Collaborative Professional Learning

Professional learning in schools will be most effective and have a larger impact on student learning when it is collaborative, relevant and future focused, supporting teachers to reflect, question and continuously improve their practice (AITSL, 2012). Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) discuss that building professional capital within the school is vital for school transformation, as the group is much more powerful than any individual. For professional learning to have impact on improving student learning, it cannot be an isolated activity. Professional development must be an ongoing and collaborative exercise, where teachers actively create, build and sustain a high level of professional capital in the school.

Collaborative professional inquiry is a key factor in raising student outcomes, through teachers being engaged in research and inquiry cycles and evaluative and reflective conversations to interrogate ideas and current practices in the school. In this process teachers are given the responsibility to decide what strategies to test in their classrooms, and through the collective support of peers collaboratively refelct on impact they have had on student learning. Following are some example frameworks for collaborative professional learning that all have inquiry at the centre of teacher learning, with collaboration and relevance to teacher practice key pieces.

The NSW Department of Education’s School Excellence Framework (2017) supports collaborative professional learning and the development of a professional learning community within and across schools. 

Professional learning communities are spaces where teachers work collaboratively, focusing on student learning rather than teaching and holding themselves accountable for results (Dufour, 2004). High performing professional learning communitites focus on four questions to dive collaborative teams: ‘what do we want students to learn; how will we know if they have learned it; what will we do if they have not learned it; and how will we provide extended opprtunitites for students who have mastered the content?’ (Dufour & Reeves, 2016). To support a collaborative professional learning community in schools, Hargreaves and O’Connor (2018) developed principles of collaborative professionalism: ‘collective autonomy [Teachers work interdependently with each other, with less dependence on top-down authority]; collective efficacy; collaborative inquiry; collective responsibility; collective initiative; mutal dialogue; joint work; common meaning and purpose; collaborating with students and big-picture thinking for all’.

Following are outlines of collaborative professional learning frameworks that schools can use to complement professional learning in the school, building professional and social capital to improve student learning.

**Research**

AITSL (2012) Australian Charter for the Professional Learning of Teachers and School Leaders. Retrieved from <https://www.aitsl.edu.au/tools-resources/resource/australian-charter-for-the-professional-learning-of-teachers-and-school-leaders> on 3 May 2019.

DuFour, R., & Reeves, D. (2016) The Futility of PLC Lite. Phi Delta Kappan, 97(6).

DuFour, Richard. (2004) What is professional learning community? Educational Leadership, 61(8). Retrieved from [http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/may04/vol61/num08/What-Is-a-Professional-Learning-Community%A2.aspx](http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/may04/vol61/num08/What-Is-a-Professional-Learning-Community%EF%BF%BD.aspx) on 6 June 2019.

Hargreaves, A. & O’Connor, M. (2018) Collaborative Professionalism. Corwin, USA.

Hargreaves, A. & Fullan, M. (2012) Professional Capital: Transforming Teaching in Every School. New York: Teachers College Press.

Harris, A. & Jones, M. (2017) Leading professional learning: putting teachers at the centre. School Leadership & Management, 37(4).

#### Lesson Study

The lesson study process involves a team of teachers collaborating through planning, teaching & observation, feedback and refinement of lesson and evaluation and reflection, with a focus on student learning. This collaborative professional learning process takes time to complete and requires teachers to be involved in all aspects – both the process and the product.

The process begins with the team deciding on the aim and objectives of the lesson study cycle. The focus could be on a pedagogical challenge or identified student needs. The team collaboratively design the lesson, focusing on and predicting how students will engage in the learning and the impact of the lesson. Through this process, teachers reflect on choice of teaching strategies and instructional experiences with the student at the centre.

One teacher leads the lesson with their class, while the remaining team members observe, taking note of impact on student learning. Following the lesson, the team discusses feedback and adapts the original lesson to improve further.

A second participant teaches the refined lesson with their class, with the rest of the team observing.

A final feedback session is completed, with the final discussion focused on the aim and objectives of the lesson study, any similarities, difference or changes observed throughout the cycle.

A report is produced to document teacher learning, which is shared with other teachers in the school. This is also suitable evidence for teacher Professional Development Plans and for measuring impact of professional learning, documenting of school milestones in School Plans and for External Validation purposes. Coenders & Verhoef, 2018.

##### Example of how use with SLEC professional learning modules

Course: Teaching and learning in innovative learning environments

Lesson study focus is on embedding the principles of innovative learning environments or the learning modes to support effective student learning. This could be done in increments, with 1 or 2 principles or modes focused on at a time, as multiple cycles of lesson study can be used to embed changed practice throughout the school.

##### Lesson study research

* Video example & how-to guide <https://www.aitsl.edu.au/tools-resources/resource/lesson-study>
* Coenders,F. & Verhoef, N. (2018) Lesson Study: Professional Development (PD) for Beginning and Experienced Teachers. Professional Development in Education, 45:2. Retrieved from https://www. tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/19415257.2018.1430050 on 30 May 2019.
* Kanellopoulou, E-M. & Darra, M. (2018) The Planning of Teaching in the Context of Lesson Study: Research Findings. International Education Studies, Vol. 11, No.2. Retrieved from [https://files.eric.ed.gov/ fulltext/EJ1167655.pdf](https://files.eric.ed.gov/%20fulltext/EJ1167655.pdf) on 30 May 2019.

#### Instructional Rounds

Instructional rounds is a strategy for engaging teachers, school leaders and system leaders in investigating instructional practices within a school and identifying the impact of these practices on student learning. Instructional rounds alone will not improve student learning. Instructional rounds provide an accelerant to school improvement, by focusing on what is happening in classrooms, ties improvement to teaching practice and student learning.

A group of leaders or teachers visit multiple classrooms at their own or another school with the aim of spreading practice and supporting scaling systemic improvements of teaching and learning. During this process, instruction is examined in fine detail and precise, non-­judgmental language is used to identify specific strategies used by teachers, to explore student learning and behaviour and to gather evidence about learning and teaching in a particular context, across a school or a network of schools.

Instructional rounds differs from more traditional approaches to classroom visits or observation as the observer is expected to learn something themselves. Rounds requires participants to 'hold up a mirror' (City, 2011) to their own practice as they observe teaching in other classrooms with the aim of understanding what is happening in classrooms, and with a view towards identifying how they can get closer to the learning that they (collectively)  would like to see in all classrooms.

The process is heavily descriptive and analytical rather than evaluative, observers noting what they see rather than what they think about it. The non-­judgemental aspect of rounds makes it a less daunting prospect for teachers than a more traditional observation process. For these reasons, instructional rounds is a very powerful strategy for professional learning as all involved in the process have a stake in improving the learning outcomes for students.

##### Why use instructional rounds?

Instructional rounds focuses on school-­wide improvement rather than the improvement of individual teachers and students. This increases a sense of ownership and accountability for the process of change and improved outcomes and builds a collaborative approach to school improvement. This focus on broader, systemic improvement supports the scaling of interventions to address an identified 'problem of practice' across a number of contexts, and potentially the system as a whole. Using non-judgmental language and being analytical rather than descriptive helps to separate the practice from the person and enables more teachers to feel confident in opening up their classroom, engaging in professional discussions and suggesting ways forward to improve practice.

**Key elements**

* Collaborative identification of an aspect of practice or school life to focus on in depth.
* Sharing practice with a mutual commitment to the improvement of practice.
* Focusing on describing what is observed in the context of the focus 'problem', not judging or evaluating.
* Trusting relationships between teachers and a sense of security in the school environment.

##### How do we implement instructional rounds?

Instructional rounds is a strategy for engaging teachers, school leaders and system leaders in investigating instructional practices within a school and identifying the impact of these practices on student learning. However, you do need to consider a few things in the planning process:

##### Example of how use with SLEC professional learning modules

Course: Any course is applicable. Instructional rounds can be used at different stages of embedding changed practice or improvement in a school. Instructional rounds can be used to collect targeted data about learning at the school, to inform decision making and development of ongoing professional learning and support to improve the ‘problem of practice’. Following a sequence of professional learning and support, instructional rounds can be used to measure the impact of professional learning on student learning.

Innovative learning environemnts: Investigate how ‘students are at the centre of learning’ at the school. Following initial professional learning in the 7 principles of innovative learning environments, the school may initially focus on 1 or 2 principles to embed throughout the school. The team uses instructional rounds to develop an understanding of the extent of changed practice and effectiveness in classrooms throughout the school. The evidence collected, analysed and shared with the school will be used to define, develop and deliver the next phase of support for individual teachers and the whole school.

##### Instructional Rounds Research

* Video example & how-to guide <https://www.aitsl.edu.au/tools-resources/resource/instructional-rounds>
* City, E. (2011) Learning from Instructional Rounds. Coaching: The New Leadership Skill, 69:2. Retrieved from [http://sai.dynamicwebware.com/Leadership/Superintendents%20Network/RoundsAndNetworks/ Liz%20City%20Learning%20from%20Instructional%20Rounds.pdf](http://sai.dynamicwebware.com/Leadership/Superintendents%20Network/RoundsAndNetworks/%20Liz%20City%20Learning%20from%20Instructional%20Rounds.pdf) on 30 May 2019.
* Marzano, E. (2011) The Art and Science of Teaching/ Making the Most of Instructional Rounds. Educational Leadership, 68:5. Retrieved from <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/feb11/vol68/num05/Making-the-Most-of-Instructional-Rounds.aspx> on 30 May 2019.
* Teitel, L. (2014) School Based Instructional Rounds: Tackling problems of practice with teachers. Harvard Education Letter, 30:1. Retrieved from <https://learningforward.org/docs/default-source/e-learning/teitel-hel-school-based-rounds-article-jan-2014.pdf?sfvrsn=2> on 30 May 2019.
* Teitel, L. (2009) Improving Teaching and Learning through Instructional Rounds. Harvard Education Letter, 25:3. Retrieved from <https://www.hepg.org/hel-home/issues/25_3/helarticle/improving-teaching-and-learning-through-instructio#home> on 30 May 2019.
* NSW Department of Education Teacher Quality Advisors can support schools in using instructional rounds.

#### Learning Walks

Learning walks are non-evaluative, brief observations of classroom practice followed by collaborative reflective discussions, to improve practice. The idea is that teachers will develop an understanding of their current practice and act to improve based on what they have seen through the learning walk observations of others’ practice. Learning walks focus on ‘learning from the observed teacher, with a lesser focus on providing feedback’ (AITSL).

A group of teachers, with the support of leadership, visit multiple classrooms within their school, to develop a shared understanding of quality teaching. The learning walk is focused on the observing teachers’ goals and learning needs which are linked to school priorities.

##### Example of how use with SLEC professional learning modules

Course: Teaching and learning in innovative learning environments

Learning Walks can be used for teachers to develop their skills in effectively using learning modes to activate student learning. This is done by identifying a quality practitioner in the school who purposefully uses learning modes to engage students in deep learning.

##### Learning Walks Research

* Video example & how-to guide <https://www.aitsl.edu.au/tools-resources/resource/learning-walks>
* Feeney, E. (2014) Design Principles for Learning to Guide Teacher Walk Throughs. The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas, 87:1.
* Finch, P. (2010) Learning Walk Continuum. *School Administrator,* 67:10. Retrieved from <http://www.aasa.org/SchoolAdministratorArticle.aspx?id=16798> on 30 May 2019.

#### Collaborative Action Research

Collaborative action research groups are teacher led and focused on teachers understanding what is occurring in their classrooms and collaboratively finding, enacting and evaluating changes to improve student learning. Teachers simultaneously investigate problems and take action to solve them – ‘it is sustained, intentional, recursive and dynamic’ (Pine, 2008, p29-30). Action research ensures that teachers are the drivers of educational change in the school to improve student learning. Action research can be focused on the needs of specific students, instructional strategies or classroom management strategies. Action research is a cycle of inquiry and reflection based around a problem of practice or question.

##### Action Research Process

Analyse

Report

Share

Evaluate

Implement

Revisit

Identify

Inform

Organise

Trial

Collect

Question

NSW DET, 2010, p2-3.

**Plan**

* Identify the problem of practice
* Develop questions to be answered through research – projects from other schools, professional reading
* Create a plan for implementation.

**Act**

* Trial the change
* Collect evidence of impact (or not)
* Interrogate the process and review as necessary

**Observe**

* Collate and analyse the evidence
* Collaboratively discuss findings
* Write a report and share findings with colleagues

**Reflect**

* Evaluate the process
* Implement the findings or new/revised strategy
* Revisit the action research process

Action research is cyclical and based on critical reflection by the participants. As it is a flexible process there may be times when the process stops mid-stream before starting a new cycle. When starting a second cycle the problem of practice would already be identified from the analysis of evidence.

Action research groups should be viewed as formal professional learning communities, as they involve classroom observations, constructive feedback to teachers, strong professional collaboration and school-based research.

##### Example of how use with SLEC professional learning modules

Course: Teaching and learning in innovative learning environments

Collaborative action research could be used to embed effective teaching strategies that align with the 7 principles of ILEs and activate learning modes. For example, the team has heard that project based learning or problem based learning is an effective strategy to improve student engagement and depth of learning, and that it meets the criteria for an ILE. The team will complete as many cycles of action research as required to build their understanding and skill in embedding in their practice.

##### Action Research Resources

* Video example of action research for professional learning: <https://www.aitsl.edu.au/tools-resources/resource/action-research-for-professional-learning-illustration-of-practice>
* Kolk, M. (N.D.) Embrace Action Research. The Creative Educator. Retrieved from <https://www.thecreativeeducator.com/v07/articles/Embracing_Action_Research> 3 June 2019.
* New South Wales Department of Education and Training (NSW DET). (2010) Professional Learning and Leadership Directorate. Retrieved from [https://www.google.com.au/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source= web&cd=2&ved=2ahUKEwj43779rMziAhWJfn0KHaxiAQwQFjABegQICxAE&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.researchgate.net%2Fprofile%2FDickson\_Adom%2Fpost%2FAction\_research%2Fattachment%2F59d654e279197b80779ac41b%2FAS%253A523197914914816%25401501751511967%2Fdownload%2Factreguide.pdf&usg=AOvVaw2vLr2oZKmGv2Oqy0tfR0Zl](https://www.google.com.au/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=%20web&cd=2&ved=2ahUKEwj43779rMziAhWJfn0KHaxiAQwQFjABegQICxAE&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.researchgate.net%2Fprofile%2FDickson_Adom%2Fpost%2FAction_research%2Fattachment%2F59d654e279197b80779ac41b%2FAS%253A523197914914816%25401501751511967%2Fdownload%2Factreguide.pdf&usg=AOvVaw2vLr2oZKmGv2Oqy0tfR0Zl) on 3 June 2019.
* NSW DOE School example, Stacey Quince <https://www.teachermagazine.com.au/articles/using-an-action-learning-model>
* Pine, G. (2008) Teacher Action Research: Building Knowledge Democracies. SAGE Publications, Inc. Retrived from <https://www.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/27030_2.pdf> 3 June 2019.
* Ritchhart, R. Retrieved from [http://www.ronritchhart.com/Current\_Work/Entries/2015/9/ 14\_Inquiry\_Action\_Projects.html](http://www.ronritchhart.com/Current_Work/Entries/2015/9/%2014_Inquiry_Action_Projects.html) on 29 May 2019.
* Sagor, R. (2000) Guiding School Improvement with Action Research. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. Retrieved from [http://www.ascd.org/publications/books/100047/chapters/ What-Is- Action-Research%C2%A2.aspx](http://www.ascd.org/publications/books/100047/chapters/%20What-Is-%20Action-Research%C2%A2.aspx) on 3 June 2019.
* Teacher Action Research: Collaborative, Participatory, and Democratic Inquiry. Retrieved from [https://www.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/27030\_2.pdf on 30 May 2019](https://www.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/27030_2.pdf%20on%2030%20May%202019).
* The Journal of Teacher Action Research. Reports of teacher action research projects. <http://www.practicalteacherresearch.com/>

#### Peer Coaching

Peer coaching is a long-term professional learning strategy which provides teachers with the opportunity to learn from each other in a sustained way in order to improve the teaching and learning process.

Peer coaching can take many forms including research, testing strategies, team teaching, peer observation, feedback evaluation and refinement of programs. Through peer coaching, teachers are able to trial different approaches, gather data and improve practice in order to impact on student learning.

##### Why use peer coaching?

Peer coaching often creates a less intimidating environment for people to explore different strategies, honestly reflect on their practice and see themselves as both learners and leaders. It changes the power dynamic of more traditional professional learning and empowers all teachers to see themselves as being in control of their own professional learning andhaving something to offer other teachers.

When embedded in a school culture of improvement, and when focused on teaching and curriculum, peer coaching provides an additional strategy for supporting teachers through the process of improvement. Showers and Joyce (1996) identified four main categories of peer coaching practice within schools. They are:

* Establishing a culture of standards and expectations.
* Improving instructional capacity.
* Supporting a process of ongoing evaluation.
* Connecting classroom practices to policy context.

**Key elements**

* Trusting and respectful relationships between staff are developed over time and enable peer coaching to become more honest and rigorous.
* Shared appreciation of the importance of confidentiality between the peer coaches and of the process.
* Equal relationships where both teachers learn from each other rather than one as the 'expert'.
* Culture of high expectations and focus on improvement which leads to a capacity to experiment, investigate, reflect and implement strategies in order to maximise learning for students.

**How do I facilitate peer coaching?**

**Stage 1 – Establishing partnerships**

There are a number of different approaches to establishing partnerships for peer coaching:

* Self-identified partnerships – teachers select their own peer coach. It is important that teachers have some accountability for the peer coaching process and use this to select the most effective partner. This approach may not be appropriate in all settings or contexts.
* Partnerships based on a similar grade or subject area – these partnerships would generally be established by the school leadership team, taking into consideration staff dynamics and context. This would enable teachers to focus on similar goals and collaborate to achieve improvement.
* Partnerships based on different grade or subject area – these partnerships would also generally be established by the school leadership team and may be selected based on similar goals from professional development plans, for example teachers wishing to focus on writing across subjects, or behaviour management strategies. These partnerships may also be established to build relationships amongst teachers in different stages or faculties, particularly in larger schools.

However, once the partnerships are initially established, it is important to set up a process by which teachers can seek to change partners if they are not comfortable in the peer coaching relationship.

**Stage 2 – Develop the relationship and goal setting**

* Taking time to work with teachers around the process of peer coaching will go a long way to a successful coaching experience. This would involve ensuring there is clarity about expectations for the process, the logistics of how and when coaching will take place and how outcomes will be evaluated, shared and contribute to improvement in the broader school community (where appropriate). Using a planning document, such as the [Peer coaching record template (.DOCX 45KB)](https://schoolsequella.det.nsw.edu.au/file/e4cbb4e1-8485-4cce-8d0f-1f23dbe76ddb/1/Peer-coaching-record.docx) provided, may help to plan the process carefully in order to maximise impact.
* Allowing teachers time to develop a coaching relationship, either through a structured process, or by providing time for teachers to collaborate or engage in professional dialogue in a less formal situation, will help develop a relationship in which they feel that they can be honest, take risks and reflect on their own learning and practice.
* Connecting the goals for peer coaching to broader goals, such as professional development plans and school plans, provides a context and purpose for the coaching program and helps teachers to focus their attention on aspects that will have the most impact on their practice.

**Stage 3 – Peer coaching sessions**

* **Session 1** – This session should be spent sharing goals, agreeing to the process (including times, process for feedback, dates etc) and identifying what each teacher would like to use future sessions for. Working together to set up the specific goal and task for the next peer coaching session will help to develop a shared ownership of the process. This may mean that one teacher requests that the peer coach conducts a lesson observation to gather data about the current classroom practice related to the particular goal. It may mean they discuss different strategies to implement and then select one to try through team teaching a lesson in the next session. It is important that a process is clearly established so that both teachers understand their role in the peer coaching program and take responsibility for the learning of themselves and their peer.
* **Further sessions** – It is important to only plan one session ahead to allow flexibility and responsiveness to be embedded in the process. Teachers should draw on other strategies to complement the peer coaching process such as: video recording analysis, co-planning lessons, team teaching lessons,  research and collegial discussion.

**Stage 4 – Reflection and evaluation**

While reflection and evaluation are integrated into all the coaching activities, it is important to periodically take time to step back and reflect on the broader goal. For example, if the broader goal is to 'improve collaborative learning for students', the individual professional learning strategies may include:

* the teachers identifying research/strategies to support collaborative learning and discussing them at length
* the teachers co-observing a lesson by a teacher with expertise in collaborative learning then debrief on what they observed
* the teachers co-developing a lesson which includes collaborative learning strategies
* the teachers co-delivering the lesson then debriefing.

Whilst each session has focused on an individual professional learning strategy, the next session may see the teachers return to their initial goal of 'collaborative learning' as a whole, to reflect on what they have learnt so far. This might happen after every third or fourth peer coaching session or at the end of a term or at other points appropriate to the context of the teacher and the school. This helps teachers to ensure they are remaining focused on directing improvement towards a particular goal. It also provides an opportunity to celebrate success by identifying changes already made and the impact that these are having on student learning. It may be appropriate to adjust goals at this point or set new goals if the initial one has been achieved.

##### Things to consider

Establishing a culture of peer feedback, open and transparent conversations and reflective practice will be vital to the success of peer coaching. Placing peer coaching within this culture and practices supports teachers in using it effectively to refine what is already being explored through larger school professional learning programs, mentoring and individual professional learning.

Providing systems and processes through which teachers can receive support from other members of staff if the peer coaching relationship isn't working will ensure that peer coaching remains a positive experience for all staff.

##### Example of how use with SLEC professional learning modules

Course: Teaching and learning in innovative learning environments

Peer coaching can be used for teachers to develop their skills in effectively using learning modes to activate student learning.

##### Peer Coaching Research

Ladyshewsky, R.K. (N.D.) Peer Coaching and Professional Development. Curtin University of Technology. Retrieved from [http://academicleadership.curtin.edu.au/local/docs/learnlead/program\_resources/ module\_resources/CC\_as\_Academic\_Leader/Ladyshewsky\_Peer\_Coaching.pdf on 6 June 2019](http://academicleadership.curtin.edu.au/local/docs/learnlead/program_resources/%20module_resources/CC_as_Academic_Leader/Ladyshewsky_Peer_Coaching.pdf%20on%206%20June%202019).

Munro, C. (2017) Context, Context, Context: Implementing Coaching in Schools. Retrieved from <http://www.growthcoaching.com.au/articles-new/context-context-context-implementing-coaching-in-schools?country=au> on 6 June 2019.

Robbins, P. (1991) How to Plan and Implement a Peer Coaching Program. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. Summary retrieved from [http://www.ascd.org/publications/books/61191149/ chapters/A-Definition-of-Peer-Coaching.aspx](http://www.ascd.org/publications/books/61191149/%20chapters/A-Definition-of-Peer-Coaching.aspx) 6 June 2019.

Showers, B. & Joyce, B. (1996) The Evolution of Peer Coaching. Educational Leadership, 53, 6. Retrieved from <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/mar96/vol53/num06/The-Evolution-of-Peer-Coaching.aspx> 6 June 2019.