
Quality Learning Circle Research

Making it happen.



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Provide time and opportunities

It's about critical reflection rather than comfortable collaboration

Non-threatening - set up principles for how the groups must operate

Formative Development

- Look at using two groups to analyse data from the "quality of talk" as you go
- Prebble uses a one-page summary for the meetings
- QLC facilitators meet to discuss progress towards principles and goals

Levels of Learning Talk

Challenging Talk- making change after careful analysis and critique by themselves or colleagues

Critical talk - Teacher evaluates the impact of their practice on student learning based on the information discussed and recorded.

Analytical Talk- evidenced based - allows teacher to judge their own effectiveness.

Constraints

Good **relationships** between members to allow critical reflection on practice.

Facilitator / group skill in **questioning** needs to be developed.

Agenda setting - Time/topic - Must lend itself to learning through talk

Have **critique** and maintain good relationships

Open-ended questioning- all participants

Teachers need to be open to examining and sharing their **attitudes, values, and beliefs** about what they do; and open to the attitudes, values, and beliefs of their colleagues.

Have class programmes running before the QLC begin so there is evidence to discuss and data to critique

Starting out

Understanding the process and what it looks like

All look at types of talk

Questioning

Establishing protocols - see appendix

Gathering data - what/ how

Developing facilitator skill as opposed to meeting manager.

Develop approaches to classroom observations

Develop critical reflection and sharing

Ashburton Borough School Approach- Peter Verstappen

- **Regular meetings** held for teachers to discuss a selected theme (topic) and what it means for their classroom teaching. Followed by an opportunity to **observe** other members of the QLC
- The group then convened for **further discussion and reflection** in order to construct new meanings about classroom practices.
- The QLC was **linked to** give greater meaning to the school's **appraisal system**
- The school contacted a **mentor** to work with the QLC group
- **Multiple approaches to data collection** were used
- Each member was given a copy of **Prebble and Stewarts'** 1993 book
- They followed the S&P suggested theme of **classroom routines** as being a particularly suitable beginning of the school year.
- The rest of the meeting involved establishing a timetable for the **remaking weeks** so that teachers could plan and prepare for the first round of visits

This included

1. Selecting partners
 2. **Clarifying learning intentions** for each pair
 3. Deciding **which lessons will be observed** and timetabling follow up
- Before the meeting **suggestions for** developing classroom **observations skills** were explored
 - The **front page** of the observation form would be the only sheet shown to the principal

This included

- a. The theme
- b. The corresponding professional standard dimension, and
- c. The major and minor area of focus for the observation.

The other observation notes remained the property of the teachers - This way the groups hoped to achieve confidentiality in the process while retaining a level of accountability.

Findings

- Positive improvement on the old appraisal subsystem more meaning for teachers and greater ownership of the goals
- Opportunities to see others teach were valued by all of the teachers

Each of the QLC pairs chose their own **areas of focus**. These included:

1. Teacher movements around the classroom
2. Patterns of interaction with learners (boys versus girls)
3. Ways used to gain students attention
4. The appropriateness of language for the age group of the children
5. The balance between teacher conversations about children's behavior versus the nature of the task
6. Management and timetable
7. *This could also include teacher talk versus students talk on the learning intention*
8. *An element of OPS Pedagogical principles*
9. ???

Phase 2

At the start of term 2 the QLC members selected a shared focus on numeracy, new partner combinations, and made timetable and classroom observations

This time the observation themes were more substantive and the teachers were partnered across all levels

Observations included

- **On-task behaviours for unsupervised groups**
- **Adherence** to the numeracy **lesson format** and the structure of the lesson
- The **methods** the teacher used to keep down **noise levels of unsupervised children**.

- Several teachers tried a **range of data gathering tools** to suit the focus of observation including:
 1. Interval sampling with their own coding.
 2. Detailed anecdotal notes
 3. Focus on on-task behaviours of unsupervised groups

Phase 3: Sharing Philosophies of Teaching

For the third phase, the teachers were uncertain whether they needed to include classroom observations. What seemed more important was that their agreed topic was one that would provide ample opportunities focused talk and reflections on their practice. After exploring a range of possibilities for a focus, the group agreed to a sharing of their philosophies of teaching in an off-site workshop using three questions:

How do we teach?

Why do we teach?

How do we build rapport with the learner?

As before, the school arranged for relieving teachers to work in the classrooms of the QLC teachers so that the workshop could be held during the school day. The workshops featured 20-minute presentations from each of the QLC teachers.

Pebble & Stewart

"The real challenge is not to follow a set standard of teaching strategies for all students but to decide on the appropriate teaching response to any particular learning challenge" (p.119)

"Decisions about how a particular conversation will proceed are made as the conversation proceeds rather than being planned thoroughly in advance. Reflection- in - action may result in the [teacher] changing their beliefs and understandings in a particular field." (p.120)

In class supervision leads to negative perception from the teacher (p.131)

Quality A goal of most schools will be to improve the quality of teaching and learning that they offer

Learning Schools should be learning communities where all members - teachers, parents and pupils wish to participate in the learning process as part of their own development

Circles Schools should be collaborative enterprises where knowledge and expertise are shared and problems are solved cooperatively

Selection

Comfortable working with each other

No more than 5 -6

Last for at least 1 year

Principal joins each group for a time

Reflection

Smythe suggests

What I do? (Describe)

What does this mean? (Inform)

How did I come to be like this? (Construct)

How might I Do things differently? (Reconstruct) (p.121)

Three phases

Start with a theme-

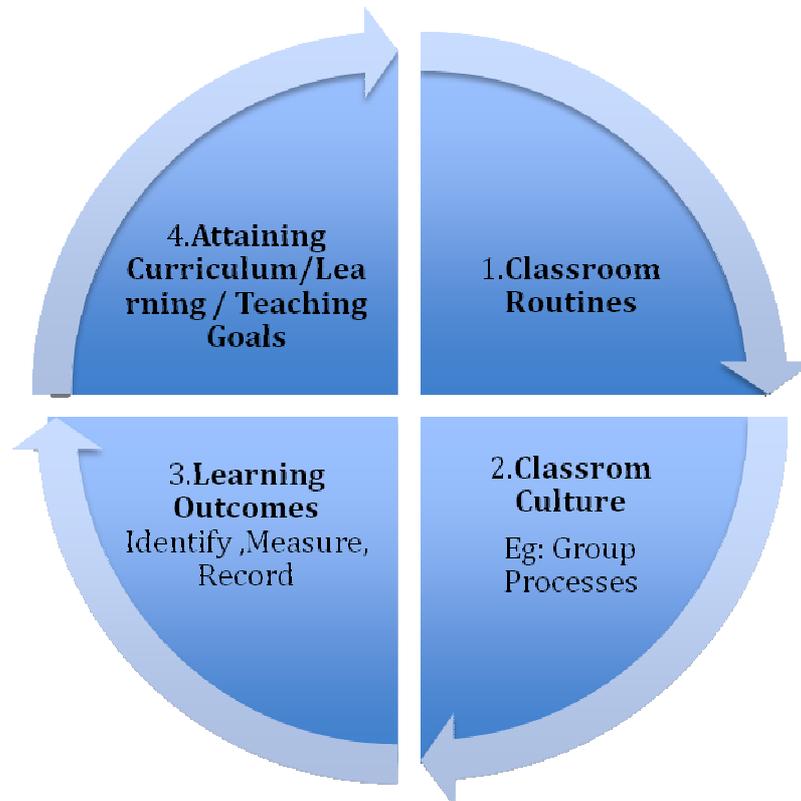
1. **Discussion and story telling** within the group about
 - How they teach
 - Their Classroom culture
 - Successes and worries of the current class
2. **Observations in classrooms** to enhance the meaning of the stories. The visitor to the classroom is the *learner* observing something that the teacher wants to share
 - Limited to one or two aspects of classroom behaviour
 - Agree ahead of time what is to be observed and how this will be observed.
3. **Discussion of observations** in peers

- Feedback to the teacher based on the data collected and interpretations the visitor has made on the sessions they have observed.
- Some examples shared with the QLC and with whole staff at staff meeting.

P&S suggest a developmental cycle to implementing Q.L.C.s

Developmental Phases of QLCS

Themes



"The sequence is supported by the teacher development literature but should not be seen to be sacrosanct and should be adapted to the needs of the particular school. Individual schools may choose to implement their own specific sequence for a particular purpose, or for a particular time."
(p. 139)

Staff need to have a clear understanding of the **structure of the school**, the **strengths and limitations** of the organizational culture of the school, and the **directions in which it might be changed**.

It may be **helpful to provide teachers with a list of management tasks**, which can assist them with their planning at the beginning of the year.

(Refer to admin handbook)

EG: Routines to be established in

Movement

Talking in class and group discussions

- Book work
- Disputes
- Early finishing activities
- Temporary absence of the teacher
-

Following this general preparation, **teachers may be asked to discuss the following questions with their Q.L.C.s**

1. What routines and classroom management procedures will be introduced during the first week of term?
2. What criteria will be used to observe and measure the effectiveness of these routines?
3. What procedure will be used to deal with students who find it difficult to settle into routines?
4. What support will be expected from senior staff?

Observations

Data gathering might include

- Recording verbal interactions of the teacher and/or pupils
- Recording the teachers use of particular techniques such as positive reinforcement;
- Recording particular events (disruptive behaviour) and their duration)
- Recording incidence of a predetermined set of classroom behaviours at set intervals through a lesson (what's going on when...?)
- Recording critical incidents that illustrate behaviour or technique in question and the consequences of this)

- Recording the range of teaching methods used in a lesson segment
- Recording conversations of students when working away from the mat. What type of talk? (The hidden curriculum)

In the first two months of the year the following processes will have occurred

- Teachers thinking about routines and classroom management
- Teachers discussing routines with each other in QLCs
- Data gathering about routines through interclass visits
- Discussion about data
- Innovative routines presented to whole staff
- Staff who are experiencing problems gaining direct and practical help
- All staff having the opportunity to visit within their QLC

Advantages of thematic approach (p.140-141)

- Reduced teacher anxiety- the focus is on the series of developmental tasks in the annual cycle of the classroom and not on the problems or difficulties the teacher may be having
- The process is school wide, encouraging collaboration across the school. The progress made by individuals may vary but at any point the while staff are working on the same theme
- The process will emphasize short-term goals rather than ambitious targets for self-improvement.
- The visiting teacher will be the learner rather than the supervisor. The visitor is there to observe and learn, not to criticize and propose alternative practices. (Ultimately any changes will come from the data collated and shared, discussion and the teachers self-reflection.)
- Teachers will get positive supportive feedback. In general, teachers will be displaying aspects of their teaching practice in which they have achieved something worthwhile and not constantly espousing their shortcomings

- The focus of discussion and observation will increase in complexity as the year progresses- As teachers become more familiar with each other's' practice, and their powers of reflection and sharing become more practiced they are likely to become more ambitious in the issues they research.
- A thematic approach will encourage a variety of data gathering instruments, and they will be less likely to be stuck in limited and habitual response to classroom challenges
- Each year will follow a similar sequence. Therefore progress made in one year can be picked up on and perused in subsequent years. The annual cycle will mean that new staff can enter the process at any point in the year. They do not have to feel they have missed out some earlier stage in the process.
- While the cycle may be the same each year, there should be some scope for emphasis to change as staff become more confident in the process.

Quality Learning Circles- Dave Stewart - The Ariki Project

"Focused interactions with colleagues where shared professional narratives are illustrated with evidence of practice."

"The emphasis here is on professional conversations. Groups will have agreed to work to a stated protocol, which will have some time constraints, some suggested question formats and a means of ensuring that reflective critique is searching but polite. All members of the group take the position of learners."

"Groups need to be clear, however, that they are seeking to stimulate thinking rather than perhaps exploring the detail of a particular instance."

Group members take turns to recount their selected interactions

This is supported with shared evidence
They then ask critical questions of each other

"In a real sense Quality Learning Circles allow groups to explore the total aspect of professional practice. The process recognises the complexity that practitioners face.

- The group become skilled at monitoring and examining each other's' work behaviours
- Evidence is retained through the artifacts, which have been critiqued.
- Colleagues have visited each other's' classrooms
- There is collaboration with a focus on learning.

Group meetings

What the Presenter does.

Interaction: (brief explanation)

Evidence: (Support for action, data from consequence of actions)

Reflection: (what I think now)

QLC Questions about Meaning

The questions are really exploring the links between implicit theory -- that is the theory in the head of the presenter and perhaps themselves, and actual practice.

- What does this mean for your students?
- How does this fit with your philosophy of learning?
- What does this mean for the kind of leadership you wish to show in your class?
- What does this mean for encouraging participation?
- And any other variant that might occur to you such as:
- How will this fit with your other plans?
- Why have you given this notion priority? Etc.

Lateral Links

Looking for Lateral Links is considering other courses of action that are perhaps tangential to the selected behaviour. In essence this is an exercise in creative thinking. Lateral thinking as different from convergent reasoning opens the mind to unexpected options.

- How did you decide to do this?
- What other options did you consider?
- Can you think of a totally lateral course of action?
- Did you search any readings?

Existing data

It can be argued that the knowledge that is already inside the head of professionals is of the same value as scientific knowledge. This craft knowledge is a valuable resource for colleagues to access when faced with educational choices. Group members may need to restrict their impulse to 'tell a similar tale' in favour of creating a question which taps into the thinking and action in this instance related to what was in others' heads.

- How did you access prior knowledge?
- Did learning about what they already thought & knew affect what you did?
- Where you surprised by any responses?

Validation

In essence these questions are seeking evidence of practice. The presenter came with some prepared evidence in the form of the portfolio artifact, and the thinking here turns to the kind of evidence that may be sought in the future. To what extent, group members may ponder, are our actions in school settings driven by evidence, precept and belief? Will better knowledge of why we do what we do, lead to more effective practice?

- How will you know that this is effective?
- What student work might be sampled?
- What aspects are not negotiable?
- What records will you keep?
- Do you have any literature to support this work?

"Reflective groups are more than just audiences. Participation in asking thoughtful and focused questions is a critical part of the dynamic. Those listening to the conversation are also engaging in lateral thinking through making comparisons to their own practice. Expressing concepts through metaphor and example are key competencies. Critical reflective thinking in groups is intensely energizing. It is a skill to be practiced."

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