



Evaluating and reporting change

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The Principles of Learning and Teaching P-12 and the PoLT program were developed and refined through a comprehensive research process. Similarly, the program is in itself a research program, generating data on which to base initiatives and then implementing and monitoring these. The development of research questions and the collection of evidence is central to this process. The action planning process which lies at the centre of the program has a lot in common with classical action research. The PoLT program needs to be thought of not simply as a method of action, but as a research process. Having a general idea of what needs changing and a broad direction to take is fine at one level. However, refining ideas about what is needed and what questions we need to ask ourselves, and working out what measures we would require to know when we have improved, is a powerful way of clarifying and thinking more deeply about our practice and of demonstrating to ourselves and others the effectiveness of our investment in time and resources.

Monitoring school-based initiatives

Some of the monitoring function will be served by observations and the outcomes of informal conversations with teachers and discussion in meetings. Some thought needs to be given to how monitoring can proceed so that the feedback helps with ongoing ideas and planning. For example, coordinators can:

- provide proformas for student and teacher feedback on classroom teaching initiatives, focusing on such things as quality of ideas coming out, amount of higher order thinking, extent to which all students are engaged, quality of work produced, student enjoyment and the richness or otherwise of their input
- arrange for teachers trying out strategies to report on and provide evaluation of them at a single-purpose meeting and to discuss the reasons for their success or otherwise
- document the developments that are occurring and ensure they are readily accessible to teachers in a form that will make it easy for the final report – recording strategies and accompanying comments on the school intranet will encourage discussion.

Self-monitoring

Coordinators and teachers can develop the habit of evaluating their own teaching and the students' learning in the following ways.

- 1 By keeping a set of unstructured progress notes:
Make informal notes about how well or badly the innovation went, immediately after lessons.

2 By developing a structured response sheet. For example:

- a** a sheet like the following from PEEL (Project for Enhancing Effective Learning) – refer to PoLT resources pages.

Comment on	New teaching strategy	Previous strategies
My questioning		
Nature of student input		
Quality and length of class discussion		
Designing activities		
Student questions		
Student responses to each others' ideas		

- b** an evaluative proforma with colleagues

Aims of the initiative	
How I felt it went, and why	
What worked and what didn't, and how I judge that	
Ideas for improvement	

3 By attempting to develop some semi-quantitative measures based on what they are aiming to do.

- a** if attempting to move toward more openended questions to encourage deeper level student responses:
 - write down some questions to try as examples
 - note the nature of own questions and jot down, afterwards, which questions worked best, and estimate how many questions were open-ended
 - see if this can be increased over time
 - note the nature of the quality of student discussion, perhaps using a simple classification system.

- b** If attempting to increase the number of decisions students make about project work:
 - take standard projects and recast them so students have to make decisions about different aspects
 - develop a grid to keep track of the different aspects they take responsibility for
 - keep a set of comments on the problems and successes experienced in supporting them to make such decisions
 - keep a count over time of the increase in the number of student decisions.

Monitoring students' perspectives or responses

Student-monitoring techniques involve developing ways of describing changes in student behaviour or understanding as different strategies are implemented. It may be possible to link changes with different aspects of a strategy – if new ways of doing things are trialed, and the student responses improve, then a strategy can be considered to be effective.

1 Written responses.

A brief questionnaire can be given to students at the end of a lesson. For example:

These questions are to help us judge how well the lessons are supporting your learning.	
• What do you think was the main thing I intended you to learn this lesson?	
• What do you think you learned from the lesson?	
• What was the most interesting thing we did, that helped you learn?	
• What could we have done that might have helped you learn better?	

2 Verbal responses.

A protocol can be developed whereby at the end of each lesson a few minutes are spent going over similar questions to those above, as a lesson review. The quality of this discussion should be monitored as well as the students' judgments about what worked for them.

Monitoring student engagement with ideas and evidence

Engagement can be thought of in terms of the whole class, or of individual responses to learning and class activities. This could be judged by such things as:

- the level of discussion of conceptual ideas
- the extent to which discussion is sustained
- the degree of absorption of students in tasks (perhaps measured by how long they spend in focused discussion, or the extent to which they act autonomously when making decisions and arrangements)
- the extent to which all this is reflected in their work (i.e. the work is not just thrown together but is thought through)
- the level of interest they show in teacher feedback.

Engagement may be monitored through the:

- 1 development of a rubric that gauges the level of class discussion

This could be filled out for a target lesson, perhaps once a week, as a reflective aid.

Level A: Student responses mainly low level, short and factual. Few students participate.

Level B: At least one third of student responses are extended and at a higher level, developing explanations. At least half students participate.

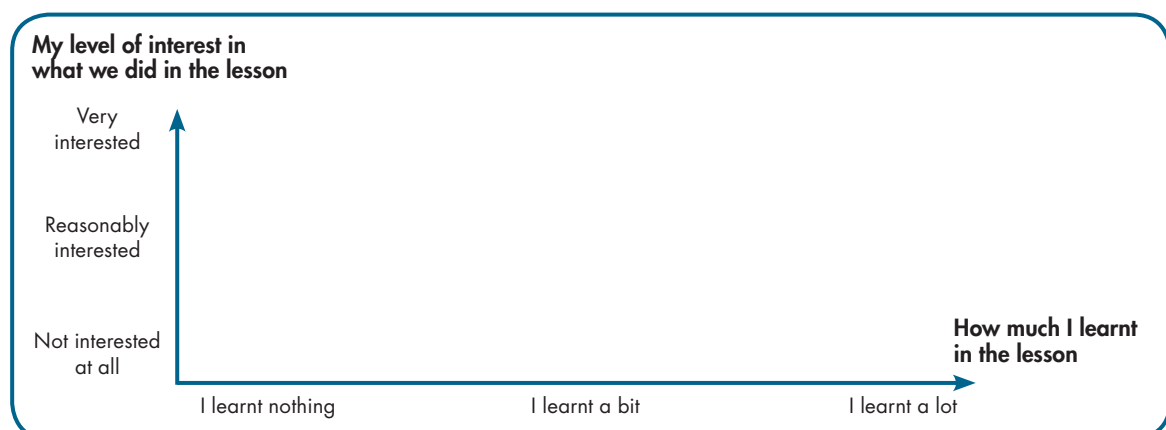
Level C: At least one third of student responses are speculative and occasionally students respond to each other's points. Most students participate.

Level D: Most student responses are at a high level, and are speculative or develop arguments. The class is fully engaged.

- 2 development of a group response chart that can be done quickly

For example, the teacher could construct a graph on an overhead projector. At the end of the lesson, each student comes up and puts a cross to indicate their response to the lesson.

Group response graph



- 3** assessment of individual students' involvement
If attempting to increase students' engagement with tasks by providing a variety of options to cater for different learning styles, the teacher should give each student a score for their involvement in productive activity:
- 0** Not involved at all. Withdrawn or disruptive.
 - 1** Becomes involved only with a lot of encouragement, and works at low level.
 - 2** Involved, and works at a good level on some task aspects.
 - 3** Very involved, and seems to enjoy completing the task to best ability.
- 4** development of a rubric that measures students' ability to raise investigable questions when working in groups
If students are to develop the ability to raise questions to explore in investigative work, the teacher should observe, through informal interview while circulating around groups, the extent to which this is happening.
- 0** No questions asked that leads to observations.
 - 1** Low-level questions asked or questions that cannot be investigated.
 - 2** Some questions asked by one or two group members but the others seem incapable.
 - 3** Group has asked a number of questions that have led to productive exploration.
- 5** development of a questionnaire for students, perhaps given at the end of each semester.

Below are some possible questions to put to students to measure engagement:

Enjoyment and interest

We do things in this subject that interest me. I enjoy the discussion in our class. I learn new and interesting ideas in this subject. I learn to think in this subject.

Involvement

I get involved in class discussions about ideas. I get the chance to make decisions about what I do. I get quite involved in the work that we do. I care about the quality of my work.

Challenge to ideas

I have opportunities to talk about my ideas and opinions. The teacher lets us discuss things that interest us in this subject. Students in our class come up with interesting ideas. As a class we challenge each other's ideas and think things through.