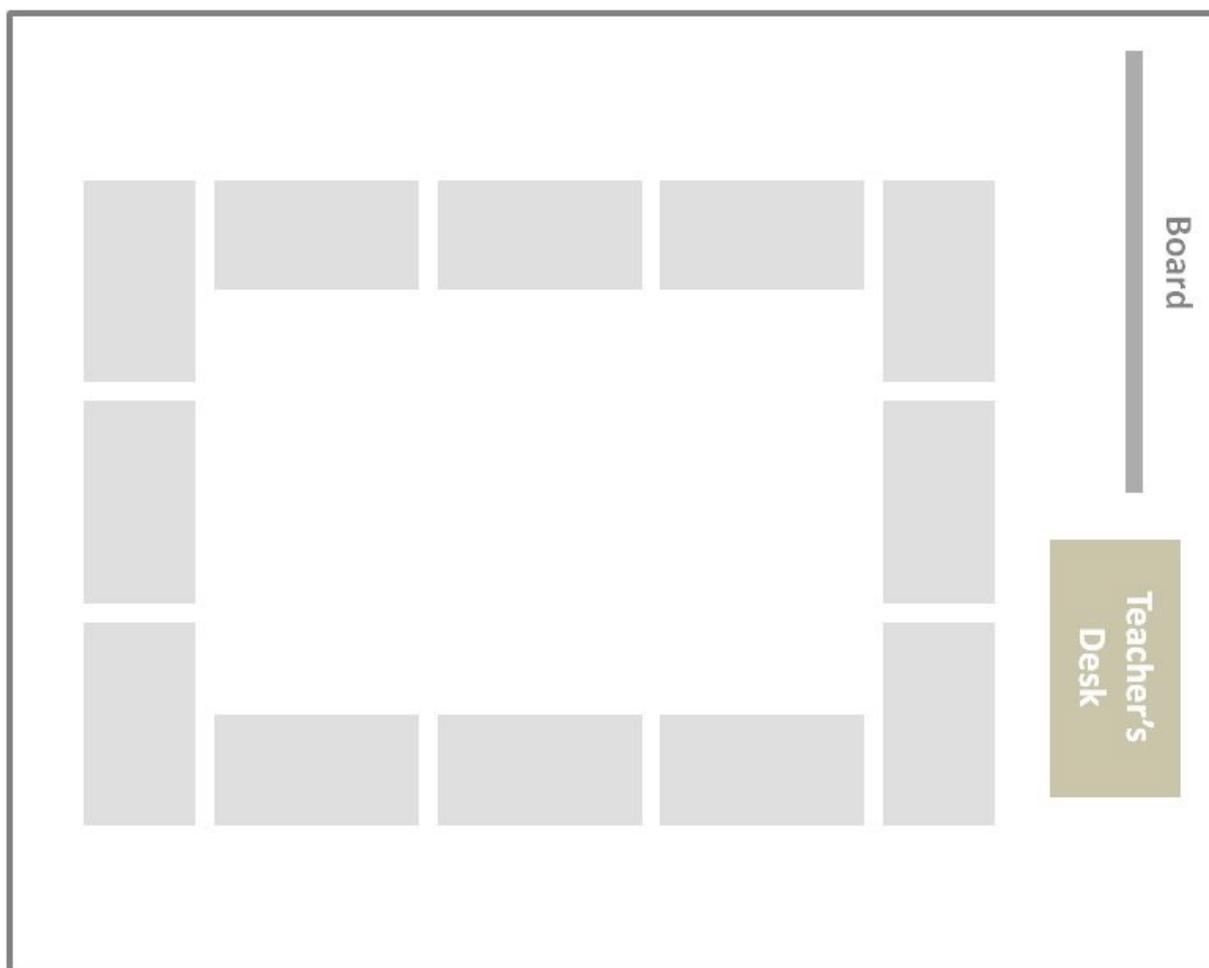
Date:		Teacher:		Time:		Class:	
What is the <i>teacher</i> saying?				What are the <i>students</i> saying?			



Section 3

Workbook

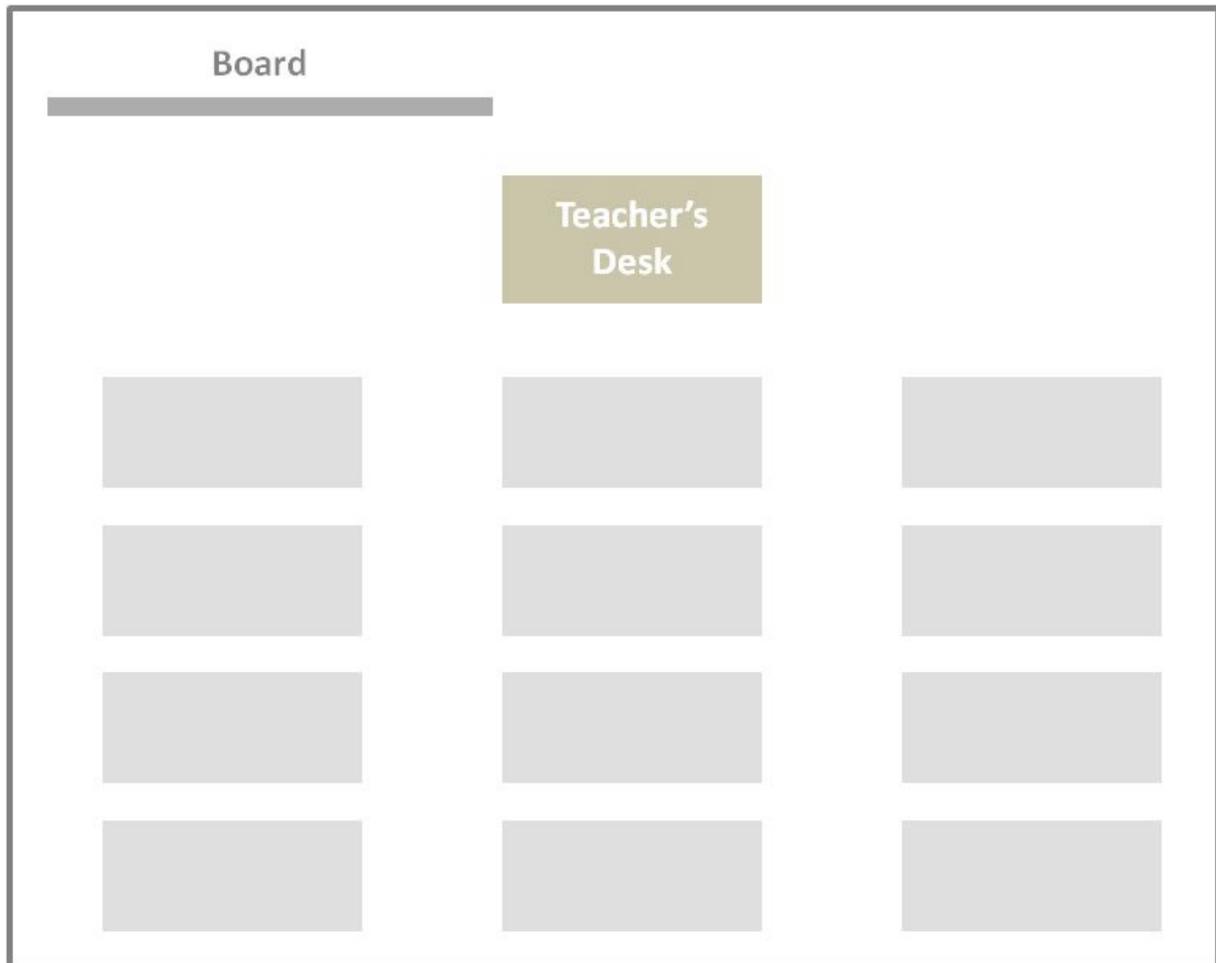
Proximity Analysis Diagram



Date:		Teacher:		Time:		Class:	
What is the <i>teacher</i> saying?				What are the <i>students</i> saying?			



Proximity Analysis Diagram

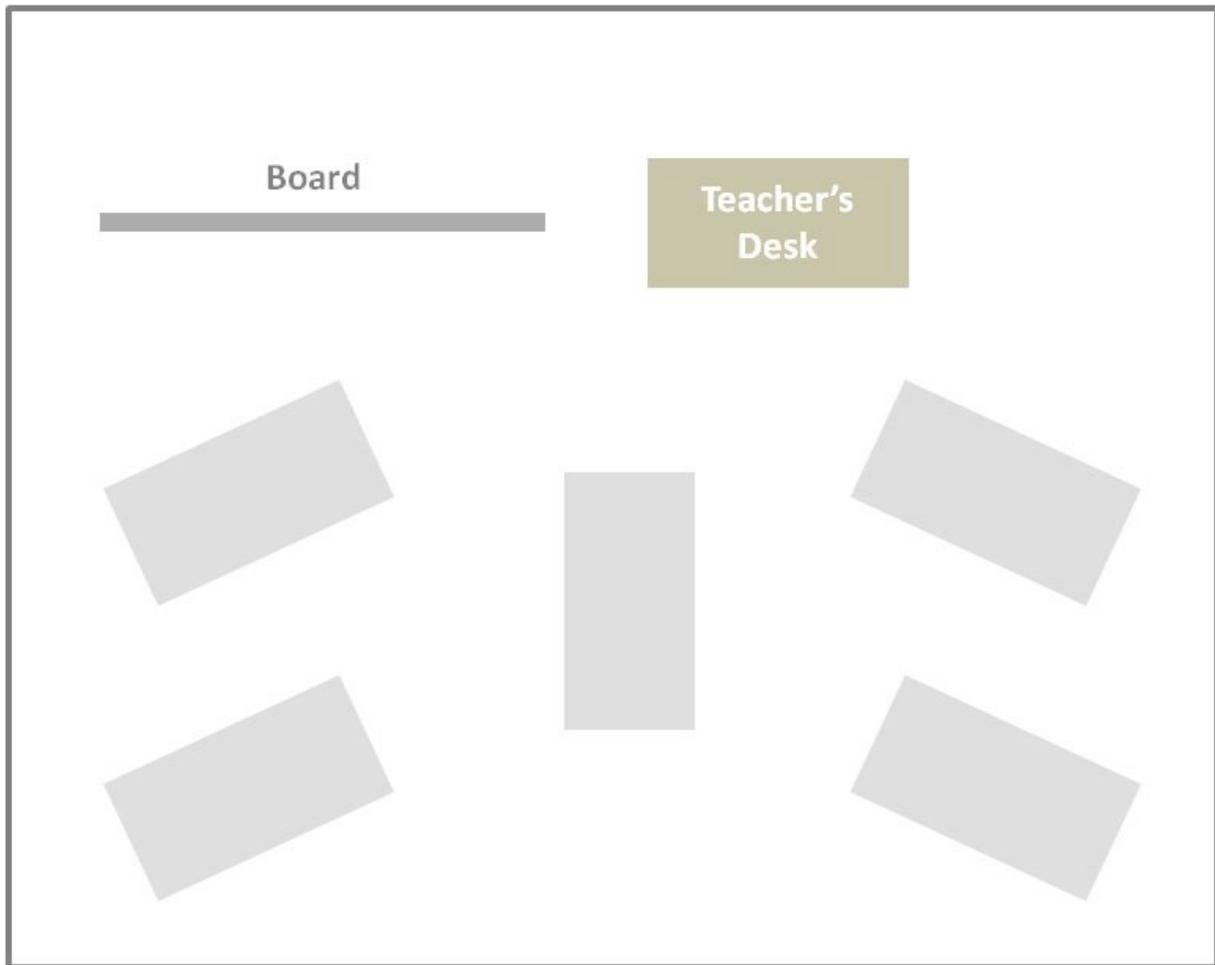


Date:		Teacher:		Time:		Class:	
What is the <i>teacher</i> saying?				What are the <i>students</i> saying?			



Section 3 Workbook

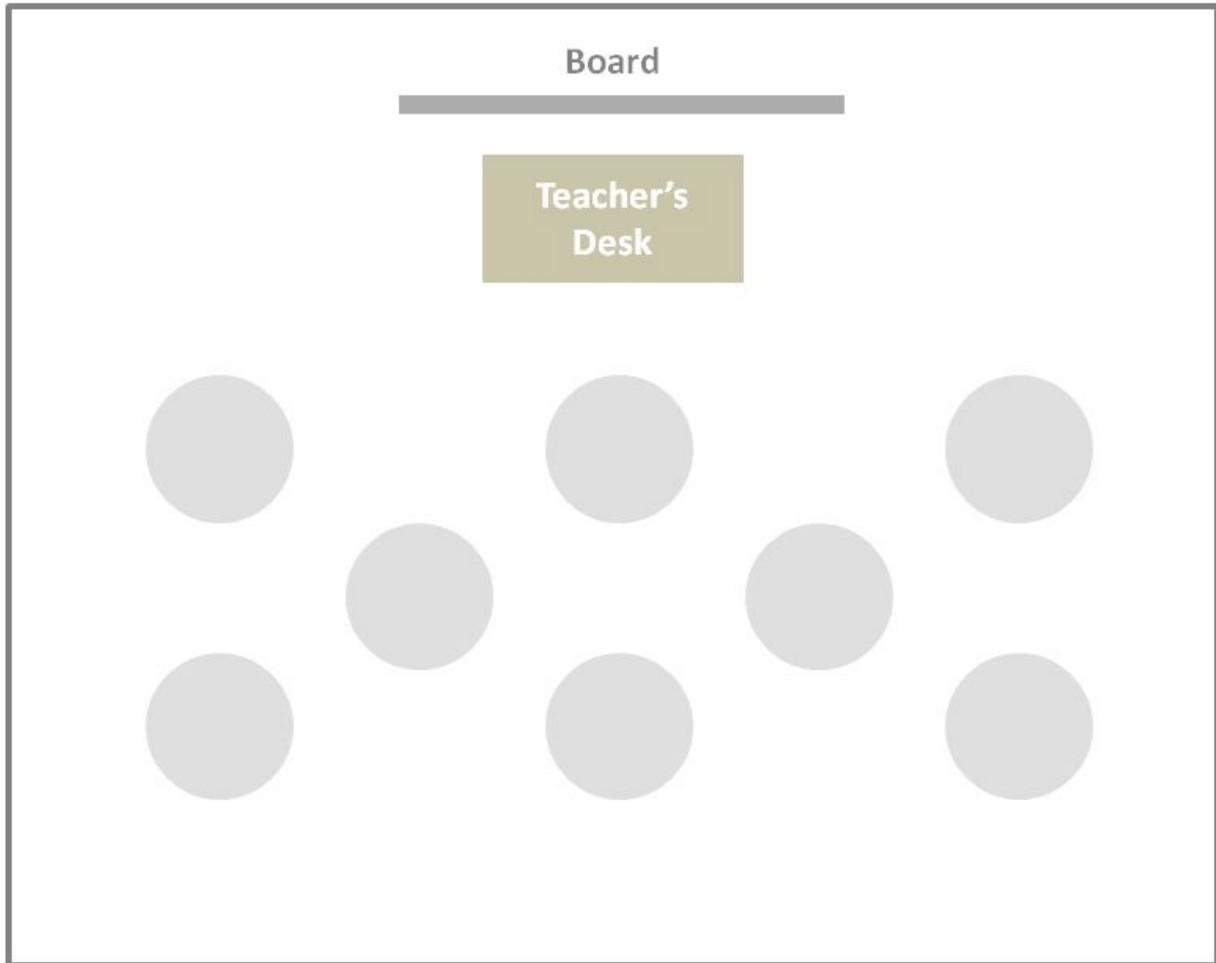
Proximity Analysis Diagram



Date:		Teacher:		Time:		Class:	
What is the <i>teacher</i> saying?				What are the <i>students</i> saying?			



Proximity Analysis Diagram



Date:		Teacher:		Time:		Class:	
What is the <i>teacher</i> saying?				What are the <i>students</i> saying?			



Section 3 Workbook

Collaborative Inquiry Protocol

Total time: 15 minutes

Purpose: This consultation protocol is designed to help the PLC team members share and explain their responses during the Instructional Round.

Set-Up:

- Select a time-keeper
- Each team member is also a note-taker, when team members are presenting.

Step 1	Individually, take time to share your responses with your PLC team (<i>agree as a team how much of the five minutes you will each spend on this</i>).
Step 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group members ask clarifying questions of each presenter. <i>This is not a time to give advice or get into the discussion.</i> • The following are <i>only sample questions</i>; make changes to suit your needs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What makes you say that...? • What evidence do you have that indicates this is what is happening? • Has this problem existed in our school for long? • Have we ever attempted to do anything about it? • What gets in the way when we try to improve <i>what is</i>? • What have we done to work on the problem? What have we NOT done? • Who will/should act on this problem?
Step 3	Understanding the instructional core. Take the groups of notes to further refine your evidence (see <i>Collating Your Observations</i> on page 28 of this handbook).
Step 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What were some noteworthy comments, insights, or questions? • What more have we learnt about each other's understanding of our school's instructional core? • What might be the perceptions of a new graduate at the school? • What might be the understandings of other leaders? • How consistent are the views of the PLC, about the school's instructional core?

Notes/Reflections:



Collating Your Observations

When the Classroom observations (i.e. 3 classroom visits per team) have been completed, return to base.

<p>Step 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individuals transfer their observation notes on to sticky notes. Some data should be sorted into cohorts such as boy/girl. For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Questions teacher asked to students Questions students answered 	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Questions</th> <th>Boys</th> <th>Girls</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>From Teacher to student</td> <td>### I</td> <td>II</td> </tr> <tr> <td>From Student to Teacher</td> <td>O</td> <td>III</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Student to another another student</td> <td>II</td> <td>O</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Questions	Boys	Girls	From Teacher to student	### I	II	From Student to Teacher	O	III	Student to another another student	II	O
Questions	Boys	Girls												
From Teacher to student	### I	II												
From Student to Teacher	O	III												
Student to another another student	II	O												
<p>Step 2</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Add ratings for task difficulty. i.e. out of 1 to 10 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 = very, very easy, 5 = just right, 10 = really difficult 	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Rank</th> <th>Boys</th> <th>Girls</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>5</td> <td>III</td> <td>O</td> </tr> <tr> <td>6</td> <td>O</td> <td>II</td> </tr> <tr> <td>7</td> <td>IIII</td> <td>### I</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Rank	Boys	Girls	5	III	O	6	O	II	7	IIII	### I
Rank	Boys	Girls												
5	III	O												
6	O	II												
7	IIII	### I												
<p>Step 3</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use a protocol to take turns to place sticky notes on the board. Use something like the diagram (right) as a template to place your sticky notes. <p>Note: This is when judgement statements are discarded and descriptive notes remain.</p>													
<p>Step 4</p>	<p>Further refine each of the clusters of notes.</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td data-bbox="244 1525 882 1798"> <p>Task</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Differentiated examples i.e. was there at least 3 levels of work evident? Place task against Blooms Taxonomy. Student rankings of task difficulty 1 – 10, what trends? Was there a rubric present? </td> <td data-bbox="882 1525 1520 1798"> <p>Teachers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Group the types of questions Verbal Flow data on which section of the room; Boys/girls etc. teacher directed questions. What formative assessment did you hear the teacher give to students? </td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="244 1798 882 1989"> <p>Content</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What did you see students doing? What topic(s)? In what format - textbook, online, worksheets etc? </td> <td data-bbox="882 1798 1520 1989"> <p>Student</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Group the types of questions asked of teacher and of each other What were they doing/making? </td> </tr> </table>		<p>Task</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Differentiated examples i.e. was there at least 3 levels of work evident? Place task against Blooms Taxonomy. Student rankings of task difficulty 1 – 10, what trends? Was there a rubric present? 	<p>Teachers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Group the types of questions Verbal Flow data on which section of the room; Boys/girls etc. teacher directed questions. What formative assessment did you hear the teacher give to students? 	<p>Content</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What did you see students doing? What topic(s)? In what format - textbook, online, worksheets etc? 	<p>Student</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Group the types of questions asked of teacher and of each other What were they doing/making? 								
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Section 3 Workbook

Recommendations for next level of work

Essential Question

'How can our PLC Team use our observations, analysis and predictions to link teaching and learning so that we can recommend the High Impact Teaching Strategies that will improve Year 7 and 8 student outcomes?'



Making the Recommendation

The PLC Team will focus on the resourcing required to move instruction to the next level. We will provide solutions and recommendations for actions to address the stated *Essential Question*.

The focus for the PLC Team is on improving teaching and learning in the classroom by developing clarity about good instructional practice and how the School Improvement Leadership Team SILT can support this practice.

The next step could be for applying what is learned by the PLC Team through this process, to enable other groups in the school/Network to apply it in their contexts.



Glossary

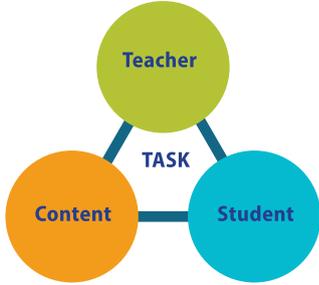
Term	Definition
Big Ideas	Relate to lifelong learning; relevant to all stages of life.
Enduring Understandings	<p>What understandings about the big ideas are desired? The relationship between two concepts that summarise important ideas and core processes that have lasting value [beyond the classroom]. They synthesise what we should understand, not just know or do.</p> <p>Enduring understandings [for Instructional Rounds] are statements summarising important ideas and core processes that are central to the discipline of learning to do the work [of Instructional Rounds]. They synthesise what the participants should understand, not just know, as a result of doing the work.</p>
Essential Questions	<p><i>Essential questions</i> spark our curiosity and sense of wonder. They derive from some deep wish to understand something which matters to us.</p> <p><i>Essential Questions</i> are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• open-ended; that is, it typically will not have a single, final, and correct answer• thought-provoking and intellectually engaging, often sparking discussion and debate• Call for higher-order thinking, such as analysis, inference, evaluation, prediction. It cannot be effectively answered by recall alone.• Points toward important, transferrable ideas within (and sometimes across) disciplines• Raise additional questions and sparks further inquiry.• Require support and justification, not just an answer.• Recur over time; that is, the question can and should be revisited again and again.
Instructional Rounds	<p>An adaptation of the <i>medical rounds</i> model. Observational rounds is an explicit practice that is designed to bring discussions on instruction directly into the process of school improvement.</p> <p>Use a set of protocols and processes for observing, analysing, discussing and understanding what can be used to improve student learning.</p> <p>Create a common discipline and focus among practitioners with a common purpose and set of problems.</p>



Section 4

Resources

Glossary

Term	Definition
<p>Problem of Practice</p>	<p>The identified problem of practice must be based on a current dilemma facing the host school and come from data, dialogue and current work within the school. It is grounded in some kind of shard evidence and is something that the host school has already been working on or think they might need to work on. When identifying a rich problem of practice, look for a problem that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • focuses on the instructional core • is directly observable • is actionable • connects to a broader strategy for improvement • has high leverage.
<p>Professional Learning Communities</p>	<p>Professional Learning Communities provides a way of working that uses inquiry for schools to focus on the <i>Excellence in Teaching and Learning</i> FISO priority of the Improvement Model, as they also implement the Victorian Curriculum.</p>
<p>The Instructional Core</p>	<p>The instructional core is composed of the student and the teacher in the presence of content. The model of the instructional core provides a basic framework for how to intervene in the instructional process so as to improve the quality and level of student learning.</p> 



High Impact Teaching Strategies

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/teachers/management/highimpactteachingstrat.pdf>

1	Setting Goals
Overview	Lessons have clear learning intentions with goals that clarify what success looks like. Lesson goals always explain what students need to understand, and what they must be able to do. This helps the teacher to plan learning activities, and helps students understand what is required.
Key Elements	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Based on assessed student needs• Goals are presented clearly so students know what they are intended to learn• Can focus on surface and/or deep learning• Challenges students relative to their current mastery of the topic• Links to explicit assessment criteria
Related effect sizes	Goals – 0.56 Teacher clarity – 0.75
2	Structuring Lessons
Overview	A lesson structure maps teaching and learning that occurs in class. Sound lesson structures reinforce routines, scaffold learning via specific steps/activities. They optimise time on task and classroom climate by using smooth transitions. Planned sequencing of teaching and learning activities stimulates and maintains engagement by linking lesson and unit learning.
Key Elements	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Clear expectations• Sequencing and linking learning• Clear instructions• Clear transitions• Scaffolding• Questioning/feedback• Formative assessment• Exit cards
Related effect sizes	Scaffolding – 0.53 Formative evaluation – 0.68 Teacher clarity – 0.75
3	Explicit Teaching
Overview	When teachers adopt explicit teaching practices they clearly show students what to do and how to do it. The teacher decides on learning intentions and success criteria, makes them transparent to students, and demonstrates them by modelling. The teacher checks for understanding, and at the end of each lesson revisits what was covered and ties it all together (<i>Hattie, 2009</i>).
Key Elements	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Shared learning intentions• Relevant content and activities• New content is explicitly introduced and explored• Teacher models application of knowledge and skills• Worked examples support independent practice• Practice and feedback loops uncover and address misunderstandings
Related effect sizes	Goals – 0.56 Worked examples – 0.57 Time on task – 0.62 Spaced practice – 0.60 Direct instruction – 0.59 Teacher clarity – 0.75



Section 4

Resources

High Impact Teaching Strategies

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/teachers/management/highimpactteachingstrat.pdf>

4	Worked Examples
Overview	<p>A worked example demonstrates the steps required to complete a task or solve a problem. By scaffolding the learning, worked examples support skill acquisition and reduce a learner's cognitive load.</p> <p>The teacher presents a worked example and explains each step. Later, students can use worked examples during independent practice, and to review and embed new knowledge.</p>
Key Elements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher clarifies the learning objective, then demonstrates what students need to do to acquire new knowledge and master new skills • Teacher presents steps required to arrive at the solution so students' cognitive load is reduced and they can focus on the process • Students practice independently using the worked example as a model
Related effect sizes	<p>Worked examples – 0.57</p> <p>Spaced practice – 0.60</p>

5	Collaborative Learning
Overview	<p>Collaborative learning occurs when students work in small groups and everyone participates in a learning task.</p> <p>There are many collaborative learning approaches. Each uses varying forms of organisation and tasks. Collaborative learning is supported by designing meaningful tasks. It involves students actively participating in negotiating roles, responsibilities and outcomes.</p>
Key Elements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students work together to apply previously acquired knowledge • Students cooperatively solve problems using previously acquired knowledge and skills • Students work in groups that foster peer learning • Groups of students compete against each other
Related effect sizes	<p>Peer tutoring – 0.55</p> <p>Reciprocal teaching – 0.74</p> <p>Small group learning – 0.49</p> <p>Cooperative learning vs whole class instruction – 0.41</p> <p>Cooperative learning vs individual work – 0.59</p> <p>Cooperative learning vs competitive learning – 0.54</p>
Months of Progress	<p>Collaborative learning +5</p> <p>Peer tutoring +5</p>



High Impact Teaching Strategies

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/teachers/management/highimpactteachingstrat.pdf>

6	Multiple Exposures
Overview	Multiple exposures provide students with multiple opportunities to encounter, engage with, and elaborate on new knowledge and skills. Research demonstrates deep learning develops over time via multiple, spaced interactions with new knowledge and concepts. This may require spacing practice over several days, and using different activities to vary the interactions learners have with new knowledge.
Key Elements	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Students have time to practice what they have learnt• Timely feedback provides opportunities for immediate correction and improvement
Related effect sizes	Time on task – 0.62 Spaced practice – 0.71 Feedback – 0.73
Months of Progress	Mastery learning +5

7	Questioning
Overview	Questioning is a powerful tool and effective teachers regularly use it for a range of purposes. It engages students, stimulates interest and curiosity in the learning, and makes links to students' lives. Questioning opens up opportunities for students to discuss, argue, and express opinions and alternative points of view. Effective questioning yields immediate feedback on student understanding, supports informal and formative assessment, and captures feedback on effectiveness of teaching strategies.
Key Elements	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Plan questions in advance for probing, extending, revising and reflecting• Teachers use open questions• Questions used as an immediate source of feedback to track progress/understanding• Cold call and strategic sampling are commonly used questioning strategies
Related effect sizes	Questioning – 0.46



Section 4 Resources

High Impact Teaching Strategies

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/teachers/management/highimpactteachingstrat.pdf>

8	Feedback
Overview	Feedback informs a student and/or teacher about the student's performance relative to learning goals. Feedback redirects or refocuses teacher and student actions so the student can align effort and activity with a clear outcome that leads to achieving a learning goal. Teachers and peers can provide formal or informal feedback. It can be oral, written, formative or summative. Whatever its form, it comprises specific advice a student can use to improve performance.
Key Elements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Precise, timely, specific, accurate and actionable • Questioning and assessment is feedback on teaching practice • Use student voice to enable student feedback about teaching
Related effect sizes	Feedback – 0.73
Months of Progress	Feedback +8

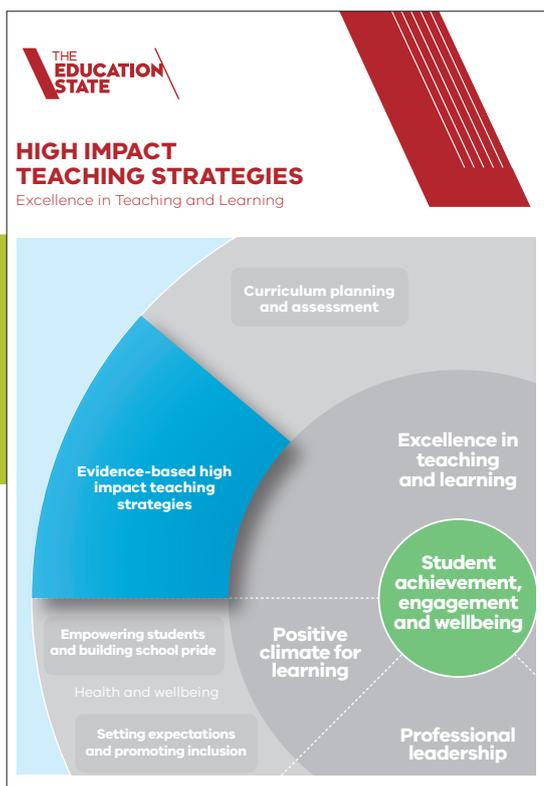
9	Metacognitive Strategies
Overview	Metacognitive strategies teach students to think about their own thinking. When students become aware of the learning process, they gain control over their learning. Metacognition extends to self-regulation, or managing one's own motivation toward learning. Metacognitive activities can include planning how to approach learning tasks, evaluating progress, and monitoring comprehension.
Key Elements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching problem solving • Teaching study skills • Promotes self-questioning • Classroom discussion is an essential feature • Uses concept mapping
Related effect sizes	Teaching problem solving – 0.63 Study skills – 0.60 Self-questioning – 0.64 Classroom discussion – 0.82 Concept mapping – 0.64
Months of Progress	Metacognition and self- regulation +8



High Impact Teaching Strategies

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/teachers/management/highimpactteachingstrat.pdf>

10	Differentiated teaching
Overview	<p>Differentiated teaching are methods teachers use to extend the knowledge and skills of every student in every class, regardless of their starting point.</p> <p>The objective is to lift the performance of all students, including those who are falling behind and those ahead of year level expectations.</p> <p>To ensure all students master objectives, effective teachers plan lessons that incorporate adjustments for content, process, and product.</p>
Key Elements	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• High quality, evidence based group instruction• Regular supplemental instruction• Individualised interventions
Related effect sizes	<p>RTI - 1.07</p> <p>Piagetian programs - 1.28</p> <p>Reading recovery - 0.5</p>
Months of Progress	<p>Individualised instruction +2</p> <p>Learning styles +2</p> <p>Mastery learning +5</p>



<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/teachers/management/highimpact-teachingstrat.pdf>



Section 4

Resources

Discussion Starter

Read the following quote and consider the discussion starter questions

A particular feature of the talk between teacher and students is the asking of questions by the teacher. This natural and direct way of checking on learning is often unproductive. One common problem is that, following a question, teachers do not wait long enough to allow students to think out their answers. When a teacher answers their own question after only two or three seconds and when a minute of silence is not tolerable, there is no possibility that a student can think out what to say.

There are then two consequences. One is that, because the only questions that can produce answers in such a short time are questions of fact, these predominate. The other is that students don't even try to think out a response. Because they know that the answer, followed by another question, will come along in a few seconds, there is no point in trying. It is also generally the case that only a few students in a class answer the teacher's questions. The rest then leave it to these few, knowing that they cannot respond as quickly and being unwilling to risk making mistakes in public. So the teacher, by lowering the level of questions and by accepting answers from a few, can keep the lesson going but is actually out of touch with the understanding of most of the class. The question and answer dialogue becomes a ritual, one in which thoughtful involvement suffers.

There are several ways to break this particular cycle. They involve giving students time to respond; asking them to discuss their thinking in pairs or in small groups, so that a respondent is speaking on behalf of others; giving students a choice between different possible answers and asking them to vote on the options; asking all of them to write down an answer and then reading out a selected few; and so on. What is essential is that any dialogue should evoke thoughtful reflection in which all students can be encouraged to take part, for only then can the formative process start to work. In short, the dialogue between students and a teacher should be thoughtful, reflective, focused to evoke and explore understanding, and conducted so that all students have an opportunity to think and to express their ideas.

Black, P. & William, D. 1998. Inside the Black Box: Raising standards through classroom assessment, King's College London

Discussion starter questions

- 1 Consider your practice and discuss how questioning occurs in your classroom and discuss.**
- 2 Give and find examples of how good questioning can be used and to what effect.**
- 3 In what ways can you improve the questioning in your classroom from tomorrow?**



Thought Starters

Will Richardson: author of “Why School”

“Teaching is learning, and learning is the teaching.”

“In this new narrative, learning ceases to focus on consuming information or knowledge that’s no longer scarce. Instead, it’s about asking questions, working with others to find the answers, doing real work for real audiences, and adding to, not simply taking from, the storehouse of knowledge that the Web is becoming. It’s about developing the kinds of habits and dispositions that deep, lifelong learners need to succeed in a world rife with information and connections.”

Tony Wagner recently said, “There’s no competitive advantage today in knowing more than the person next to you. The world doesn’t care what you know. What the world cares about is what you can do with what you know.”

“Learning a passion to learn is more important for your practical success than learning any particular facts or skills.”

“The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write. The illiterate will be those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn.” Consider.

“The longer we wait to start a conversation around doing school “differently,” instead of simply “better,” the more we’re putting our kids at risk.”

“Work is learning, and learning is the work.”

Will Richardson:

<https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/25590449-from-master-teacher-to-master-learner>;

<https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/16032207-why-school?> How education must change when learning and information are everywhere

We’re Trying To Do “The Wrong Thing Right” in Schools

Whenever I think about the way most schools are structured today, I always come back to the same question: Do we do the things we do because they’re better for kids or because they are easier for us? For instance: separating kids by age in school. Is that something we do because kids learn better that way? Or do we do it because it’s just an easier way organizing our work? I think all of us know the answer to that. And there are quite a few other comparisons like those that are worth thinking about:

- Do kids learn better when we separate out the content into different subjects, or is it just easier for us?
- Do kids learn better when we have every one of them pretty much go through the same curriculum in the same way, or is it just easier for us?
- Do kids learn better when we have them turn off all of their technology in school, or is it just easier for us?
- Do kids learn better when we we assess them all the same way, or is it just easier for us?
- Do kids learn better when we decide what they should learn and how they should learn it, or is it just easier for us?
- Do kids learn better in 50 or 90 minute blocks, or is it just easier for us?

To be sure, these are not new questions, nor are they unique to my thinking. Many of us in the edu online community have been writing about these things for years. As with much of the “we need to change schools” conversation, it’s another part of the repeatedly articulated argument that appeals to common sense but hasn’t much moved the needle when it comes to doing things any differently in schools.



Section 4

Resources

Thought Starters

Hard to learn about your passions when you don't have anyone putting something in front of you.

People wouldn't learn as much with total freedom.

We don't know what we don't like until we're made to do it.

Students have to be shown how exciting it can be to learn versus what you want to learn.

Teachers don't use technology to learn the way that kids do.

I learn more stuff on YouTube than anything else.

Under what conditions do people *LEARN* most powerfully and deeply?

Doing the right thing vs doing the wrong thing right

- safe learning environment
- personal investment
- real world application
- fun
- relevance to their lives
- social
- interesting questions
- positive learning environment
- real audience
- passion
- teachers/mentors
- feedback autonomy and agency
- challenging
- cross-disciplines
- not time constrained
- flow
- sitting in rows
- 45/60/88 minute blocks
- discrete curriculum
- one subject area focus
- age grouped co-learners
- no real world application
- emphasis on grades
- carrots and sticks
- no choice/no agency
- lack of relevance
- "handing it in"
- limited access

Productive Learning is where the process engenders and reinforces *wanting to learn more*.
Absent wanting to learn the learning context is unproductive.

Teachers don't know what I'm doing on my iPad.

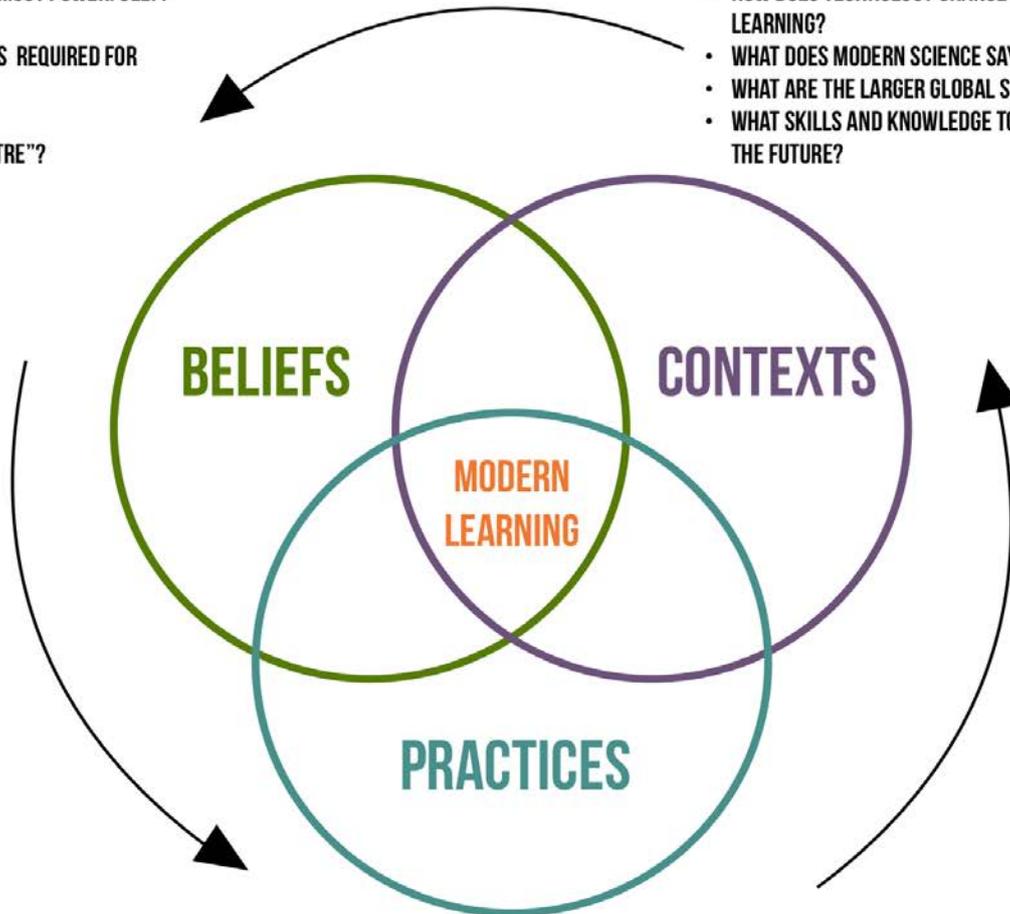
Lot of times I'm learning what I'm passionate about, not what I'm supposed to be learning about.



Thought Starters

HOW DO CHILDREN LEARN MOST POWERFULLY?
HOW DO WE LEARN?
WHAT ARE THE CONDITIONS REQUIRED FOR
POWERFUL LEARNING?
WHAT IS OUR MISSION?
WHAT IS OUR "RAISON D'ETRE"?

- HOW DOES TECHNOLOGY CHANGE THE WHAT AND HOW OF LEARNING?
- WHAT DOES MODERN SCIENCE SAY ABOUT HOW KIDS LEARN?
- WHAT ARE THE LARGER GLOBAL SHIFTS THAT INFORM OUR WORK?
- WHAT SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE TO STUDENTS NEED TO THRIVE IN THE FUTURE?



- WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER?
- WHAT IS OUR VISION FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING?
- WHAT IS OUR CULTURE? TEACHING OR LEARNING?



Section 4 Resources

Classroom layout – what does the research say?

extract: *Teacher Magazine, ACER*

- What effect do different classroom seating arrangements have on student participation?
- What does your learning space reveal about your teaching philosophy?
- Should teachers or students decide who sits where?

In this article, we take a look at what the research says.

Learning spaces come in all shapes and sizes, from rectangular rooms built for 30 students where you can close the door on the world but still peer through the window, to flexible, open-plan environments with folding walls where scores of students come together. Outdoors, indoors, subject-specific spaces with specialist equipment and multipurpose rooms for whole school use.

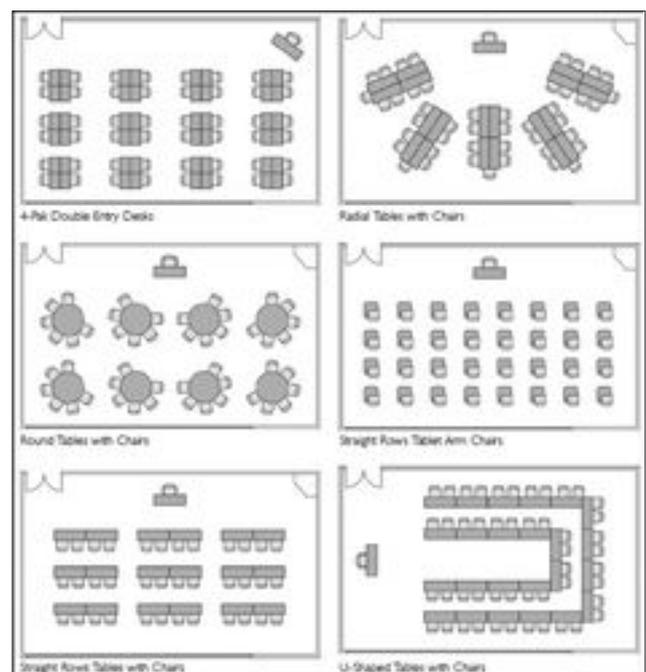
As a teacher, you don't often get the chance to choose your classroom. However, the many fixtures and fittings means there's a lot you can do to change the layout. Of course, once you've arranged your student desks, standing workstations, bean bags and other seating options (some educators even throw in exercise balls) you'll likely next turn your attention to who sits where.

Dialogue between students and a teacher should be thoughtful, reflective, focused to evoke and explore understanding, and conducted so that all students have an opportunity to think and to express their ideas.

A classroom to support teaching and learning

So, how are you going to teach, what will the learning activity be and what do you want to achieve? Forty years ago, US environmental psychologist Professor Robert Sommer had this to say about choosing a classroom layout. 'The teacher's educational philosophy will be reflected in the layout of the classroom. The teacher should be able to justify the arrangement of desks and chairs on the basis of certain educational goals. There is no ideal classroom layout for all activities.' (Sommer, 1977)

He goes on to give a few examples: the traditional row and column style with all seats facing the front lends itself to 'sit-and-listen teaching'; for group work, where students share tasks and cooperate 'cluster tables are best'; and if you're using equipment that needs some space, such as Cuisenaire rods in mathematics, then you're going to need long tables.





Classroom layout – what does the research say?

Do certain seating arrangements encourage participation?

A study involving a class of fourth graders in Germany (Marx, Fuhrer & Hartig, 1999) looked at whether different seating arrangements led to students asking more questions. The researchers observed 53 German and maths lessons over eight weeks and in all cases the teacher was at the front – either sitting at her desk or standing.

They tested two seating arrangements – traditional rows and columns and a semicircle. 'Our results showed that question-asking was more frequent when the children were seated in the semicircular arrangement than in the row-and-column arrangement,' the researchers report. Interestingly, in both arrangements, even the rows and columns, they found two 'action zones' – one shaped like a T and the other like a triangle. Children in these zones (those with a more central seating location) asked more questions per lesson.

They say the results of their study suggest arranging seating in a semicircle in primary school 'could lead to equal opportunities for everyone in the class' but caution that, when it comes to student participation, factors such as teacher personality and their teaching style shouldn't be ruled out.

Fernandes, Huang & Rinaldo (2011) say research has shown that participation and engagement is beneficial for student learning. 'Classroom participation is associated with the generation and promotion of higher order thinking skills, and this cognitive stimulation provides students with a different environment which promotes positive and effective learning experiences ...'

Looking at things from a student perspective

During a visit to the cinema or a sporting event, there's always a chance you'll arrive at your seat and discover you've got a 'restricted view'. Or (usually five minutes before the start) someone with the height and physique of Jonah Lomu will take their seat ... the one that's right in front of yours.

In a classroom environment, if your desks are in clusters – unless you've got a really big space to work with – it's difficult to find a solution where at least one or two students don't have their backs to the board. But, there are other things to consider.

Sommer argues that, far from being a 'single homogenous space cube' a classroom is lots of connected micro-environments. 'The lighting is much better in one part of the room than elsewhere, it is cold over by the windows, and perhaps too warm by the heating vent. The view of the blackboard differs dramatically from one part of the room to another often because of a glare from the ceiling lights.'

This advice dates back to the 1970s but it's still relevant today. With BYOD and one-to-one laptops, and electronic smartboards, screen glare from ceiling lights and windows can be a problem. And there's more. Sommer adds: 'A few students may have an outside view, others don't. Someone may be teaching in a room for years without realizing the students in a quadrant of the room will have difficulty seeing the blackboard or charts. There may also be a physical barrier between students in the rear and portions of the blackboard, such as a tall student in a front desk.'

When was the last time you looked at things from a student perspective? Have you put yourselves in their shoes (or seat, in this case) or even checked with everyone if they can see and hear properly?



Section 4 Resources

Classroom layout – what does the research say?

Deciding who sits where

In primary settings, it's often the teacher who decides where students sit. In secondary, where you're not based in one classroom for most or all of the day, some teachers are happy to let students choose a seat at the start of each lesson.

Fernandes, Huang & Rinaldo (2011) say it would be good for students if the learning activity dictated the seating. On the topic of giving a free choice of seats, they point out the learning experience for students is different for those at the front than for those nearer the back of the room. And, throwing it open to students to decide means some will get a better pick than others. 'Students who enter the classroom first may be in the position to select desirable seats first; thus, those who are unable to come first may be left with seats they do not desire ...'

As a teacher, if you're deciding who sits where there can be lots of reasons for your choices. It could be about a group task involving specific students, it could be about ability (for example, grouping similar abilities or setting up cluster tables to encourage peer support), or it could be about behaviour management (for example, putting space between certain students, or moving some closer to your own desk).

A recent study in the Netherlands explored not only the different types of seating arrangements in elementary schools, but also the teachers' considerations for deciding who sits where (Gremmen, van den Berg, Segers, & Cillessen, 2016).

'At the beginning of the school year, as part of classroom management, teachers face the question of how and where to seat their students. This is an important decision, as classroom seating arrangements influence classroom climate and students' relationships with each other ...' they note.

'[Teachers] determine whom students sit close to, whom they are exposed to, and with whom they interact during the school day. Unfortunately, this aspect of classroom management is hardly addressed in teacher training, even though the physical design of the classroom has shown to be important for both the academic and social development of students.'

When asked about opting for certain classroom arrangements, the 50 teachers in the study mentioned between two and 19 reasons – most of them were academic (31 per cent) but 17 per cent of the reasons were related to classroom management. Almost half of the teachers in the study (48 per cent), chose to divide students into small groups, 40 per cent chose rows and 12 per cent chose a different arrangement.

The researchers found: 'The most frequently mentioned reason for small groups was cooperation between students, whereas teachers who chose rows did so to create a quiet atmosphere in which students can work well academically.' Interestingly, more teachers (70 per cent) actually preferred small groups but they didn't always opt for that arrangement, particularly at the start of the year. 'Teachers mentioned they start with rows in the beginning of the school year to get students to concentrate and try to work with groups later in the year.'

Which brings us back to Sommer's suggestion to choose something that works for you and your students, in your context, at that particular point in time.

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Classroom layout – what does the research say?

Discussion Questions

1 When was the last time you looked at your classroom layout from a student perspective?

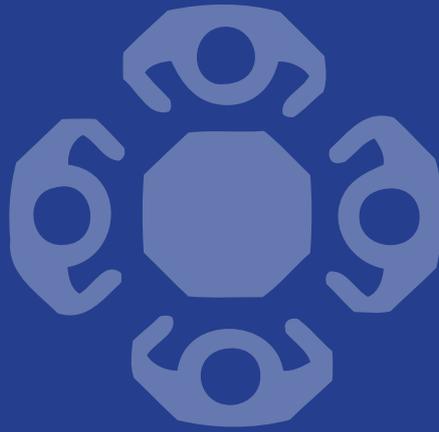
2 Do you regularly check if everyone can see and hear properly?

3 Does the learning activity dictate the seating arrangement in your classroom?

4 Do you change your layout according to different activities or at different times of the year?

5 Can you justify your choice of classroom seating arrangement on the basis of educational goals?





To develop creative, articulate, respectful and resourceful young people
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Instructional Rounds Handbook

Semester II: 2017

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