"Sharing Classrooms" workshop – Building shared and purposeful understandings amongst teachers to grow stronger and more reflective classroom practitioners.

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Given the existence of the AITSL professional teaching standards and the proposed implementation in 2014 of AITSL's Australian Teacher Performance and Development Framework, lots of discussion has been happening about coaching, mentoring or sharing classroom practice and which model is best. Luther College has trialled various models of sharing practice since 2011 and has run a program involving a large number of teaching staff on a voluntary basis in 2013. Research into sharing classrooms practices has concluded programs like these have positive results in collegiality, professional conversations and teaching practices. A few quotes from Luther College sharing classroom participants:

It's been fantastic to have conversations with fellow colleagues about pedagogy and curriculum after visiting their classrooms and having them see me teach as well.

I thought it might be scary to have someone come to my classroom but I found it really affirming.

Participants will have an opportunity to observe recorded examples of teaching at Luther College using a thinking focus. A selection of "lenses" will be provided for workshop participants to select. A modified version of Ron Ritchhart's (Harvard Project Zero) Ladder of Feedback will then be used to debrief.

Cultural Forces

The 8 cultural forces that define our classroom

CULTURAL FORCE	DIRECTED TOWARD THINKING BY
Time	Allocating time for thinking by providing time for exploring topics more in depth as well as time to formulate thoughtful responses.
Opportunities	Providing purposeful activities that require students to engage in thinking and the development of understanding as part of their ongoing experience of the classroom.
Routines & Structures	Scaffolding students' thinking in the moment as well as providing tools and patterns of thinking that can be used independently.
Language	Using a language of thinking that provides students with the vocabulary for describing and reflecting on thinking.
Modeling	Modeling of who we are as thinkers and learners so that the process of our thinking is discussed, shared, and made visible.
Interactions & Relationships	Showing a respect for and valuing of one another's contributions of ideas and thinking in a spirit of ongoing collaborative inquiry.
Physical Environment	Making thinking visible by displaying the process of thinking and development of ideas. Arranging the space to facilitate thoughtful interactions.
Expectations	Setting an agenda of understanding and conveying clear expectations. Focusing on the value for thinking and learning as outcomes as opposed to mere completion of 'work'.

Culture of Thinking

Behaviours to look for in a 'culture of thinking' classroom

1. Modeling
a) Is thinking regularly made visible and "on display" in the classroom?
b) Does the teacher share his or her thinking, providing reasons and evidence for the decisions that are made?
c) Does the teacher display curiosity, passion, and interest for ideas? Is there a sense that the teacher is learning too? This may be evident in the teacher taking risks and trying new things.
d) Do students model their thought process by spontaneously justifying and providing evidence for their thinking?

2. Opportunities
a) Does the teacher prompt students for their opinions, questions, and ideas as opposed to just their knowledge of the topic?
b) Is there a focus on big ideas and generative topics that advance deep disciplinary understanding?
c) Is the learning of the class connected to the larger community outside of school?
d) Are there opportunities to reflect on how one's thinking about a topic has changed and developed over time?
e) Are there opportunities to explore ideas in depth?
f) Are there opportunities to revise and refine one's work based on feedback?

3. Routines
a) Are thinking routines used flexibly, spontaneously, and effectively to deepen students' understanding?
b) Do students' confidently and independently use routines and structures to further their understanding and as a platform for discussion, rather than as work to be done?
c) Does the teacher create his / her own structures and routines to facilitate the thinking he or she is after?

4. Environment
a) Are students' questions, words, ideas, and thoughts documented and on display?
b) Do wall displays have an ongoing, inchoate, and/or dialogic nature to them versus a static display of finished work?
c) Are there teacher reflections and comments accompanying wall displays?
d) Through the wall displays, can one discern the learning of the class?
e) Through the wall displays, is the learning process of the group evident?
f) Is the physical environment arranged to facilitate various kinds of group learning as may be needed?
g) Are the resources needed for learning present in the room?
h) Do the displays in the room inspire learning in the subject area and connect students to the larger world of ideas by displaying positive messages about learning and thinking?

Culture of Thinking
Behaviours to look for in a 'culture of thinking' classroom

5. Language

a) Teacher Language
i. Does the teacher use conditional language (What might it be? Are there other ways? One possibility... It could be...) as opposed to absolute language (It is... How is it done?) to keep conversation and ideas open?
ii. Does the teacher use a language of thinking that invites specific thinking actions on the part of the students ("I want you to compare these two objects." versus "I want you to look at these two objects.")?
iii. Does the teacher use a language of curiosity (I wonder...? I'm puzzled by...? I'm finding this challenging...? What if...?)

b) Student Language
i. Does the student language mirror that of the teacher in terms of conditionality, a focus on thinking, and curiosity?
ii. Are student responses and contributions in class elaborate, supported, and/or complex?
iii. Do students' contributions reflect confidence (versus inflected responses that are implicitly asking "is that right?")

6. Interactions

a) Teacher responses to students
i. Are students pushed to elaborate their responses, to reason, and to think beyond a simple answer or statement?
ii. Does the teacher challenge, or invite others to challenge, ideas and comments?
iii. Does the teacher provide the "space" for students to extend, elaborate, or develop the ideas of others?
iv. Does the teacher provide specific feedback to students beyond merely affirming or negating a response?
v. Does the teacher listen to student conversations without interrupting them and guiding them?
vi. Does the teacher listen to and show an interest in students' contributions as opposed to trying to elicit a specific response? This may entail building on students' contributions.
vii. Is the learning of the group, as well as individuals, celebrated and acknowledged?

Culture of Thinking

Behaviours to look for in a 'culture of thinking' classroom

b) Students' responses to the teacher and one another

   i.   Do students ask questions that show a curiosity for and interest in the topic?

   ii.   Do students spontaneously (versus being prompted) build on others' comments and contributions either through elaboration or challenge?

   iii.   Is there a sense of academically focused conversational threads in the room, as opposed to a teacher directed question and answer session?

   iv.   Do students spontaneously make connections between ideas offered by others to advance their learning?

   v.   Are there student-to-student exchanges on the topic of discussion?

   vi.   Do students disagree with others in a respectfully manner?

   vii.   What percent of students participate in class discussions? Do students of all levels and abilities contribute versus a few dominating?

   viii.   Do students participate with the teacher more equitably in the activity of the classroom. Rather than merely responding to teachers' questions and prompts, do they also react to others responses, ask questions, and suggest changes to activities? That is, do students take on more teacher-like moves?

   ix.   Do more students make meaningful contributions to class and the incidence of "I don't know's" diminish.

7. Time

a) How much wait time does the teacher provide after a question and before they call on students for a response?

b) How much time does the teacher provide after a student responds or makes a contribution before calling on another student or responding themselves?

c) What is the ratio of teacher talk to student talk?

d) What is the length of student responses and contributions in class?

8. Expectations

a) The classroom is learning versus work oriented

b) Is the purpose of classroom activity well understood and kept at the forefront of classroom activities?

c) Is learning viewed as a positive, engaging endeavor, rather than a compulsory exercise?

d) Learning, rather than work, is celebrated

Ladder of Feedback
Guide for classroom observations

The "Ladder of Feedback" is a protocol or structure that establishes a culture of trust and constructive support by sequencing feedback in order that is constructive.

Which class is being observed	
Feedback for	
Feedback from	

Focus		Lens	

ACTION	COMMENTS
CLARIFY Are there aspects of the class or lesson that you don't believe you understood? • Ensure that you're clear about what your feedback colleague was trying to accomplish in the lesson by asking some questions or stating any assumptions you've made: *"I wasn't sure if you meant that students will understand X, but that's what I assumed, so now you can understand where my feedback is coming from."* • If you are approaching your observations from a particular frame or perspective, state that: *"I was interested in looking at how students were interacting in the lesson, so my feedback is focused mainly on that aspect."*	
VALUE What did you see in the class that you find to be particularly impressive, innovative, strong or noteworthy? Valuing builds a supportive culture of understanding and will help your feedback colleague identify strengths in their work that they might not have recognized. Valuing reminds your feedback colleague of the parts of his/her lesson that should be preserved when making improvements. Expressing your appreciation for learners and their ideas is fundamental to the process of constructive feedback. Stressing the positive points and offering honest compliments sets a supportive tone.	

ACTION	COMMENTS
RAISE QUESTIONS & CONCERNS What questions, issues, tensions or concerns were raised for you within the lesson? - Share your concerns, not as criticisms, but as honest thoughts and questions, not as absolute judgements of right and wrong: *"It might be interesting to explore…"* *"I wonder what would happen if…"* *"Perhaps you have thought about this, but…"* *"A question this raised for me was…"* *"One of the things this got me thinking about was…"* *"A concern raised for me was…"* *"Observing the class made me more aware of the tension between …"*	
SUGGEST Do you have suggestions for refining the lesson, moving forward, or on how to address the concerns you identified? - Help you feedback colleague make improvements by sharing your ideas on how he / she might refine or advance the lesson. - Suggestions can also be forward looking by putting forth ideas on where the lesson might go next or how a teacher might build on students' ideas and work: *"It might be interesting to follow up on that issue by …"*	
RESPOND The presenting teacher has the opportunity to respond to the themes and ideas arising from the discussion so far.	
THANK How has observing and giving feedback enhanced your own understanding of teaching and learning? - Tell your feedback colleague what you have learned from this experience. - Share the questions and issues you will take away to think more about: *"This lesson has made me think more about how I might…"*	