

Briefings

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THE IMPORTANCE OF LESSON OBSERVATIONS AND HIGH QUALITY FEEDBACK FOR TEACHER GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

"To ensure that schools support more powerful learning for students, education systems need to offer powerful learning opportunities for teachers."
(SCHLEICHER, 2020)

Foreword

The core purpose of educators is to improve outcomes for students. The challenge for schools is to consider the key aspects in which they can improve student outcomes and the evidence-based methodology they utilise to achieve this.

This research feature compiled by ISQ Manager (School Improvement) Eva Perry investigates the literature regarding effective improvement and growth processes for teachers. High quality professional learning has been found to be essential for teacher growth, but the challenge arises in understanding what high quality professional learning is and how to best embed it into school processes.

As well as high quality professional learning, effective feedback is also essential for teacher growth and development, and this feedback should come from a range of sources, encompassing a culture of assessment and evidence gathering.

Studies show the key to improving student outcomes is the effectiveness of their teachers, hence improving teacher effectiveness is an important part of both State and National improvement agendas.

School improvement that provides for high quality teacher growth and development is imperative for all schools and high performing schools have a clear, narrow and focused approach to school improvement.



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THE IMPORTANCE OF LESSON OBSERVATIONS AND HIGH QUALITY FEEDBACK FOR TEACHER GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT



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As educators, our core purpose is to improve outcomes for students. The challenge for schools is to consider the key aspects in which they can improve student outcomes and the evidence-based methodology they utilise to achieve this.

"All studies show that the key to higher performing students is the effectiveness of their teachers. Conservative estimates suggest that students with a highly effective teacher learn twice as much as students with a less effective teacher. Systems of teacher appraisal and feedback that are directly linked to improved classroom teaching and student performance can increase teacher effectiveness by as much as 20 to 30%. This would lift the performance of Australia's students to the best in the world" Jensen, (2011).

Improving teacher effectiveness is an important part of both State and National improvement agendas: *"All Australian schools are required to have a demonstrable, systemic approach about improvement processes for the school, including a clearly articulated improvement process for teacher development"* (2017 Australian Education Amendment Act 2017 No. 78 (Cth) the

Amending Act), which has amended the Australian Education Act 2013.

In recent years, there has been much research into what constitutes effective improvement and growth processes for teachers (Gates, 2013; Jensen, 2020; Wiliam, 2015). Schools need to provide a comprehensive system of professional learning that explicitly provides high quality feedback to teachers. This will enable clear reflection, goal setting and targeted support for growth, articulated through a Teacher Performance and Development (TPD) Framework. This framework should be embedded in proven adult learning modes and be an integral part of classroom practice (Robinson, 2014; Tusting & Barton, 2003). It is best delivered collaboratively, through disciplined Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) (Wiliam, 2015; Jones & Harris 2014).

A common paradigm for improving teacher effectiveness has been to provide professional learning courses based on a deficit model, assuming teachers 'lack important knowledge' (Wiliam, 2015; Timperley, et al 2020). This paradigm suggests that professional learning should fill gaps and lack of understanding rather than build on the skills, knowledge, understanding and experience that the teacher has. This type of learning has been proven to have little impact on change to classroom practice (Schleicher, 2020; Jensen, 2020; Hattie, 2003). In fact, this approach often has very little or no link to teacher appraisal and feedback as part of the process. Schools will typically invest money and time into this type of professional learning for teachers, but it invariably does not translate to changed classroom practice nor improved outcomes for students (Darling-Hammond et al, 2017; Jones & Harris, 2014).

"To ensure that schools support more powerful learning for students, education systems need to offer powerful learning opportunities for teachers" (Schleicher, 2020).

High quality professional learning is essential for teacher growth (Jones and Harris, 2014). The challenge is for schools to understand what high quality professional learning is and to clearly articulate what high quality teaching looks like in order to develop integrated processes that encompass goal setting and feedback which, in turn, informs effective professional learning. Darling-Hammond et al., (2017), defines effective professional learning *"as structured professional learning that results in changes in teacher practices and improvements in student learning outcomes."* Professional learning on its own, is unlikely to have any impact or change to classroom practice. *"Hattie's synthesis of 800 meta-analyses identifies the challenge of realising the results of any educational initiative where it matters most, finding that while professional development was likely to change teacher learning (with an effect size of 0.90), it was less likely to change teacher behaviour (0.60) and even less likely to have an impact on student learning (0.37)139"* (New South Wales Department of Education 7 Communities, 2014). Professional learning must be explicitly linked to clear goals as part of daily work. There also needs to be clarity on what effective professional learning constitutes and how best to implement this (Dubrowski 2016; Jensen, 2011).

The qualities that make effective professional learning for teachers must be made clear and be evident in the processes within the TPD Framework that teachers and school leaders work within.

FIGURE 1. TEACHER PERFORMANCE AND DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

Anna Dabrowski 2016	Linda Darling-Hammond, Maria E. Hyler, and Madelyn Gardner, with assistance from Danny Espinoza 2017	Wiliam 2015
Teachers' content knowledge	Is content focused	Choice
Teachers' knowledge of how students learn	Incorporates active learning	Accountable
Alignment to individual and school learning goals	Supports collaboration	Small steps
Support by school leadership	Uses models of effective practice	Support
Training must meet teachers' changing needs	Provides coaching and expert support	Flexibility
Offered more widely and more readily	Offers feedback and reflection Is of sustained duration	

Key aspects include alignment to individual and school goals; is content focused; offers flexibility; supports collaboration; and is of sustained duration as detailed in Figure 1 (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Dubrowski, 2016; Wiliam 2015).

In understanding how schools can best support professional learning for teachers, it is important to note that *"the research shows that the greatest impact on student learning comes from meaningful feedback to improve classroom teaching"* (Jensen, 2011).

Effective feedback for teachers is essential for teacher growth and development. Teachers deserve feedback in order to reflect on their daily practice, set professional growth goals and implement change to classroom practice in order to improve student outcomes. Feedback to teachers is key to this and should include a range of evidence including the use of student progress data, student feedback and importantly, lesson observation feedback.

"Almost three quarters of teachers who received feedback on their work found it useful for improving their practice, suggesting that a culture of regular feedback can help develop an ecosystem of continuous learning" (Schleicher, 2020).

Jensen (2011), states that in order for the feedback to have the highest standards of impact, this range should include at least four of the following methods of assessment and evidence gathering:

- student performance and assessments
- peer observation and collaboration
- direct observation of classroom teaching and learning
- student surveys and feedback
- 360-degree assessment and feedback
- self-assessment
- parent surveys and feedback
- external observation.

In choosing the mix of methods, schools *"should be required to include student performance and assessments among the four"* (Jensen, 2011).

Similarly, the MET Project (2013) found that teachers need feedback from a range of sources that include:

- classroom observation instruments
- student perception surveys
- student achievement gains.

"To ensure that schools support more powerful learning for students, education systems need to offer powerful learning opportunities for teachers" (Schleicher, 2020).

They found that in order for lesson observation feedback to be effective, it needed to include the following factors:

- Observers must be trained, and the quality of their training checked.
- Observations should come from at least two different observers and must be part of a regular cycle, not a one-off.
- A clearly articulated paradigm of effective teaching.
- Lessons being observed should reflect regular instruction and learning environment.
- Protocols such as confidentiality must be in place.
- Students giving feedback should be clear on what is being asked.
- Ensure processes for teachers to look at results and reflect on them.
- Consider data collection processes so that student progress data is accessible and useful to the reflection and goal setting.

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It is essential that feedback is part of a comprehensive cycle, not a stand-alone activity. Evidence and reflection of feedback should clearly inform professional learning as part of a TPD Framework, and feedback and growth needs to be part of the regular work of teachers, embedded in classroom practice and peer collaboration systems.

Before assessment and feedback in any form can commence, it is essential for schools to explicitly identify and communicate what effective teaching looks like in their school setting.

“Schools must decide the objectives and benchmarks against which performance is assessed” (Jensen, 2011).

In order to give quality feedback, teachers need to be able to identify what good practice is (University of Newcastle, 2021). There needs to be a shared understanding and language describing this, for teachers to undertake metacognition on practice and to provide clear and detailed feedback to others (Dept Ed Vic, 2017; AITSL, 2014). When teachers can clearly describe and demonstrate high quality teaching and have a shared vocabulary to engage in professional dialogue for reflection and improvement, they are better able to set meaningful and achievable goals and are able to carefully consider the appropriate modes of professional learning to achieve their goals.

When describing high quality practice, it is vital that this is clearly linked to the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers addressing all career stages. Teachers also need to have a deep understanding of the standards and how to progress through the career stages. Training for lesson observations

should include formal practice and moderation of the process.

“Make sure your staff are provided with the tools and training to provide effective developmental feedback. Objective setting, focusing on specific observable behaviours, identifying next steps and putting the teacher’s development at the centre of observation is vital” (Patzner, 2020).

Leaders need to check the standard of observation practice for regular implementation as part of the TPD Framework. The reflection and goal setting process should be explicitly linked to the school’s strategic plan in order to access support from leadership and be sustainable within a school’s competing priorities.

How do we measure effective teaching?

To carry out this complex work, there needs to be a clear process that is transparent to all stakeholders. Research from the MET project (2016) has identified the following key factors:

- **Set expectations** – Schools need to articulate clearly what is expected of teachers. This involves developing a pedagogical plan that describes what high quality classroom practice is, as well as the detailed processes and expectations around how the reflection and feedback cycle will occur.
- **Use multiple sources** – The use of multiple sources helps to assure that a fair and broad measure and reflection can occur.
- **Balance weights** – The consideration of this helps reduce the chance of implementing too narrow a focus.

In Jensen’s five step model (2020) Figure 2, student achievement and progress is core to the process of informing feedback and professional growth. In assessing this, teachers need to seek evidence to provide feedback. The use of student progress data and feedback from students themselves are two methods proven to have high impact (Gates, 2013 and Jensen, 2020). To gather useful student data, the focus, methods and tools selected should be clear, align with the school’s strategic plan and be specific in nature. Teachers must be supported in the process of gathering, collating and analysing student data. When teachers have clarity on the learning needs of their students, they are more likely to seek feedback and change classroom practice.

FIGURE 2. JENSEN’S FIVE STEP MODEL

1. Assess student learning needs
2. Examine teacher practice
3. Plan a school response, including how professional development (PD) will improve the teaching and learning issues identified in steps 1 and 2
4. Take action by implementing the plan and undertaking the PD identified in step 3
5. Review impact, including how PD improved the identified teaching and learning issues. At the end of the cycle, there should be clear evaluation information of how PD succeeded and failed to improve teaching and learning in the identified issues, and implications for future PD investments.

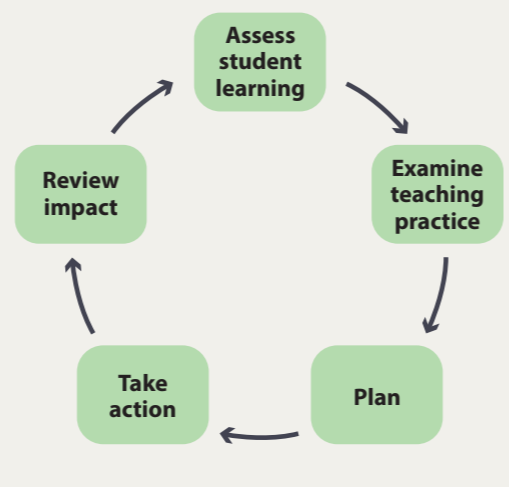
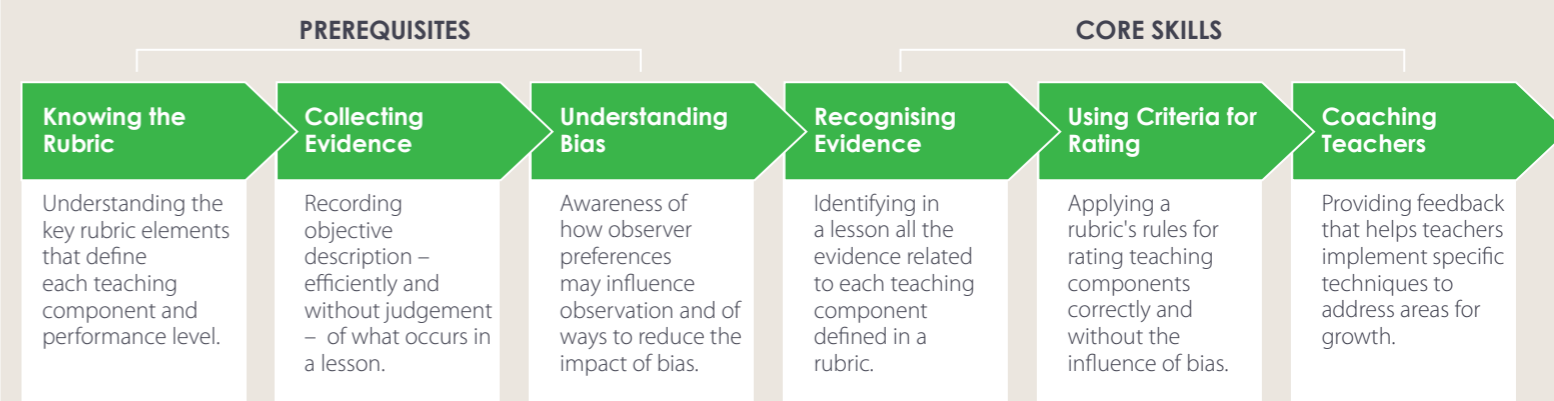


FIGURE 3. OBSERVATION KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS



Effective professional learning is best done with support from school leaders (AITSL, 2012). In the planning phase, teachers may access a range of learning opportunities. This could range from observing master teachers, trialling strategies with support from an instructional coach, accessing academic materials and discussing this within their PLC, growth coaching sessions or targeted external learning as part of their plan to implement change to practice in their classroom.

The teacher then takes action in their classroom, with strategies in place to review the impact of these changes. Gathering evidence of impact via student progress data, student feedback and lesson observation enables informed self-reflection on the next best strategies for professional learning, and the cycle continues.

Teachers need to be taught how to observe a lesson

Too often, those given the responsibility for lesson observation and feedback have had no training and the process is not clear to the person being observed. Teachers need to be taught how to observe a lesson (University of Newcastle, 2021; Gates, 2013, Archer et al., 2016). Training needs to include certain essential activities that help evaluators gain the knowledge and skills they need to observe.

These are:

- **Explaining the rubric**, by providing an overview of the observation instrument’s criteria, structure, and key features.
- **Minimising bias**, by making observers aware of their personal preferences and how to mitigate their impact on observation.
- **Supporting practice**, through explicit instruction, modelling, and guided practice reviewing and rating pre-scored videos of teaching.
- **Modelling feedback**, by illustrating how to give teachers productive feedback based on their observations.

“Ensuring that observers can provide accurate and meaningful feedback, in rich conversations with teachers, is essential for improving teaching and learning” (Archer et al., 2016).

Protocols

In developing the frameworks and processes for a comprehensive approach to lesson observation, feedback, goal setting and professional learning, it is essential to develop clear protocols for all aspects. This should be done in collaboration with teachers in order to incorporate authorship and ownership of the processes and documentation to increase buy in, depth of understanding and effective participation.

There are numerous published sets of protocols that may make for a good starting point for each school to then adapt to their unique setting. Some factors include being clear on the purpose of the observation, who will be involved, length of observation, presence of the observer, structure of post meeting and reflection, the role colleagues will play in giving feedback, how the feedback will be linked to improvement strategies, through to pragmatics of punctuality and confidentiality.

As part of extensive research with the University of Newcastle, the NSW Dept of Education and Training (2021) uses the following set of ‘essential features’ for lesson observations for their Quality Teaching Rounds:

- at least three teachers in each PLC
- full participation
- all members will host a round
- focus on teaching ‘regular’ lessons
- entire lesson to be observed
- time for individual coding and analysis (30 minutes)
- discussion with each member providing codes, evidence and justification in relation to the QT classroom practice guide (1-2 hours)
- commitment to confidentiality.

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The AITSL How To Guide - Peer Observation also provides some questions to start shaping observation protocols:

Developing a set of protocols in your school context

The following questions provide a basis for reflecting on what you need to consider when developing protocols for classroom observation in your school. The answers to these questions will frame the protocols for how classroom observation is implemented in your context.

Orientation: Who, what, when, and how long

- Who will observe me?
- Who determines the focus of the observation?
- How long will the observer be in my classroom?
- When will the observer come into my classroom?
- Will the observer talk to me before the observation?
- Will the observer talk to the students in my class?
- How many times will the observer visit my classroom?
- Will the observer have the discipline specific expertise?
- What will they observe do with the information they gather?
- Will the same observer visit my classroom over time?

Orientation: The how

- How will the observer collect information?
- Where will the observer place themselves in the classroom?
- Will the observer rate my performance?
- Will the observer use the same method as all observers in the school?
- Will the observer be looking for particular practices?

Debriefing: Making sense of what was seen

- When will we discuss what the observer saw in my classroom?
- How will we structure the conversation?
- Will I get a chance to talk about how I thought the lesson went?
- Will the conversation be private?

Action planning: So what/now what?

- What happens next?
- What if I need support to work on particular strategies?
- Can I work with another teacher who has expertise in these strategies?
- Do I have to document anything in my PD plan?
- Will I be held accountable for working on these strategies?
- Will the observer come back to check on my progress?

How can the Continuum support your work?

The Continuum provides the basis for developing consistency and accuracy in interpretations of classroom observations in the debriefing phase of the observation experience and the action planning phase in terms of what happens next. One of the most difficult areas that school leaders encounter in performance and development discussions is in the provision of feedback to teachers about their next level of development. The Continuum is designed to demonstrate the next level of performance for all teachers. It will provide valuable input into these conversations (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership).

The Victoria State Government Education and Training Protocols (2018) include guiding questions to help frame protocols for before, during and post lesson observation:

Focusing the observation

- What is the purpose of peer observation and what roles do participants play to support the achievement of the purpose?
- What will be the agreed focus for the observation and feedback?
- Who will be involved in the observation?
- How long is needed for the observation?
- When is the best time for the observation to occur (the beginning, during part of, the end, all of the lesson or over a series of lessons)?

Undertaking the observation

- What is the agreed role in the classroom for the teacher and the observer?
- What will be done to prepare students for an observer in their learning space?
- Where would you like the observer to be located (appropriateness of options rather than the back of the room)?
- What type of 'presence' do you want the observer to have (team teacher, coach, in the background)?
- Will the teacher have any interaction with the teacher and/or students and if so how and when?
- How will the observation and data be recorded and stored and what role can technology play?
- How can the observer incorporate visual diagrams to capture interaction in teaching and learning activities?
- Do these protocols comply with the school's obligation regarding photographing and filming students?

Learning after the observation

- What are the expectations of self-reflection?
- What role will colleagues and team members play in the reflection, analysis and feedback process, if any?
- How will learning be shared within and across teams, if appropriate and agreed?
- What is the role of school leadership in supporting school wide learning from observations?
- How will learning be integrated into the school's improvement activities?

Communication of feedback

The art of giving and receiving feedback includes elements that require thought and planning. Understanding human nature and how people receive feedback are important aspects of training so that teachers can construct feedback that is taken onboard and seen as constructive and helpful. In her workshops on the

FIGURE 4. DARE TO LEAD - THE ENGAGED FEEDBACK CHECKLIST



'Neuroscience of Leadership', Michelle Loch (2019) impresses on the point that we can be aware of how people perceive threats and rewards and be mindful of this when communicating and giving feedback to others. AITSL (2015) states that effective feedback:

- is specific
- attends to the stated goal
- is observable
- is descriptive not evaluative
- refers to evidence
- is actionable
- is timely
- is not judgemental or evaluative.

Understanding how people receive feedback

It is important that there are clear processes and protocols for giving feedback, and that teachers have the opportunity to learn and practice these in a safe and supportive environment.

Brene Brown (2018) has produced 'The Engaged Feedback Checklist' that is a helpful prompt for teachers to consider prior to giving feedback. It demonstrates the role and responsibility of the feedback giver in the way they conduct themselves during feedback.

When giving feedback, privacy and confidentiality are paramount. This not only pertains to issues or growth areas observed, but trust is built by maintaining privacy in general. This includes comments about examples of interesting student behaviour or responses seen in a lesson and general comments about a teacher's classroom, even if they are complimentary. General comments or funny snippets shared in the staffroom or in conversation may undermine trust.

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The role of the Professional Learning Community (PLC)

A professional learning community (PLC) in schools involves collaboration, sharing and ongoing critical analysis of teaching practices in line with professional standards. PLCs should be learning-oriented and promote the growth of teachers and students (AITSL Professional Learning Communities Guide). For collaboration and impact, PLCs need to be disciplined (Jones & Harris 2014). A well-constructed PLC is systematic in approach and has a clear methodology of working that is rigorous and consistent. People within the PLC demonstrate diligence, patience and persistence when working interdependently. They are problem seeking, not problem solving in nature.

“Collaborating with colleagues in a systemic way on a real issue or problem is still the most powerful form of professional learning we have” (Jones & Harris, 2014).

“PLCs can provide teachers with a structured forum in which to clarify and expand on their understanding of high-quality practice and how to measure the impact on student outcomes. It can also provide for constructive dialogue around teaching, growth and development and allow for support from colleagues in exploring methods for improving practice with confidence and support” (Darling-Hammond, et al., 2017).

Disciplined, structured PLCs offer highly effective, in-time, professional learning opportunities for teachers to engage in metacognition of their current practice

for their own classrooms. PLCs allow for reflection, support from colleagues, the opportunity to hear about new or different practice from others, and a safe space to discuss and try out new strategies (Schleicher, 2020; Wiliam, 2015).

The work of the PLC should be clearly aligned to the school’s strategic plan, focusing on improving student outcomes and teacher goal setting, feedback and professional learning.

Modelling Effective Practice

A powerful form of professional learning for teachers is the opportunity to observe other, highly skilled teachers in action. As Darling-Hammond, et al., (2017) notes, the use of professional development that includes models of effective practice has proven successful at promoting teacher learning and supporting student achievement. This is referred to by AITSL (2012) as observing ‘master teachers’. ‘Master teachers’ are highly skilled classroom practitioners who are willing to collaborate with colleagues and demonstrate and or give feedback on classroom practice. This may be actualised in a range of ways such as in observation and feedback, instructional coaching, sharing of recorded lessons and through collaborative planning.

“The more teachers observed other classrooms, engaged in collaborative professional development, and taught jointly, the more they perceived themselves as being effective teachers” (Schleicher, 2020).

Making Time for Lesson Observation, Feedback and Reflection

Developing a comprehensive TPD Framework often includes opportunities for professional learning and collaboration, PLCs, observations and coaching. Many school leaders express concern over how to make time for the necessary practices within the school day.

“There is limited time and energy in schools. Professional learning and improvement work is difficult. Without a principled approach and clear direction, these activities may have the impact of taking time away from the central demands of the job and become ‘activity traps’” (Katz et al., 2009).

Policy makers and administrators may decide to evaluate and redesign the use of time and school schedules to increase opportunities for professional learning and collaboration, including participation in PLCs, peer coaching and observations across classrooms, and collaborative planning.

“By rethinking the traditional school timetable, schools can find flexible and effective time for teachers to reflect on their practice” (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

Some examples of this include having a small number of teachers attend weekly events such as assemblies and chapel, allowing other groups of teachers time to work together, without a cost to the budget. Some schools do this on a rotation basis to allow all teachers regular and planned time to work collaboratively.

Many schools are utilising information technology to enable lesson observations to occur. By filming lessons, the teacher can control the lesson they wish to share, whilst being less obtrusive in the classroom. The lesson can be saved and those involved in the observation, including the teacher themselves, can view the lesson at a time that suits them. This flexibility allows both the observer and

“The problem is that our schools are inundated with initiatives, and too many schools try to embrace them all. When everything is a priority, nothing is, and schools have to be selective about where they invest their efforts. Too many educational leaders, at school, at local authority, and at national level, are content to ‘let a thousand flowers bloom’ in terms of school improvement.” (William 2015).

the teacher to reflect on the lesson. The teacher is a part of the reflection process, and the observation is no longer an activity done ‘to them’.

Recording of lessons also enables schools to build up a repertoire of quality examples of exceptional teaching practice that can be viewed by others, providing flexible, timely and cost-effective access to ‘master teachers’.

Conclusion

School improvement that provides for high quality teacher growth and development is imperative for all schools.

As Wiliam (2015), notes, *“The problem is that our schools are inundated with initiatives, and too many schools try to embrace them all. When everything is a priority, nothing is, and schools have to be selective about where they invest their efforts. Too many educational leaders, at school, at local authority, and at national level, are content to ‘let a thousand flowers bloom’ in terms of school improvement.”*

High performing schools have a clear, narrow and focused approach to school improvement. They ensure that improvement priorities are clearly aligned to their school’s strategic plan, operational plan, TPD Framework and associated budgets. They utilise data that is directly aligned to the improvement agenda to inform teacher reflection, goal setting and provide professional learning that is centred around improved outcomes for students.

“Professional learning must be supported by, and embedded in, a coherent learning culture focused on a few priority, student-focused goals if it is to make a difference” (Timperley et al., 2020 quoting Jensen et al., 2016; Timperley et al., 2014).

In summary, an effective TPD Framework will consist of transparent processes that provide clearly articulated and consistent approaches and protocols. Associated elements such as professional learning groups and coaching should be collaborative, structured and disciplined. These processes will be valued and timetabled for, ensuring all teachers involved are trained in the skills of lesson observation and giving and receiving feedback.

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ISQ STATE FORUM, AGM & GALA DINNER

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Matt Carroll AM has been Chief Executive Officer of the Australian Olympic Committee since March 2017 and is a director of the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games Organising Committee and the Olympic Winter Institute of Australia.

Matt will share the latest from the Australian Olympic Committee, with a focus on the positive impact the 2032 Brisbane Olympics and Paralympics will have on our schools and the educational landscape in our city, state and country.

Matt is widely considered one of Australia's most accomplished sports administrators, with over 30 years' experience in all aspects of sports administration. Matt was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia in 2004 for services to rugby union, in particular the staging of Rugby World Cup 2003.

We look forward to hearing from Matt at this year's ISQ Gala Dinner, which follows on from the State Forum and Annual General Meeting. ISQ members are encouraged to attend some or all of the day's events.

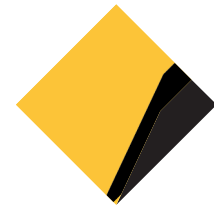
We hope to see you there!

FIND OUT MORE

matt
carroll



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