



Leading change

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## The PoLT Coordinator as a change facilitator

The PoLT Coordinator is the key person in framing and supporting the development of learning and teaching practice within a school. To do this well the coordinator will need to:

- build a strong rationale for PoLT by identifying the links with the Victorian Essential Learning Standards and the new Assessment and Reporting advice.
- provide leadership for teachers in the school to review current practice, and plan and implement a process of change to improve learning and teaching in the school
- manage a strategic process, leading to a school action plan that reflects the school's approach to prioritising and implementing the Principles in P–12 classrooms
- work with the teachers in the school to implement the action plan and incorporate the Principles into classroom practice, for instance by chairing planning meetings, helping to develop and monitor teaching strategies or encouraging the sharing of ideas
- coordinate a professional development program to support teachers in developing new learning and teaching strategies
- monitor classroom practices using the Component Map and other evaluation measures
- work with the school leadership team to support the project and keep them informed of its progress.

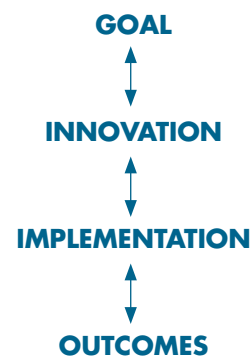
If the PoLT program is being implemented as a cluster, the coordinator will need to liaise with the Cluster Coordinator and work with other schools in the cluster to develop a shared pedagogical focus and joint actions, articulated in a cluster action plan.

The audit tools and advice about planning, implementing and monitoring change will provide many practical ideas for offering leadership. In particular, the Effective Team Practices Questionnaire (see page 52) will provide the opportunity to work with the team to discuss issues that relate to leadership. As a facilitator of change in the school, the coordinator may already have a

deep understanding of the nature of the initiatives in which the school is involved. As well as this knowledge they will need an understanding of the process of implementation through which the many changes will be delivered.

What does it mean to implement a new teaching strategy or an organisational arrangement?

The term 'implementation' is often loosely used to mean the same thing as change, yet it has a deeper meaning. Implementation is a process which is characterised by evidence of some change(s) having taken place. Implementation potentially involves changes in resources and materials, behaviours and, ultimately, values and beliefs. It can be shown in simple terms in the following statement:



In this diagram, the term 'innovation' refers to a program, project element, strategy or initiatives in an action plan developed to address the issues that have been identified. What does this mean for the teacher who will be trying to use new approaches to their teaching or adopting new organisational arrangements?

Research on implementation tells us that bringing about change is a process that takes time. We also know that each individual must be nurtured through the process since it is usually complex, involving the use of new learning materials or specific teaching strategies and ultimately the development of deeper beliefs about the value of the changes being implemented.

What does implementation look like in practice? What does it mean to say that a teacher is implementing higher order thinking skills or a new teaching strategy?

If a teacher is implementing a new teaching strategy such as problem-based learning, it will be possible to observe the teacher using the approach in the classroom. This is not to say that in the beginning the teacher is either confident or expert in using the new approach. However, given adequate resources and training and appropriate support (see below), the teacher will become proficient and the approach will, in time, become a part of their regular repertoire of teaching strategies. When this has occurred, we can say that the behaviour has become institutionalised. That is, there is a high probability that it will be sustained in the future.

If initiatives are to be successfully implemented in the terms described above, then three broad working principles need to be attended to. The three key aspects of the implementation process are set out below:



**Resources:** Teachers need to be provided with the necessary resources to assist with the development of their pedagogical repertoire. This may include time for planning, or accessing learning and teaching materials, or particular timetable arrangements.

**Professional learning:** Meeting the professional learning needs of teachers is essential for renewal and growth. This can occur in a number of ways, through participation in the PoLT Professional Development modules (see page 76) and the on-line Professional Learning Resource, or general discussion and mentoring from colleagues.

**Support:** As people experience the change process, they need to receive appropriate support. This implies the establishment of support structures within the school and cluster which may include participation in a PLT, peer observation, shadowing, team teaching, coaching or mentoring.

**Implementation:** A combination of these three kinds of interventions will ensure that the innovation is successfully implemented.

Teachers will differ in their knowledge about and enthusiasm for many of the initiatives being implemented. Teachers will come to a change process with personal concerns about how the project will affect them. Each teacher needs to be supported in particular ways that meet their specific concerns. It is important that the coordinator address the specific concerns of each teacher while also looking after the overall concerns of the group.

Over time, through successive implementation efforts based on the above processes, teachers' beliefs and values will change, while the overall culture of the organisation will also undergo transformation. The goal of implementation will then have been achieved and the potential of future sustainability greatly enhanced.

The sections that follow provide suggestions of many specific strategies and interventions that coordinators can use to support teachers in their school and cluster.

## Leadership: helping individuals and groups

The PoLT Coordinator needs to develop a clear vision of what PoLT is about and the directions needed to improve learning and teaching in the school, as well as a commitment to encouraging and nurturing change. The PoLT Coordinator will need to think about leadership strategies in relating to teachers in different groupings or teams, and contexts.

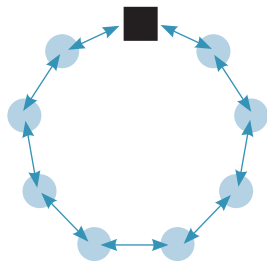
An important issue for PoLT Coordinators is ensuring the involvement of all teachers in the professional learning teams. It may be the case that a number of teachers are not interested in changing their teaching, or their patterns of commitment to students. There are also sometimes personal issues to deal with.

The coordinator will need to provide leadership; to move beyond planning offerings and suggestions and work out ways to encourage teacher commitment to improving learning and teaching. It is important to achieve a balance between being assertive and demanding on the one hand, and being supportive and flexible on the other.

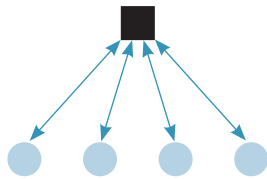
## Some ways in which PoLT Coordinators work

PoLT Coordinators will work at various levels with teachers, perhaps with the whole staff, in meetings, with professional learning teams working on particular initiatives, and with individual teachers. The task will involve being able to adjust continually between these different levels to support the project.

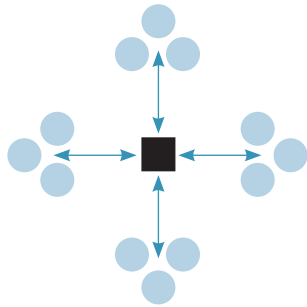
## Ways of working with teachers



*PoLT Coordinator works with teachers in planning meetings*



*PoLT Coordinator works with individual teachers*



*PoLT Coordinator supports teams of teachers working on initiatives*

In the PoLT program, the planning and implementation will be done by an overlapping network of professional learning teams, each providing impetus and taking responsibility for particular areas of innovation. These may be organisationally based, or based on year level or learning area, and some will be cross-cluster teams working on joint initiatives. The term 'team' must therefore be interpreted broadly.

There are many strategies PoLT Coordinators can use to support the change process.

### *Team building – encouraging a common agenda*

- Make a deliberate attempt to involve relevant teachers. Full- or half-day planning sessions are very useful for gaining momentum. Conduct a whole-staff planning day based around pedagogy.
- Use project resources to ensure a productive atmosphere – organise lunch for a professional learning team strategy workshop, or organise afternoon meetings, with lunch provided.

- Undertake a curriculum review—linking PoLT to the Victorian Essential Learning Standards will be a useful initial focus for year level teams or learning area teams.
- Make regular contributions to staff meetings. It is a good way of involving all teachers in the project. For instance, allocating a few minutes during staff meetings to address one of the Principles has the effect of keeping the Principles of Learning and Teaching P–12 constantly as a priority.
- Set up mechanisms for regular contact and communication; this may mean regular personal contact or emails circulated with meeting agendas and minutes. Timelines help with task completion and engender collective ownership and responsibility.
- Encourage all teachers to work together on one initiative, for instance developing and trialing cooperative learning activities/units, focusing on assessment, or using their contacts to collect planning proformas and then designing one for the school.
- Ensure that teachers, having agreed on an approach, trial strategies in their classrooms and report back.

### *Supporting teams working on initiatives*

- Work out ways to ensure that groups of teachers (e.g. a Year 6/7 planning team) can meet together.
- Provide regular meeting times and encourage the setting of deadlines to ensure the demands of the project do not slip down the priority list.
- Continue to meet with small teams from time to time to revisit items on action plans. This invigorates the issues and allows for any changes to be monitored.
- During meetings, teachers will initially ask for ideas. It is important to respond to this need and also to provide opportunities for teachers to ask why the activities work and what the theory is behind them. The PoLT on-line Professional Learning Resource (see the PoLT Resources page) has been designed to respond to these needs and will provide useful direction and support. Enlist the help of other teachers with particular expertise, to provide advice and ideas on strategies and activities.
- Continually prompt and offer support, particularly before planning meetings. Be actively involved when units of work or curriculum sequences are being planned, giving guidance and suggesting possibilities.

### *Supporting individual teachers*

There are many ways of working with individual teachers.

- Work with a teacher to develop and then implement new teaching strategies. Team teaching can be a powerful way of monitoring initiatives and developing a shared understanding. Visiting teachers' classes to support what they are doing enables you to promote it with other teachers and the school administration.
- Introduce coaching where teachers wishing to improve a particular aspect of their teaching enlist the help of another teacher with expertise in that area.
- Direct teachers to the on-line Professional Learning Resource to find out more about the Principle they are focusing on.
- Aim to become a resource for teachers to discuss their ideas and try to support them with additional resources and further ideas.
- Search for websites that are useful and mention them to teachers or bookmark them on computers.
- Initiate discussions about effective learning and teaching in planning meetings.

### *Encouraging innovation and involvement*

- Build a rapport and involve the principal and/or leadership team to support the innovation and initiatives of the action plan.
- Encourage experimentation – effective coordinators are team players who encourage teachers to take risks and become involved. A large part of the role may be helping teachers develop the confidence to tackle 'new' teaching ideas. Celebrate successes with teachers and give lots of constructive feedback.
- Try a variety of innovative approaches – get classes involved with different ideas. See which ones work and develop them. It is important to maintain the momentum.
- Avoid feeling frustrated. You, and the staff, need to recognise that real change will be slow.

### *Allowing for individual foci*

- The teacher Component Map discussions are useful for identifying individual teachers' strengths and the areas that they are interested in developing. They may promote immediate individual actions in many cases. Time for reflection is imperative in the process. Don't rush into implementing a strategy straight after the interviews. Allow time for this to evolve.
- Initial tasks can be based on teachers' main interests and most immediate needs. This can engage teachers who may initially sit on the periphery – they can actually become key players.

- Encourage teachers to work first with areas they want to change and feel comfortable with. This initial success is important to enable teachers to move on. It also ensures that all teachers become involved in doing something, and it allows them to identify what is working well.
- Use teacher expertise in planning meetings. In this way responsibility is shared around and teachers become involved in areas of strength.

### *Getting teachers on board*

A large part of the secret to getting all teachers on board is good planning and working at developing a team ethos. The following suggestions are offered for dealing with negative teacher attitudes during a major change process:

- Put effort where it will bear fruit.
- Be patient with slow starters and try to work with school-based initiatives that will enlist their support. Encourage them to work on things they nominate as areas of change.
- Get to know the particular teachers involved and what their beliefs and their needs are, and support them accordingly.
- Make sure that the principal is on board to the extent that he or she generates an expectation of new school-based initiatives.
- Generate an atmosphere of change using enthusiasts and make sure they get to report at meetings about what worked for them and how students felt. Gradually others will come on board.
- Organise a long meeting, away from the school if possible, with food and a clear task.
- Get teachers to feel good about the initiative by ensuring that it is reported and mentioned in general staff meetings, by producing publicity and stories, and by having displays or reports to school council etc., so they feel part of something that gathers momentum.

For further reading on leadership see the leadership framework linking Sergiovanni's Model of Transformational Leadership and two descriptions of leadership capabilities. Go to <http://www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/blueprint/fs3/default.asp> and click on the effective leaders diagram. While this leadership model is designed for principals it is also relevant to the PolT coordinator managing change.