A guide to ...

Productive Pedagogies

Classroom reflection manual

This booklet has been adapted from the Classroom Observation Booklet by New Basics Branch and the Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Study (QSRLS) commissioned by Education Queensland

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Productive Pedagogies

'Productive Pedagogies' is a balanced theoretical framework enabling teachers to reflect critically on their work.

Teachers should use the Productive Pedagogies framework to consider:

- Are all the students I teach, regardless of background, engaged in intellectually challenging and relevant curriculum in a supportive environment?
- How do my teaching and assessment practices support or hinder this?
- What opportunities do I have to critically reflect upon my work with colleagues?

This manual may be used to assist teachers with:

- reflecting on current classroom practices
- generating a professional language
- designing curriculum and learning experiences
- making intelligent decisions about individual students' needs.

The manual describes each of the twenty Productive Pedagogies,
and includes examples of how they may be applied.

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Intellectual quality

The early self-fulfilling prophecy studies (Rist, 1970) and studies of streaming and tracking (Oakes, Gamoran & Page, 1992), show that one of the main reasons some students do not achieve high academic performances is that schools do not always require students to perform work of high intellectual quality. Conversely, Newmann and Associates (1996) suggest that when students from all backgrounds are expected to perform work of high intellectual quality, overall student academic performance increases and equity gaps diminish, relative to conventional teaching practices. From this research, we would generalise that a focus on high intellectual quality is necessary for all students to perform well academically.

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Higher-order thinking

Are students using higher-order thinking operations within a critical framework?

Explanation

Higher-order thinking by students involves the transformation of information and ideas. This transformation occurs when students combine facts and ideas and synthesise, generalise, explain, hypothesise or arrive at some conclusion or interpretation. Manipulating information and ideas through these processes allows students to solve problems, gain understanding and discover new meanings. When students engage in the construction of knowledge, an element of uncertainty is introduced into the instructional process and the outcomes are not always predictable; in other words, the teacher is not certain what the students will produce. In helping students become producers of knowledge, the teacher's main instructional task is to create activities or environments that allow them opportunities to engage in higher-order thinking.

Lower-order thinking occurs when students are asked to receive or recite factual information or to employ rules and algorithms through repetitive routines. Students are given prespecified knowledge ranging from simple facts and information to more complex concepts. Such knowledge is conveyed to students through a reading, work sheet, lecture or other direct instructional medium. The instructional process is to simply transmit knowledge or practise procedural routines. Students are in a similar role when they are reciting previously acquired knowledge: for example responding to test-type questions. More complex activities may still involve reproducing knowledge if students are required to follow only predetermined steps and routines, or employ algorithms in a rote fashion.
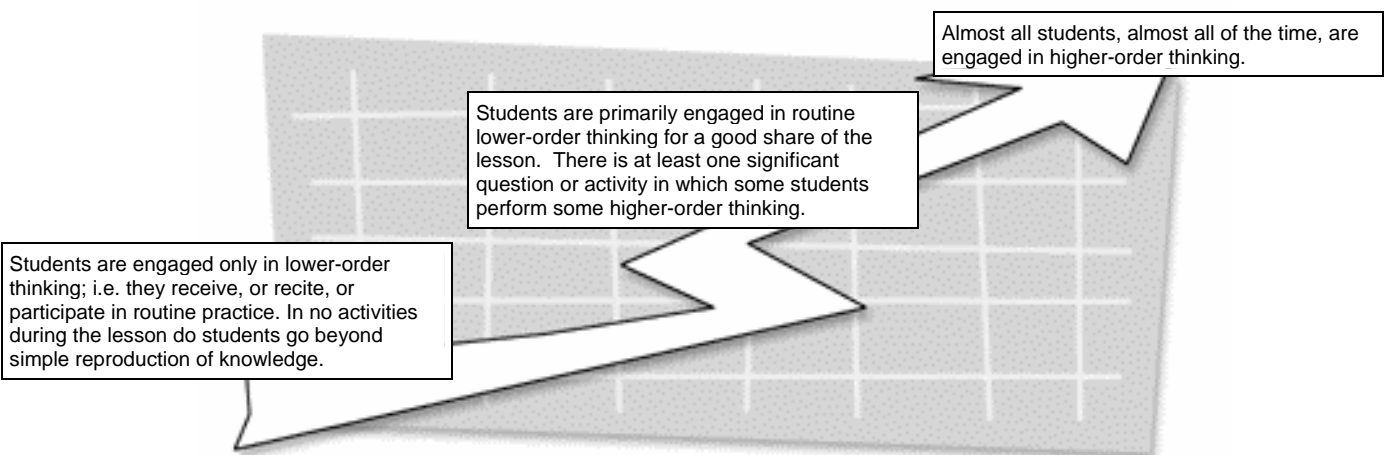
Example

The topic of a Year 2 Maths lesson was classification and grouping generally, and more specifically set theory. The teacher brought in a range of diverse objects. Students, in groups, had to categorise the objects according to criteria that they determined themselves.

At the end of that part of the lesson, the groups rotated around the classroom and in groups suggested the basis of each classification. The teacher then gave two hula-hoops to each group and asked them to place the objects into overlapping sets, so that objects in the overlapping or intersection set had characteristics in common with the objects within each of the hoops. The groups did this and again rotated and discussed the basis of the classification.

The basis of the classification could be, for example, that the objects were all yellow, or all dirty, or all cubes. Students simply had to articulate reasons and justify their classifications. The lesson concluded with the teacher making comments regarding the use of symbolic representations in Maths.

Continuum of practice

Almost all students, almost all of the time, are engaged in higher-order thinking.

Students are primarily engaged in routine lower-order thinking for a good share of the lesson. There is at least one significant question or activity in which some students perform some higher-order thinking.

Students are engaged only in lower-order thinking; i.e. they receive, or recite, or participate in routine practice. In no activities during the lesson do students go beyond simple reproduction of knowledge.

Deep knowledge

Does the lesson cover operational fields in any depth, detail or level of specificity?

Explanation

Knowledge is *deep* when it concerns the central ideas of a topic or discipline, which are judged to be crucial to it. Deep knowledge involves establishing relatively complex connections to those central concepts.
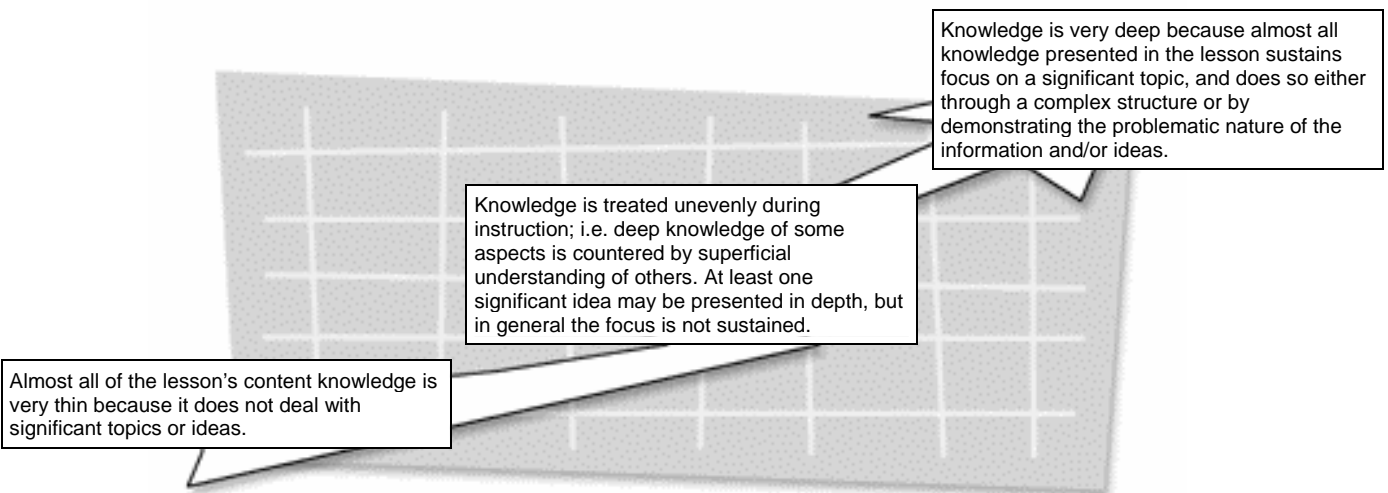
Knowledge is *shallow, thin* or *superficial* when it is not connected with significant concepts or central ideas of a topic or discipline, and is dealt with only in an algorithmic or procedural fashion. Knowledge is also shallow when important, central ideas have been trivialised by the teacher or students, or when it is presented as non-problematic. This superficiality can be due, in part, to instructional strategies: for example when a teacher covers large numbers of fragmented ideas and bits of information that are unconnected to other knowledge.

Example

Year 11 Multistrand Science students were nearing the completion of an extensive study of the ecosystem of their town's river. The students had participated in many in-class and fieldwork activities, such as using classification systems, monitoring water quality and studying the impacts of flooding and industry along the river, with the aim of making the students 'experts' on the ecosystem of their local river.

The students were asked to apply this deep knowledge to the task of designing a creature adapted to the conditions of the river ecosystem. They were required to draw the creature and describe its physical and behavioural adaptations. To do this, the students needed to have a thorough knowledge of the topic.

Continuum of practice

Knowledge is very deep because almost all knowledge presented in the lesson sustains focus on a significant topic, and does so either through a complex structure or by demonstrating the problematic nature of the information and/or ideas.

Knowledge is treated unevenly during instruction; i.e. deep knowledge of some aspects is countered by superficial understanding of others. At least one significant idea may be presented in depth, but in general the focus is not sustained.

Almost all of the lesson's content knowledge is very thin because it does not deal with significant topics or ideas.

Deep understanding

Do the work and responses of the students demonstrate a deep understanding of concepts or ideas?

Explanation

Students develop deep understanding when they grasp the relatively complex relationships between the central concepts of a topic or discipline. Instead of being able to recite only fragmented pieces of information, they understand the topic in a relatively systematic, integrated or holistic way. As a result of their deep understanding, they can produce new knowledge by discovering relationships, solving problems, constructing explanations and drawing conclusions.

Students have only shallow understanding when they do not or cannot use knowledge to make clear distinctions, present arguments, solve problems or develop more complex understanding of other related phenomena.
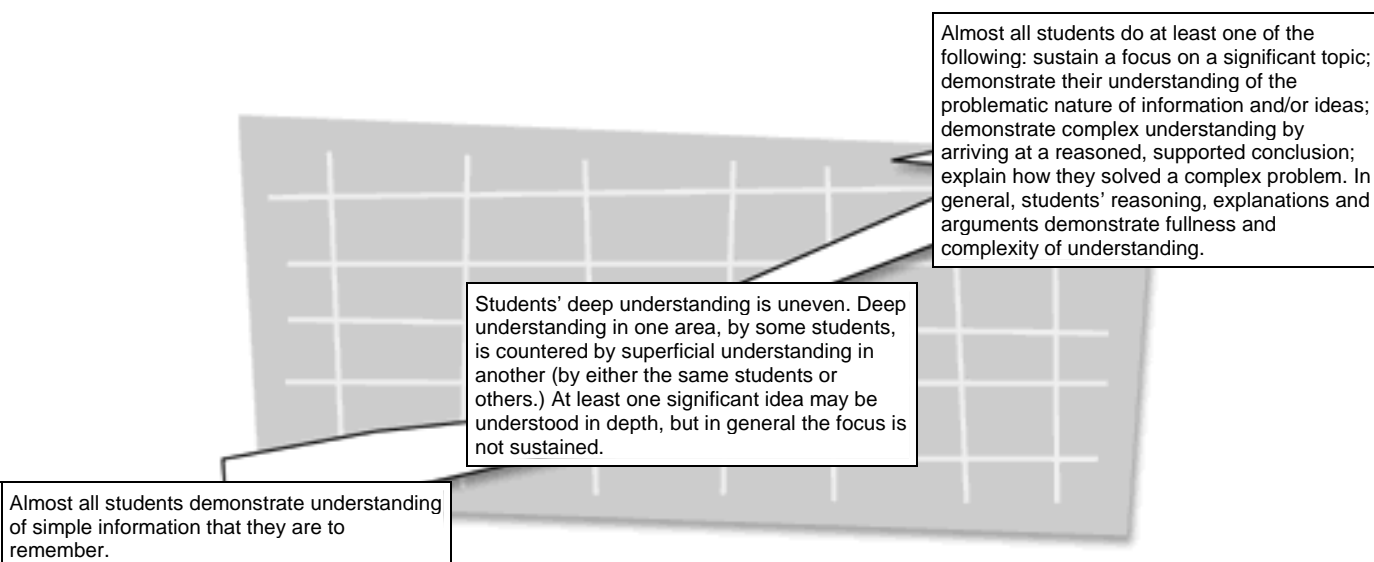
Example

A Year 12 Art class worked collaboratively on a submission to design a three-dimensional installation for a public space with a youth theme.

The collaborative nature of the task required extended dialogue between the students and their teacher to develop shared ideas, concepts, themes and design elements. Because the installation was planned for a public space, they also consulted local government officers. The students demonstrated deep understanding at each stage of the project: the specifications of the design brief, the sourcing of materials, the timeframe for constructing the installation and the preparation of the submission.

The students' final proposal was supported by reasoned and creative explanations of the installation's aesthetic and functional appeal.

The students needed very little direction from the teacher. They were engaged in the project in ways that demonstrated their complete understanding of what was expected of them; and they showed insight in their artistic explanation of the work.

Continuum of practice

Almost all students do at least one of the following: sustain a focus on a significant topic; demonstrate their understanding of the problematic nature of information and/or ideas; demonstrate complex understanding by arriving at a reasoned, supported conclusion; explain how they solved a complex problem. In general, students' reasoning, explanations and arguments demonstrate fullness and complexity of understanding.

Students' deep understanding is uneven. Deep understanding in one area, by some students, is countered by superficial understanding in another (by either the same students or others.) At least one significant idea may be understood in depth, but in general the focus is not sustained.

Almost all students demonstrate understanding of simple information that they are to remember.

Substantive conversation

Does classroom talk lead to sustained conversational dialogue between students, and between teacher and students, to create or negotiate understanding of subject matter?

Explanation

In classes with *substantive conversation* there is considerable interaction among students, and between teacher and students, about the ideas of a substantive topic; the interactions are reciprocal, and promote shared understanding.

Features of substantive conversation include the following:

- INTELLECTUAL SUBSTANCE. The talk is about subject matter in the discipline and encourages critical reasoning such as making distinctions, applying ideas, forming generalisations and raising questions. It moves beyond merely recounting experiences, facts, definitions or procedures, and encompasses technical language, analytical distinctions and grounds of disagreement.

- DIALOGUE. The conversation involves sharing ideas, and is not completely scripted or controlled by one party (as in teacher-led recitation). Participants provide extended statements, and address their comments, questions and statements directly to others.

- LOGICAL EXTENSION AND SYNTHESIS. The dialogue builds coherently on participants' ideas to promote improved collective understanding of a theme or topic. For example, teachers and students may make relevant topic shifts, use linking words, make explicit references to previous comments, and may summarise.

- A SUSTAINED EXCHANGE. Exchanges extend beyond the routine IRE (initiate/response/evaluate) pattern. Dialogue consists of a sustained and topically related series of linked exchanges between students, or between teacher and students.

In classes where there is little or no substantive conversation, teacher-student interaction typically consists of a lecture with recitation, where the teacher deviates very little from delivering information and asking routine questions. In this situation students typically give very short answers. Discussion here may follow the typical IRE pattern: low-level recall/fact-based questions, short-utterance or single-word responses, and further simple questions and/or teacher evaluation statements such as 'Yes, good'. This is an extremely routine, teacher-centred pattern, amounting only to a 'fill in the blank', or 'guess what's in the teacher's head' format.
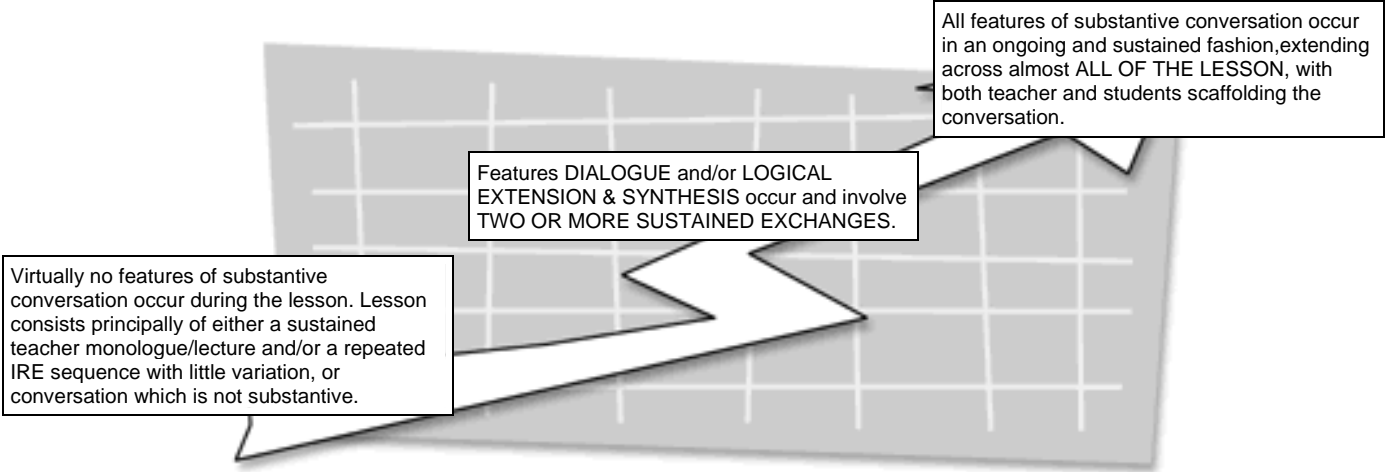
Examples

1. A Year 8 integrated Maths and Science class was divided into groups. Each group spent a lesson building animals to certain design specifications. The animals were given names by the students. Discussion was then held about ways in which the animals could be classified. Afterwards the teacher distributed a classification system that he had created.

In groups of four, the students then moved from table to table where the fifteen animals were set up and discussed the animals within their groups. On a sheet they classified the animals according to the system the teacher had given them.

When all groups had classified all the animals, the teacher held a whole-class discussion of the results. Interesting discussions ensued in respect of different classifications of the same animal by some of the groups. These covered issues of measurement (including very sophisticated discussion about exactitude), angle of viewing the animals, injured animals, error in measurement generally and its sources. In most instances, the students themselves were initiating the dialogue and other students were providing the framework upon which the groups were constructing their collective understanding of the topic.

2. During a Year 4 class discussion, students were reflecting on whether we would have more freedom without clocks. During the discussion a student made the observation that time is a dimension. When asked what he meant he showed a book, explaining that the book had length, width and depth but also time. Once it didn't exist and now it did; and many years later it might have ceased to exist.

Continuum of practice

All features of substantive conversation occur in an ongoing and sustained fashion,extending across almost ALL OF THE LESSON, with both teacher and students scaffolding the conversation.

Features DIALOGUE and/or LOGICAL EXTENSION & SYNTHESIS occur and involve TWO OR MORE SUSTAINED EXCHANGES.

Virtually no features of substantive conversation occur during the lesson. Lesson consists principally of either a sustained teacher monologue/lecture and/or a repeated IRE sequence with little variation, or conversation which is not substantive.

Knowledge as problematic

Are students critically examining texts, ideas and knowledge?

Explanation

Presenting *knowledge as problematic* involves an understanding of knowledge not as a fixed body of information, but rather as being constructed, and hence subject to political, social and cultural influences and implications. Multiple contrasting and potentially conflicting forms of knowledge are represented.

Presenting *knowledge as given* is representing the subject content as immutable fact: as a body of truth to be acquired by students. The transmission of the information may vary, but is based on the concept of knowledge as being static and able to be handled as property, perhaps in the form of tables, charts, handouts, texts and comprehension activities.
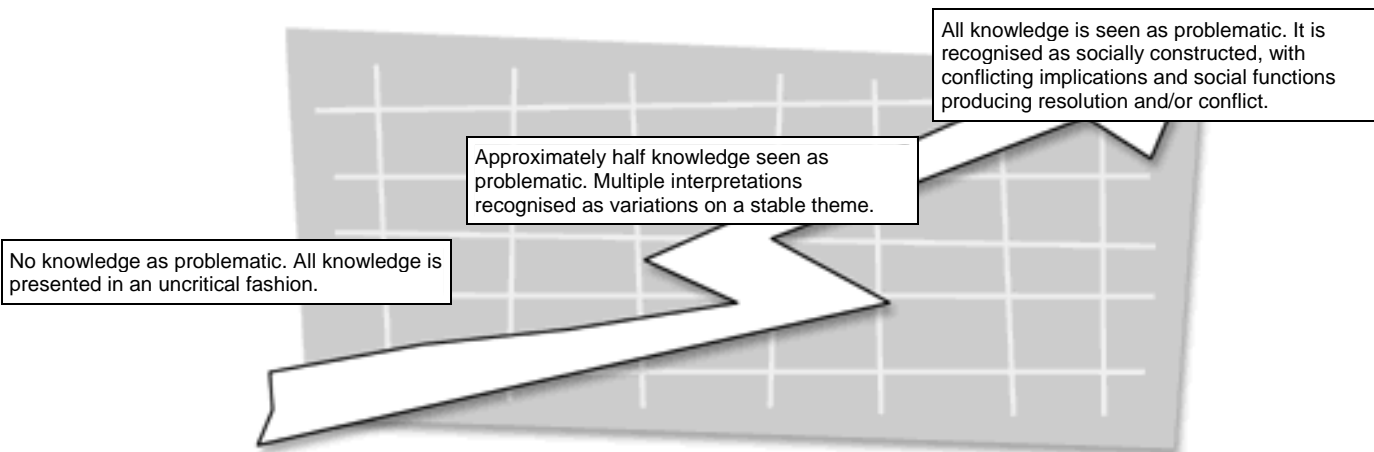
Examples

1. As an introductory lesson to a topic about the environment, a Year 8 Social Science teacher drew a long horizontal line across the blackboard and wrote 'very concerned' at one end and 'not concerned' at the other end. She asked each student to place a mark on the line representing their degree of concern about the environment.

This required each student to make a 'low-key' public statement about their position and then to justify it in writing under the heading 'Why I chose my position'. The teacher made a number of statements that could be interpreted as supporting multiple positions, thus reinforcing that there was no single correct position.

Anticipating that divergent and potentially conflicting views would surface during the activity, the teacher skilfully and continually kept opening the discussion up by reinforcing the complexity of the issues and the need to consider multiple viewpoints and experiences.

2. Year 7 students engaged in collaborative discussion about what it means to be an Australian. They were given a range of texts presenting contrasting positions, including 'My Country' by Dorothea Mackellar, 'Advance Australia Fair, The New True Anthem' by Kevin Gilbert (Aboriginal activist and writer) and 'The Past' by Oodgeroo Noonuccal. The students discussed the dominant messages in the texts and the linguistic features that supported these messages. They were asked to provide feedback on whose interests were served and whose interests marginalised by the different texts.

Continuum of practice

All knowledge is seen as problematic. It is recognised as socially constructed, with conflicting implications and social functions producing resolution and/or conflict.

Approximately half knowledge seen as problematic. Multiple interpretations recognised as variations on a stable theme.

No knowledge as problematic. All knowledge is presented in an uncritical fashion.

Metalanguage

Are aspects of language, grammar and technical vocabulary being given prominence?

Explanation

High-metalanguage instruction incorporates frequent discussion about talk and writing, about how written and spoken texts work, about specific technical vocabulary and words, about how sentences work or don't work (syntax/grammar), about meaning structures and text structures (semantics/genre), and about how discourses and ideologies work in speech and writing. Teachers choose teaching moments within activities, assignments, readings and lessons to focus on particular words, sentences, text features, discourses and so on.

Low-metalanguage instruction has little explicit discussion of talk and writing, about how written and spoken texts work, about their features, characteristics, patterns, genres or discourses. The emphasis is simply on doing text-based activities.
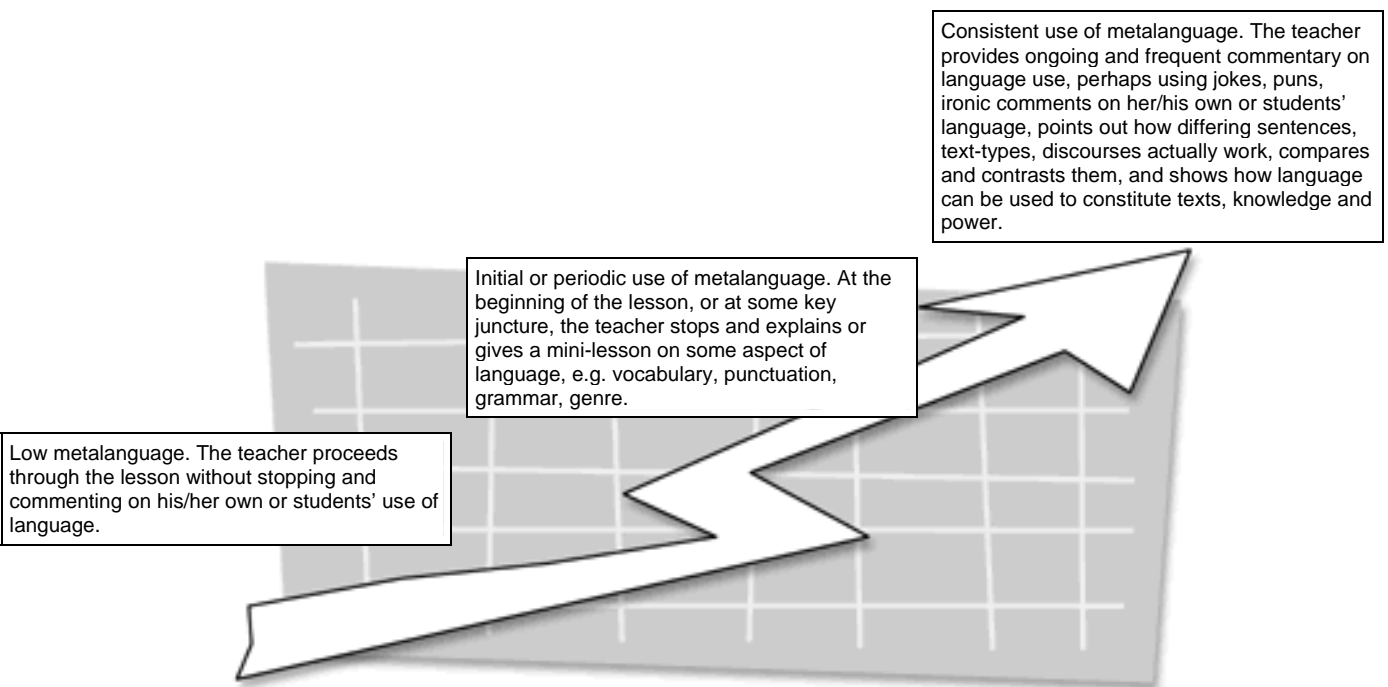
Examples

1. A Year 11 English class was being introduced to the concept of 'discourse'. The teacher asked the students to examine how medical, legal and mechanical languages operate within particular contexts to suit speakers, listeners and subjects. The students gave some concrete examples of these and described how power operates in each situation and is closely aligned with knowledge.

By reversing the speaker and the listener, students were able to consider alternative discourses and to examine how power relations can be disrupted. There was consistent use of metalanguage throughout as the teacher and students examined how discourses constitute texts, knowledge and power.

2. A Year 11 Maths class was manipulating statistics to suit the needs of various stakeholders. In the lesson they examined how the same data could be interpreted from multiple viewpoints to suit varying purposes.

Continuum of practice

Consistent use of metalanguage. The teacher provides ongoing and frequent commentary on language use, perhaps using jokes, puns, ironic comments on her/his own or students' language, points out how differing sentences, text-types, discourses actually work, compares and contrasts them, and shows how language can be used to constitute texts, knowledge and power.

Initial or periodic use of metalanguage. At the beginning of the lesson, or at some key juncture, the teacher stops and explains or gives a mini-lesson on some aspect of language, e.g. vocabulary, punctuation, grammar, genre.

Low metalanguage. The teacher proceeds through the lesson without stopping and commenting on his/her own or students' use of language.

Supportive classroom environment

Issues of classroom environment have been of concern to a very wide variety of educators and educational researchers. From the well known effective schools research on school and classroom ethos, to a multitude of studies on the in-class behaviour of students, to more progressive concerns for the treatment of students according to the social dynamics of race, gender and class, it is clear that students require a supportive classroom environment if they are to achieve what teachers ask of them (Brophy & Good, 1986; Doyle, 1992). Unfortunately, it can not be said that this body of research indicates that schools and teachers are always able to provide such an environment. As with relevance, the SRLS focus on a supportive classroom environment is based on the hypothesis that a focus on high intellectual quality in and of itself will not be a sufficient condition for improved student outcomes, especially for students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

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Student direction

Do students determine specific activities or outcomes of the lesson?

Explanation

Student direction means that students influence the specific activities or tasks they will do in a lesson, or how they will undertake them. Such activities are likely to be student-centred ones such as group work, or individual research or investigative projects.

A *low level of student direction* is exhibited where the teacher, or some other educational or institutional authority, explicitly determines what activities students do, and hence how they will meet the specified objectives of the lesson. The teacher and/or external authority decides on the appropriateness of any particular activity for meeting these criteria, and the students themselves have little or no influence.
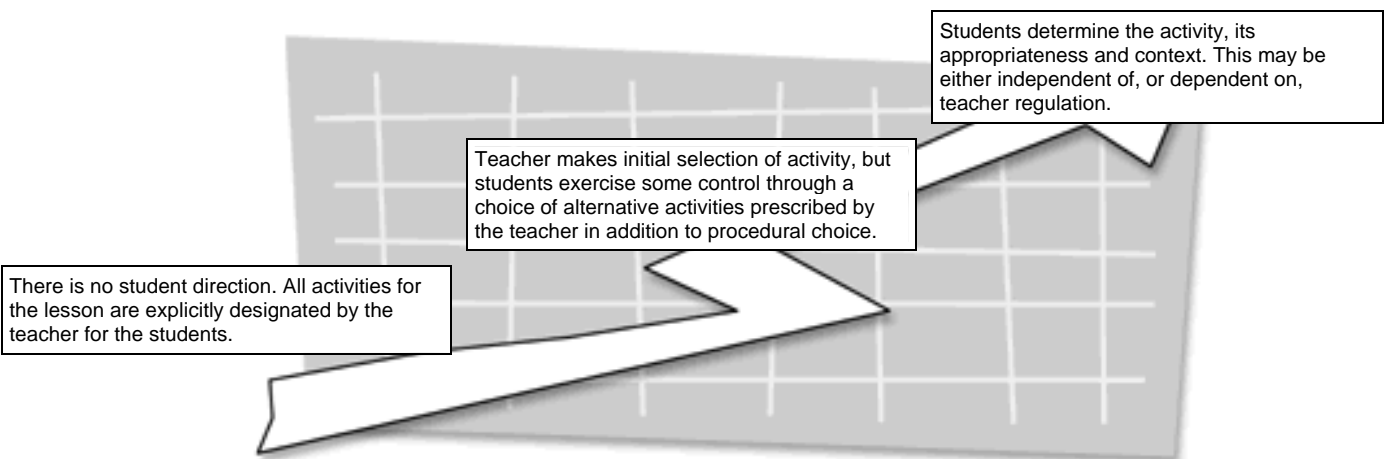
Example

A number of teachers were concerned about the engagement of Year 8 students with the academic curriculum of the school.

A group of four teachers (a Social Science teacher, an English teacher, a Maths teacher and a Science teacher), with the support of the school administration, decided to embark on an innovative program to address this issue. Central to the philosophy behind this innovation was a commitment to student direction of activities.

When Year 8 students entered the high school at the beginning of the year they were presented with two questions: 'What do you want to learn about yourself?' and 'What do you want to learn about the world?' These questions served as the basis of the Year 8 curriculum and throughout the year, the students were involved in the determination of both the content and the activities.

The project proved most successful in changing teaching styles and engaging the students in productive learning.

Continuum of practice

Students determine the activity, its appropriateness and context. This may be either independent of, or dependent on, teacher regulation.

Teacher makes initial selection of activity, but students exercise some control through a choice of alternative activities prescribed by the teacher in addition to procedural choice.

There is no student direction. All activities for the lesson are explicitly designated by the teacher for the students.

Social support

Is the classroom characterised by an atmosphere of mutual respect and support between teacher and students, and among students?

Explanation

Social support is present in classes where the teacher supports students by conveying high expectations for them all. These expectations include the following: (a) that it is necessary to take risks and try hard to master challenging academic work; (b) that all members of the class can learn important knowledge and skills; and (c) that a climate of mutual respect among all members of the class contributes to achievement by all. Mutual respect means that students with less skill or proficiency in a subject are treated in ways that continue to encourage them and make their presence valued. If disagreement or conflict develops in the classroom, the teacher helps students resolve it in a constructive way for all concerned.

A *lack of social support* is evident when the behaviour, comments and actions of the teacher or students discourage effort, participation, and taking risks to learn or express one's views. For example, comments from a teacher or another student that belittle a student's answer, or efforts by some students to prevent others from taking an assignment seriously, will undermine support for achievement. Even when no such overt acts occur, there can still be a lack of social support in a class if the overall atmosphere is negative as a result of previous behaviour. Note also that token acknowledgment by a teacher of students' actions or does responses not constitute evidence of social support.
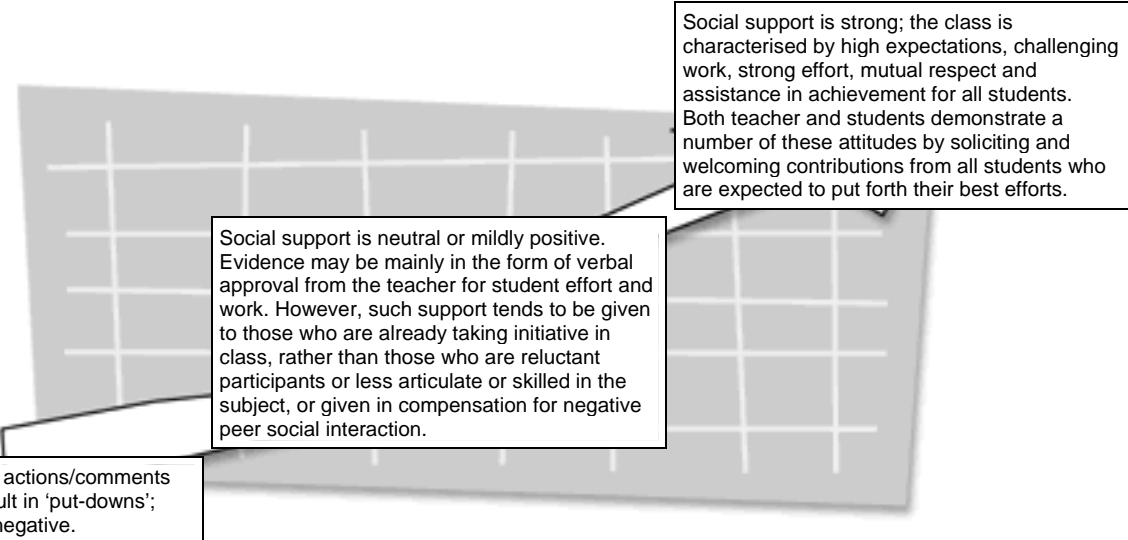
Example

In a Year 12 Art class, students were in the closing stages of work on a self-directed, themed, multimedia project which formed part of their major assessment for the year. The work in progress was permanently displayed in the classroom.

At the beginning of the lesson the students made quick charcoal sketches relating to the theme of their major work. The students then rotated around these quick warm-up sketches and added a quick sketch of their own. When the warm-up sketching was finished, the students were invited to move freely about the room making observations and comments on each other's work. The students and the teacher all made thoughtful comments on the work, not only providing positive feedback but also making relevant suggestions for improvement.

As this lesson progressed the students frequently asked the teacher and other students for feedback on their work. Not only was the teacher supportive, but the students also supported and encouraged each other in the development of their project. Furthermore, this activity encouraged students to take risks by seeking and providing comments that could contribute to the improvement of their project.

Continuum of practice

Social support is strong; the class is characterised by high expectations, challenging work, strong effort, mutual respect and assistance in achievement for all students. Both teacher and students demonstrate a number of these attitudes by soliciting and welcoming contributions from all students who are expected to put forth their best efforts.

Social support is neutral or mildly positive. Evidence may be mainly in the form of verbal approval from the teacher for student effort and work. However, such support tends to be given to those who are already taking initiative in class, rather than those who are reluctant participants or less articulate or skilled in the subject, or given in compensation for negative peer social interaction.

Social support is negative; actions/comments by teacher or students result in 'put-downs'; classroom atmosphere is negative.

Academic engagement

Are students engaged and on-task during the lesson?

Explanation

Students *demonstrate academic engagement* when they are attentive and do the assigned work. They show enthusiasm for their work by raising questions, contributing to group activities and helping peers.

Disengagement is evident when students are bored or make little effort. Students who are academically disengaged may daydream or even sleep in class, talk to peers about non-class matters, make a noise or otherwise disrupt the class.
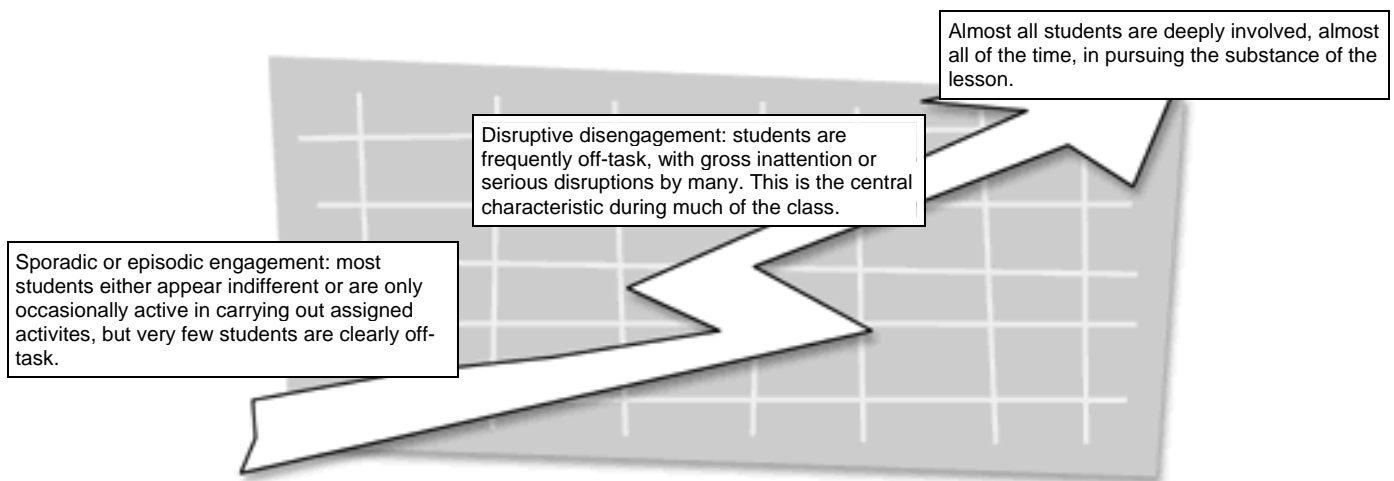
Example

Some Year 8 students were engaged in writing CD reviews. The students had each chosen a CD to review, with the selections ranging from country music (e.g. Garth Brooks) to pop music (e.g. Backstreet Boys). All of these selections were valued and accepted by the teachers and class members.

The students studied music reviews from a variety of sources such as magazines, newspapers and the Internet. Through discussion as a class and in small groups, the teacher and students developed a set of criteria for the CD reviews. Nearly all the students were highly engaged and focused throughout this activity.

The students demonstrated engagement with this activity through enthusiastic discussion and questioning, both as they developed the review criteria and in the ensuing drafting of the CD reviews.

Continuum of practice

Almost all students are deeply involved, almost all of the time, in pursuing the substance of the lesson.

Disruptive disengagement: students are frequently off-task, with gross inattention or serious disruptions by many. This is the central characteristic during much of the class.

Sporadic or episodic engagement: most students either appear indifferent or are only occasionally active in carrying out assigned activites, but very few students are clearly off-task.

Explicit quality performance criteria

Are the criteria for judging the range of student performance made explicit?

Explanation

Explicit quality performance criteria are frequent, detailed and specific statements about what the students are to do and to achieve. This may involve overall statements regarding tasks or assignments, or about performance at different stages in a lesson.
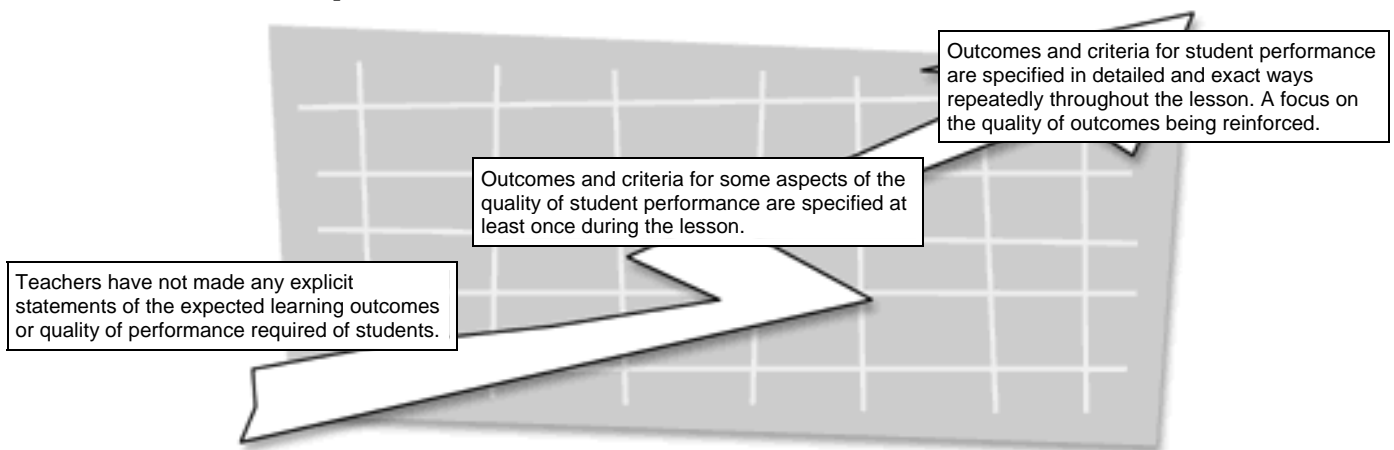
There may, on the other hand, be an absence of written or spoken reference to requirements, benchmarks, or levels of acceptable performance expected of students. In this situation the performance criteria are *implicit*. This may be a deliberate strategy for students to discover or construct their own outcomes, rather than indicating neglect.

Example

In a Year 8 English class the students worked in teams to create school newspapers. The students were allocated clearly defined roles such as editor, subeditor, reporter and photographer. Each role required familiarity with a particular writing style: for example news reports, comment pieces and editorials. The newsworthiness of photographs and cartoons was also assessed. As well as working in their allocated role, all students were expected to subedit material written for the paper, and were therefore involved in a number of drafting and redrafting exchanges.

Access to numerous actual newspapers provided a ready supply of benchmarks against which students could evaluate their own work. The cyclic nature of the writing and subediting process repeatedly reinforced what counts as high-quality performance. The teacher, on a regular basis, also drew the students' attention to the structural features of the genre of each written piece.

Continuum of practice

Outcomes and criteria for student performance are specified in detailed and exact ways repeatedly throughout the lesson. A focus on the quality of outcomes being reinforced.

Outcomes and criteria for some aspects of the quality of student performance are specified at least once during the lesson.

Teachers have not made any explicit statements of the expected learning outcomes or quality of performance required of students.

Self-regulation

Is the direction of student behaviour implicit and self-regulatory?

Explanation

Teachers who exert *high implicit* control rarely have to make explicit statements to discipline students (e.g. 'You're not being good today', or 'Put your pens away'), or to regulate students' movements and dispositions (e.g. 'Sit down', 'Stop talking', 'Eyes this way' or 'Pay attention').

Teachers who exert *low implicit* control have to devote a substantial amount of verbal work to disciplining students and regulating their movement.
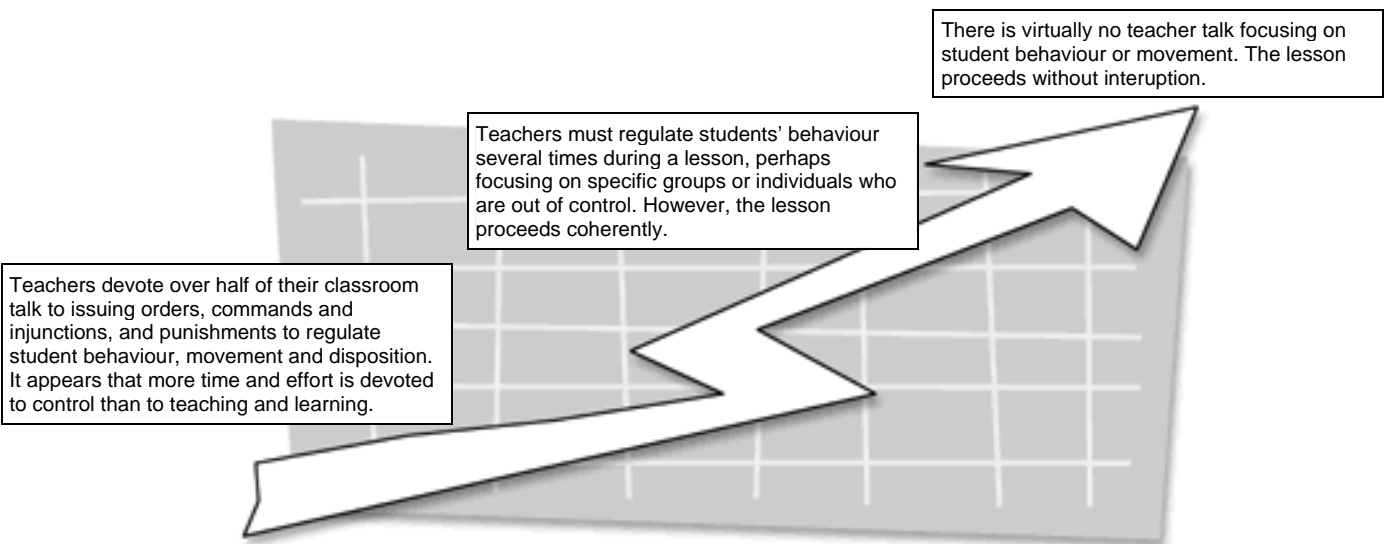
Example

A year 8 Social Studies teacher wrote two letters about an event that might have occurred in the classroom the day before. One letter was written from the perspective of the teacher, and the other from the perspective of a student. The views presented were largely divergent around the same event.

The teacher very cleverly and creatively utilised discussion about these two letters to pursue the issue of evidence in historical research and writing. Extensive discussion followed and many issues raised, including power and the production of knowledge, the nature of truth, the creation of historical narratives and the use of historical sources.

One of the striking features of this lesson was the studious and enthusiastic way in which the students engaged in the activity. Because of its perceived relevance they were eager to pursue the discussion and monitored their own behaviour and that of their peers. This ensured a range of contributions from some of the less vocal students.

Continuum of practice

There is virtually no teacher talk focusing on student behaviour or movement. The lesson proceeds without interuption.

Teachers must regulate students' behaviour several times during a lesson, perhaps focusing on specific groups or individuals who are out of control. However, the lesson proceeds coherently.

Teachers devote over half of their classroom talk to issuing orders, commands and injunctions, and punishments to regulate student behaviour, movement and disposition. It appears that more time and effort is devoted to control than to teaching and learning.

Recognition of difference

… recognition of difference is perhaps the most theoretically and practically significant dimension for explaining how to systematically improve the achievement of students from scholastically disadvantaged sociocultural backgrounds. A great amount of thought has gone into trying to explain how and why students from disadvantaged backgrounds do not do well in school when compared with their more socially advantaged counterparts. However, while a substantial body of research exists to support the items included in the SRLS focus on recognition of difference, it should be noted at the outset that the SRLS is one of the first attempts to assess many of these existing theories within a systematic, large-scale empirical study focusing on student outcomes.

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Cultural knowledge

Are non-dominant cultures valued?

Explanation

Cultural identity is represented in such things as beliefs, languages, practices and ways of knowing. *Cultures are valued* when there is explicit appreciation of these characteristics, and within the curriculum this requires that a range of cultures are acknowledged and given status. Cultural groups are distinguished by social characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, race, religion, economic status or age. Valuing them means legitimating these cultures for all students, through the inclusion, recognition and transmission of cultural knowledge.

Cultural diversity is devalued when curriculum knowledge is constructed and framed within a single set of cultural definitions, symbols, values, views and qualities, thus attributing some higher status to this one culture.

Note

Linked closely with knowledge presented as problematic, this dimension goes on to both recognise the social construction and hence conflicting nature of knowledge, and explicitly value that knowledge associated with sub-group cultures.
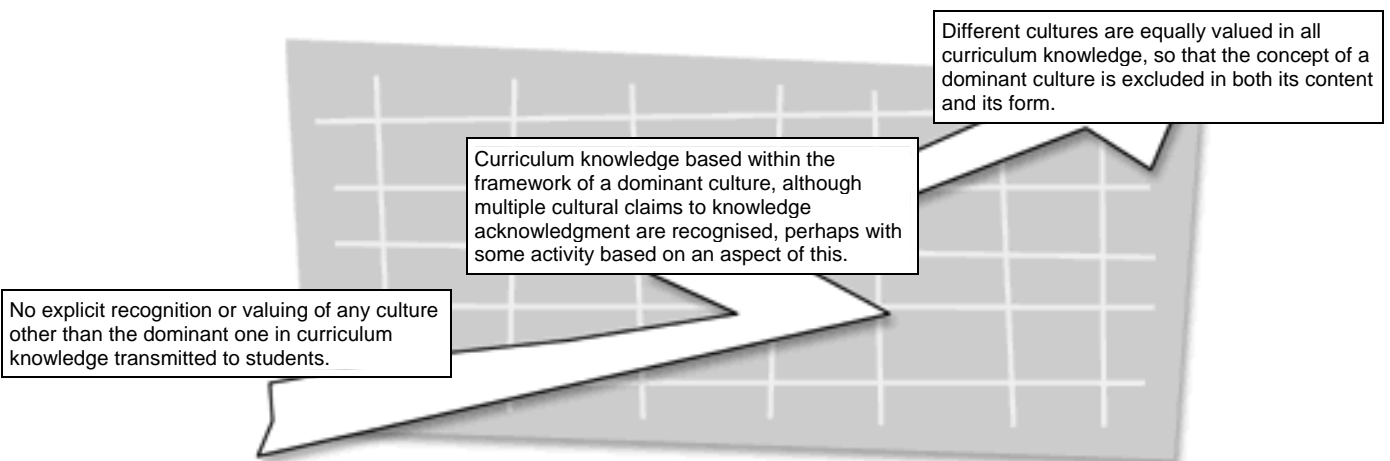
Example

A Year 11 Modern History class, largely consisting of middle-class students of Anglo-Celtic origin, was looking at the issue of 'the stolen generation'.

Coverage of this topic is not mandatory within the Queensland Modern History curriculum. However, the Queensland Syllabus lists a number of thematic units that need to be covered during the course of two years, one of which is 'Imperialism and Racial Conflicts and Compromises'. The teacher of this class situated 'the stolen generation' within this unit.

The teacher commented that he saw understanding the issues around the stolen generation as an essential component in the reconciliation process. During the course of the lesson, he drew on a number of texts written by Indigenous Australians, including the Aboriginal singer/songwriter Archie Roach. The students discussed a number of these texts and considered why saying 'Sorry' is an important and controversial issue within contemporary Australia.

Continuum of practice

Different cultures are equally valued in all curriculum knowledge, so that the concept of a dominant culture is excluded in both its content and its form.

Curriculum knowledge based within the framework of a dominant culture, although multiple cultural claims to knowledge acknowledgment are recognised, perhaps with some activity based on an aspect of this.

No explicit recognition or valuing of any culture other than the dominant one in curriculum knowledge transmitted to students.

Inclusivity

Are deliberate attempts made to ensure that students from diverse backgrounds are actively engaged in learning?

Explanation

Inclusive classroom practices intentionally acknowledge, support and incorporate the diversity of students' diverse backgrounds, experiences and abilities.

Lack of inclusivity is apparent when students are treated as a homogeneous group, without their diverse backgrounds being incorporated in meaningful or appropriate ways. This often results in some groups being unable or unwilling to contribute.
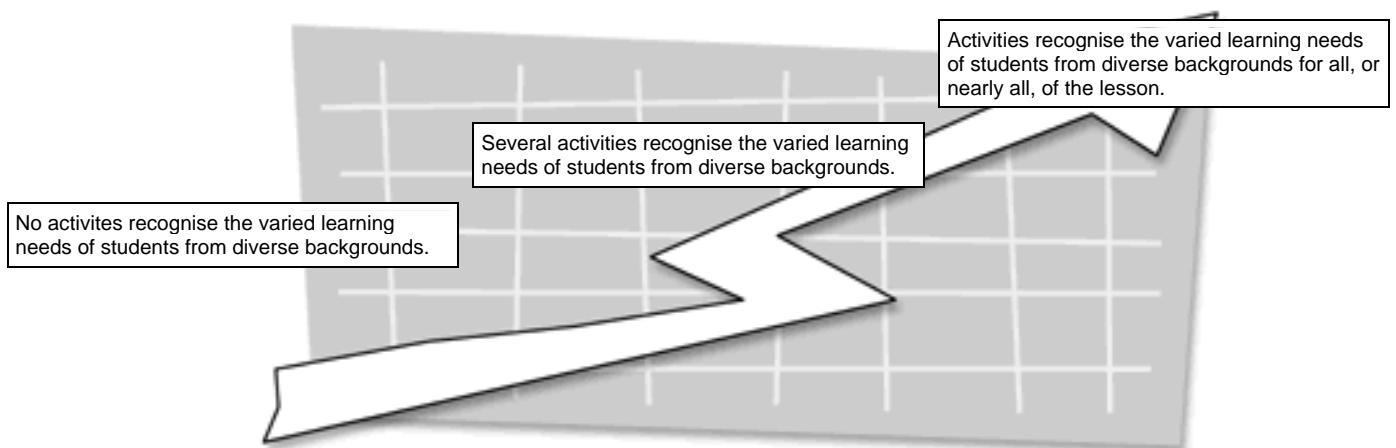
Example

In preparation for Mother's Day, Year 4 students in a primarily ethnic school community were asked to bring in catalogues that they found in their letterboxes at home. The students were then asked to examine the catalogues to see if people like their mothers were represented. Classroom discussion included factors such as cultural identity, socioeconomic background, visual representation and so on.

Most students felt that the women represented in the catalogue were nothing like their mothers. The teacher asked them to look through clip art for suitable graphics, or alternatively draw or construct an image of their mothers through a drawing program, that could be used in a catalogue.

The students were then asked to look at the items for sale for Mother's Day in the catalogues and conduct surveys to see whether or not their mothers would actually like these items or not; in many cases the answer was 'No'. The class then discussed why these items had in fact been chosen for the catalogues, and whose interests were being represented. The generic structure of the catalogues was also dissected, with particular attention paid to the language used to encourage sales.

Finally, the students used the knowledge they had acquired, and their visual images of their mothers, to construct a new catalogue.

Continuum of practice

Activities recognise the varied learning needs of students from diverse backgrounds for all, or nearly all, of the lesson.

Several activities recognise the varied learning needs of students from diverse backgrounds.

No activites recognise the varied learning needs of students from diverse backgrounds.

Narrative

Is the style of teaching principally narrative or is it expository?

Explanation

Narrative consists of a linked sequence of events. The use of narrative in lessons involves an emphasis, both in teaching and in student responses, on structures and forms. This may include the use of personal stories, biographies, historical accounts, and literary and cultural texts.

An expository teaching style places more emphasis on written, nonfiction prose, and scientific and expository expression, by both teacher and students. It involves descriptions, reports, explanations, demonstrations, and the use of documentaries.
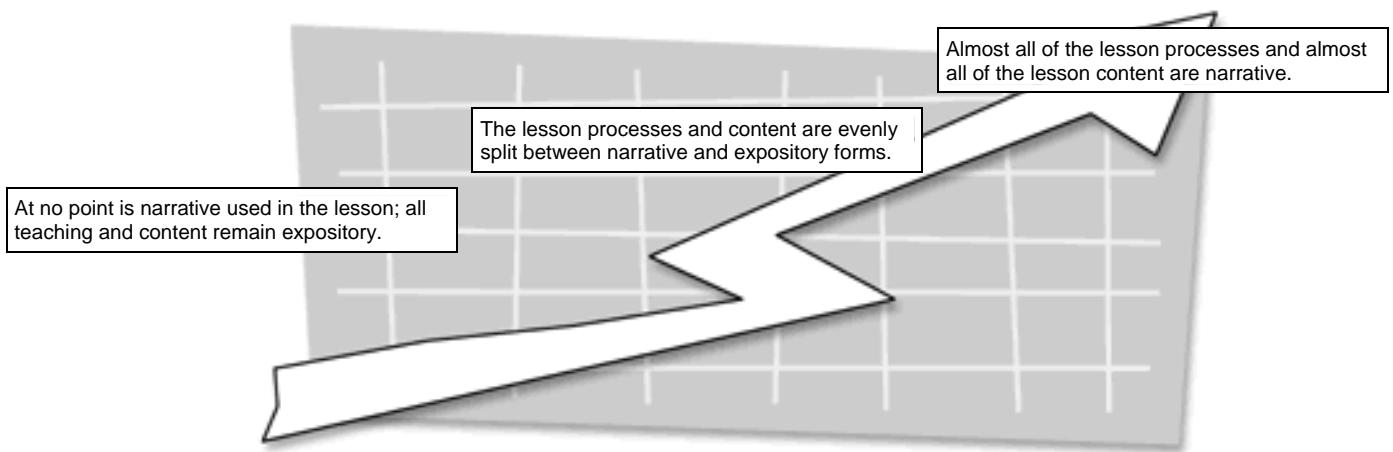
Example

In a Year 6 Social Science class, a teacher was dealing with the sensitive topic of racism in the context of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies. He provided a detailed description of his childhood experiences in a small provincial city, giving a very clear account through a child's eyes.

The teacher then told the class about a recent visit he had made to an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander museum in this same town. It was only then that he had come to understand the oppression that Indigenous people in his town had faced. He spoke of racism, and in particular that of the townspeople, which resulted from a lack of knowledge about the historical issues relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

This narrative was a very powerful device for demonstrating the impact of racism on a child's interpretation of the world. It was clearly more powerful than an exposition could have been.

Continuum of practice

Almost all of the lesson processes and almost all of the lesson content are narrative.

The lesson processes and content are evenly split between narrative and expository forms.

At no point is narrative used in the lesson; all teaching and content remain expository.

Group identity

Does the teaching build a sense of community and identity?

Explanation

Schools need to create a supportive environment where difference is viewed positively and group identities are valued. Within the classroom, there needs to be a strong sense of community.

For example, in a classroom, Aboriginal identities are given positive recognition in classroom practices and representations. Aboriginal students and teachers are given opportunities to pursue aspects of the development of Aboriginal identities and cultures, and all class participants value this as a positive and legitimate aspect of their classroom community. Racism is challenged within the classroom, school, and in the wider community.

In a classroom where there is low group identity the climate is characterised by mistrust demonstrated by (a) students not willingly participating in front of their peers and offering suggestions or alternative points of view, or (b) students who don't participate or don't conform to the behaviours exhibited by the majority of the class are subject to bullying or isolation. One dominant student or group of students may hold the power and monitor the behaviour of the rest of the class in this environment. Apathy or uncertainty may prevail where students don't feel a valued stakeholder in the class.
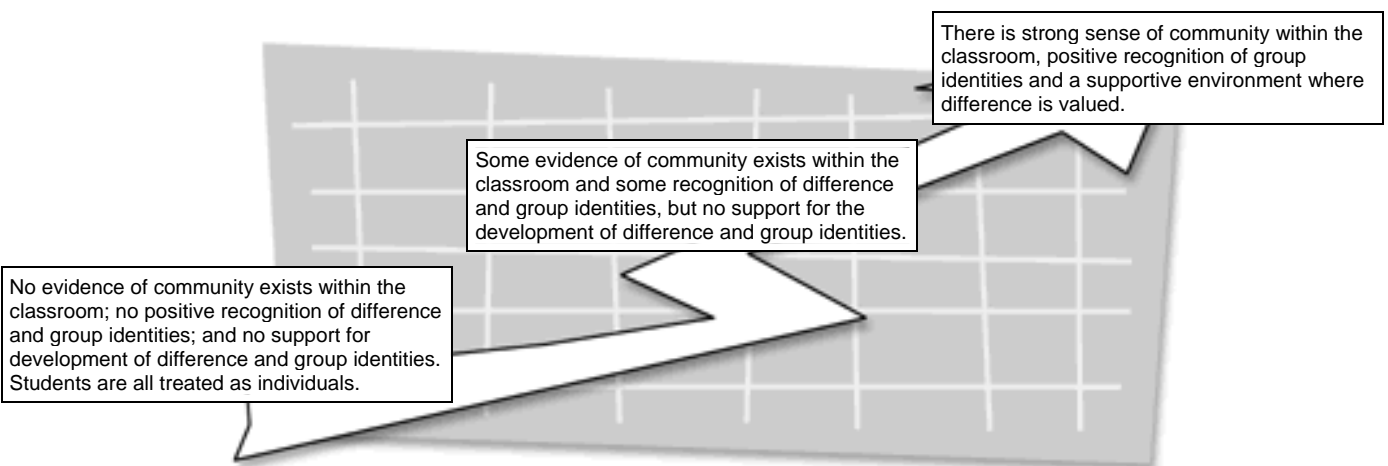
Example

1. In a Year 11 English class the assessment involved a tutorial presented by each student to a small group of their peers on one of the themes in To Kill a Mockingbird.

In one of these tutorials, which contained five students (three males and two females) and the female class teacher, one of the female students gave a presentation on the differences between women's rights in the 1930s and in the 1990s. Throughout the tutorial the student drew on the experiences of the female students and teacher to explain their attitudes to the issues she was raising.

What these students and teacher thought was treated as important because they were female. The differences between their attitudes and those of the male students were clearly recognised, even though the male students were quite supportive of the female students' views.

2. A Year 9 lesson, in a school located in a large multicultural area, focused on the novel Looking for Alibrandi by Melina Marchetta. The students were engaged in considering the question 'What is an Australian?' Students reflected upon how different cultures had been valued, and whether they had been treated fairly, within the context of the novel.

Continuum of practice

There is strong sense of community within the classroom, positive recognition of group identities and a supportive environment where difference is valued.

Some evidence of community exists within the classroom and some recognition of difference and group identities, but no support for the development of difference and group identities.

No evidence of community exists within the classroom; no positive recognition of difference and group identities; and no support for development of difference and group identities. Students are all treated as individuals.

Active citizenship

Are attempts made to encourage active citizenship within the classroom?

Explanation

Active citizenship involves acknowledging that in a democratic society all individuals and groups have rights and responsibilities. They have the right to engage in the creation and re-creation of that democratic society, and to participate in all of the democratic practices and institutions within that society. They have the responsibility to ensure that no groups or individuals are excluded from these practices and institutions.

In the classroom, the principle of *active citizenship* is followed when the teacher explains these rights and responsibilities and ensures that they are adhered to, both within and outside the school.

In a classroom where active citizenship is not valued or practised, the teacher controls the room with no negotiation rights or responsibilities attributed to the learner. The democratic institution is neither discussed nor practised.
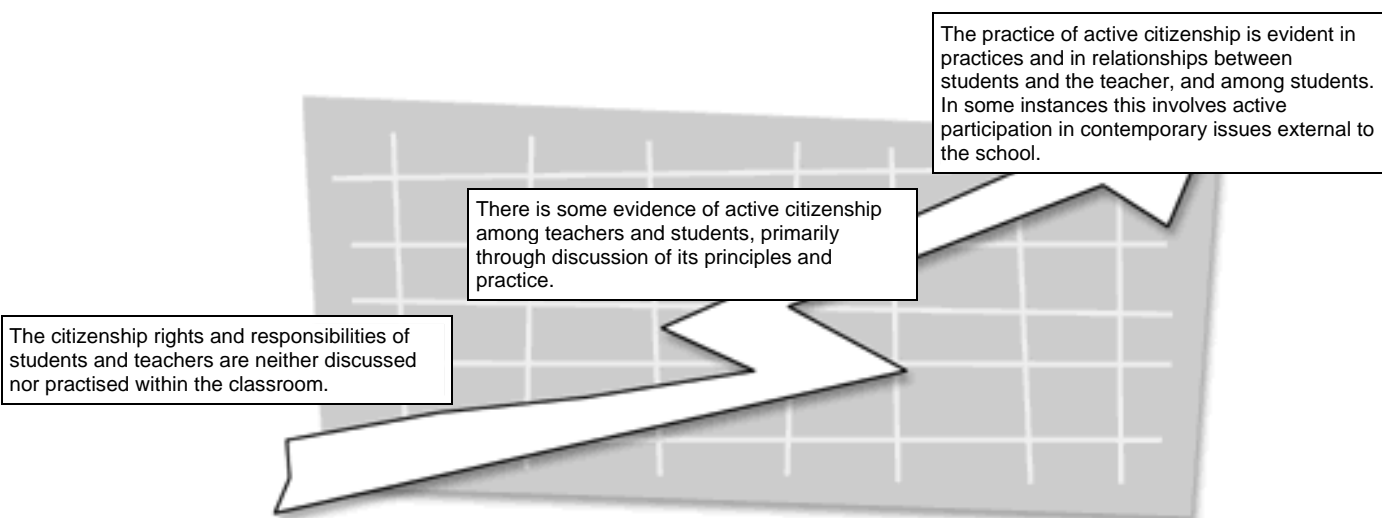
Example

1. Year 7 students were engaged in a unit of work considering the impact of poverty on societies across the globe. They thought about the food they ate in a typical day, and compared this with descriptions in case studies about children in Third World countries suffering hunger. They were encouraged to consider the range of situations that contribute to serious food shortages and starvation.

The students gathered a range of comparative statistics on family income and expenditure across the world. They then prepared a library presentation exploring the impact of poverty on children's lives in Australia and other parts of the world, and made recommendations for school community involvement in Amnesty International and Community Aid Abroad.

2. Groups within a Year 6 class each selected an environmental problem within their school. Each group identified a concern, planned how to address the concern, took action and reflected on the impact of that action, before planning their next step.

One group was concerned about the erosion caused by students who took a short cut outside their classroom, which resulted in dust consistently blowing into the room. They brainstormed a range of options, and then contacted a parent who was a landscaper to discuss the viability of their options. From the options discussed, they chose to create a path and gardens in the area. First, from local companies, they priced materials for making the path. Then, having chosen cement, they drew up a proposal and approached the principal for approval and the student council for funding, before proceeding with the project. A working bee completed the gardens.

Continuum of practice

The practice of active citizenship is evident in practices and in relationships between students and the teacher, and among students. In some instances this involves active participation in contemporary issues external to the school.

There is some evidence of active citizenship among teachers and students, primarily through discussion of its principles and practice.

The citizenship rights and responsibilities of students and teachers are neither discussed nor practised within the classroom.

Connectedness

The [Connectedness] dimension of Productive Pedagogies synthesises a common concern that emanates from diverse interests and research findings. On the one hand, a general concern of students in Australian schools is a need for school studies to be more 'relevant' (Walker, 1986). On the other hand, studies of cognition, curriculum design, and school restructuring all question the degree to which classroom practices address issues or problems which have salience outside of the school (Rogoff, 1991).

(P. 8 QSRLS Supplementary Material)

Knowledge integration

Does the lesson integrate a range of subject areas?

Explanation

Integrated school knowledge is identifiable when either (a) explicit attempts are made to connect two or more sets of subject area knowledge, or (b) no boundaries between subject areas are readily seen. Topics or problems that either require knowledge from multiple areas, or do not have their basis in any clear subject areas in the first place, are indicators of curricula that integrate knowledge from a variety of school subjects.

Non-integrated school knowledge is typically segregated or divided in such a way that specific sets of knowledge and skills are (relatively) unique and discrete for each specified school subject area. Segregated knowledge is identified by clear boundaries between subject areas. The less evident the connections are between knowledge in different segregated subject areas, the stronger are the boundaries between them. In the extreme, such boundaries prevent any interconnection between different subject areas.
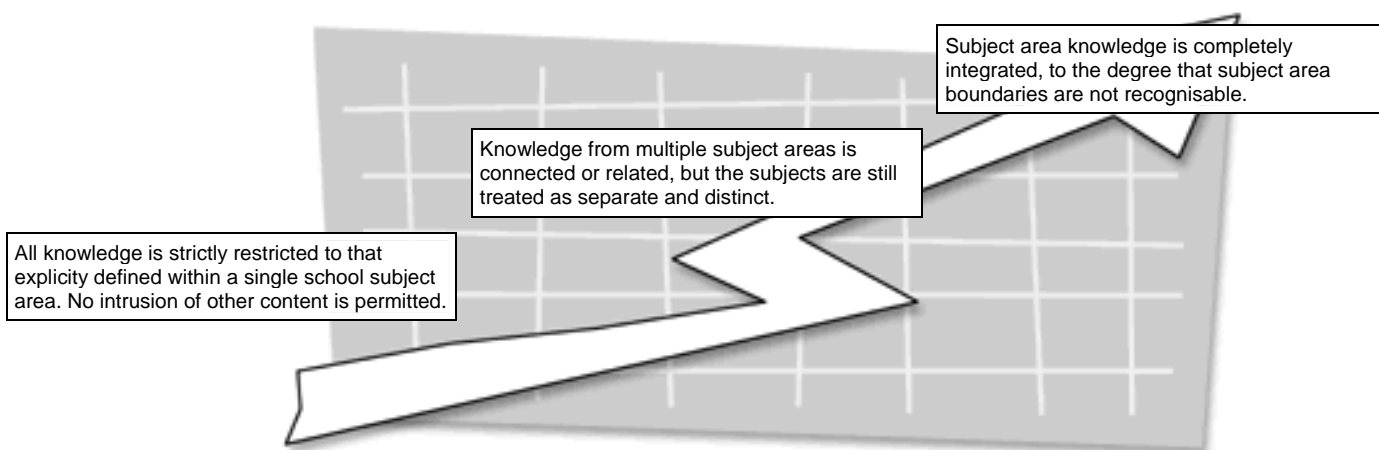
Example

Growing enrolments at a high school necessitated increasing the number of houses by two for various inter-house sporting events. To accommodate this change, two extra lanes had to be marked on the running track in time for the school athletics carnival. This prompted a group of Year 8 teachers from different disciplines to work together on an integrated unit with a single group of students.

An HPE teacher worked with the students to design the new track and athletics field so that it would accommodate the extra competitors. Extra areas had to be allocated for the new house groups, for more marshalling space, and for specialised events such as discus and long jump. A Maths teacher worked with her class to determine the actual lengths of the new tracks and the position of the starting blocks for events over various distances. An English teacher worked with his class to draw up programs, advertising material, results lists and signage. A Computer Studies teacher worked with her class to construct a website for the carnival and keep this website up-to-date.

In this example, integration occurred around a common topic while the subject boundaries remained intact.

Continuum of practice

Subject area knowledge is completely integrated, to the degree that subject area boundaries are not recognisable.

Knowledge from multiple subject areas is connected or related, but the subjects are still treated as separate and distinct.

All knowledge is strictly restricted to that explicity defined within a single school subject area. No intrusion of other content is permitted.

Background knowledge

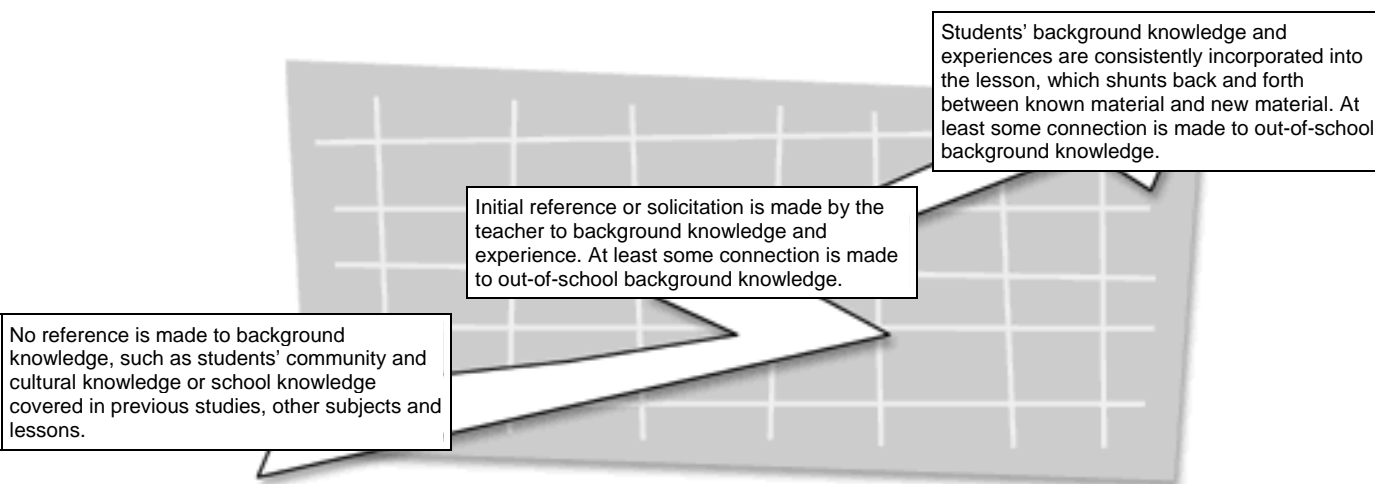**Are links with students' background knowledge made explicit?**

Explanation

High-connection lessons provide students with opportunities to make connections between their own background knowledge and experience and the topics, skills and competencies they are studying and acquiring. Their background knowledge and world view may be derived from personal experience of their community and local area, from their linguistic and cultural heritage, and/or from the media and popular culture.

Low-connection lessons introduce new content, skills and competencies without any direct or explicit exploration of any prior knowledge students may have of the topic. Neither do these lessons attempt to provide key background knowledge that might enhance students' comprehension and understanding of the 'new' material offered.

Example

Year 7 students were asked to create the ideal country. They were asked to consider what elements compose a country. After brainstorming ideas they formed groups in which they had to reach consensus in justifying choices of resources, geographical features, industrial infrastructure, government, industry and cultural composition, customs and laws. Students drew heavily on their own background knowledge and experiences in making choices and justifying decisions to the rest of the group.

Continuum of practice

Students' background knowledge and experiences are consistently incorporated into the lesson, which shunts back and forth between known material and new material. At least some connection is made to out-of-school background knowledge.

Initial reference or solicitation is made by the teacher to background knowledge and experience. At least some connection is made to out-of-school background knowledge.

No reference is made to background knowledge, such as students' community and cultural knowledge or school knowledge covered in previous studies, other subjects and lessons.

Connectedness to the world

Is the lesson, activity or task connected to competencies or concerns beyond the classroom?

Explanation

Connectedness describes the extent to which the lesson has value and meaning beyond the instructional context, making a connection to the wider social context within which students live.

Two areas in which students' work can exhibit some degree of connectedness are: (a) real-world public problems or (b) students' personal experiences. Students might confront an actual contemporary issue or problem, such as preparing a report on homeless people to the local council by applying statistical analysis; or the lesson might focus directly on, or build upon, students' own experiences or situations. A high level of connectedness can be achieved when the lesson entails one or both of these approaches.

A lesson with *low connectedness* has little or no value beyond the classroom; activities are deemed important when success is achieved only within the school context and for no other aspects of life. Students' work has no impact on others and serves only to certify their level of competence or compliance with the norms and routines of formal schooling.

Example

A Year 10 English class was provided with the opportunity to conduct an independent unit of work. The only requirement was that the students had to provide a written product and present their project to the class.

The criteria for the unit were decided in collaboration with the students. Some of the topics the students covered in this class were 'How to do a PowerPoint presentation', 'How to maintain a bicycle', 'How to do sign language', 'How to take good photographs' and 'How to do Japanese cooking'.

In each case the students saw the topics as having value outside the class. There was a suggestion, for example, that the students learning how to do PowerPoint presentations would be able to conduct in-service training for some of the staff. The students learning sign language suggested a number of uses to which they wanted to put their newfound skills. And the two students who were creating a manual on how to maintain a bicycle were discussing ways in which they could market their booklet in the community.

Continuum of practice

Students study or work on a topic, problem or issue that the teacher and students see as connected to their personal experience or actual contemporary public situations. Students recognise the connections between classroom knowledge and situations outside the classroom. They explore these connections in ways that create personal meaning and significance for the knowledge. This meaning and significance is strong enough to lead students to become involved in an effort to affect or influence a larger audience beyond their classroom in one of the following ways: by communicating knowledge to others (including within the school); by advocating solutions to social problems that provide assistance to people; or by creating performance or products with utilitarian or aesthetic value.

Students study a topic, problem or issue that the teacher succeeds in connecting students' actual experiences or to a contemporary public situation. Students recognise some connection between classroom knowledge and situations outside the classroom, but they do not explore the implications of these connections, which remain abstract or hypothetical. There is no effort to actually influence a larger audience.

Lesson topic and activities have no clear connection to anything beyond itself; the teacher offers no justification beyond the need to perform well in class.

Problem-based curriculum

Is there a focus on identifying and solving intellectual and/or real-world problems?

Explanation

A *problem-based curriculum* is one in which students are presented with specific practical, real or hypothetical problems (or sets of problems) to solve. Problems are defined as having no single correct solution, requiring the construction of knowledge by the students, and requiring sustained attention beyond a single lesson.

Problem-based curriculum is not evident when students are presented with a large body of facts and recall is expected with only one given answer accepted as correct.
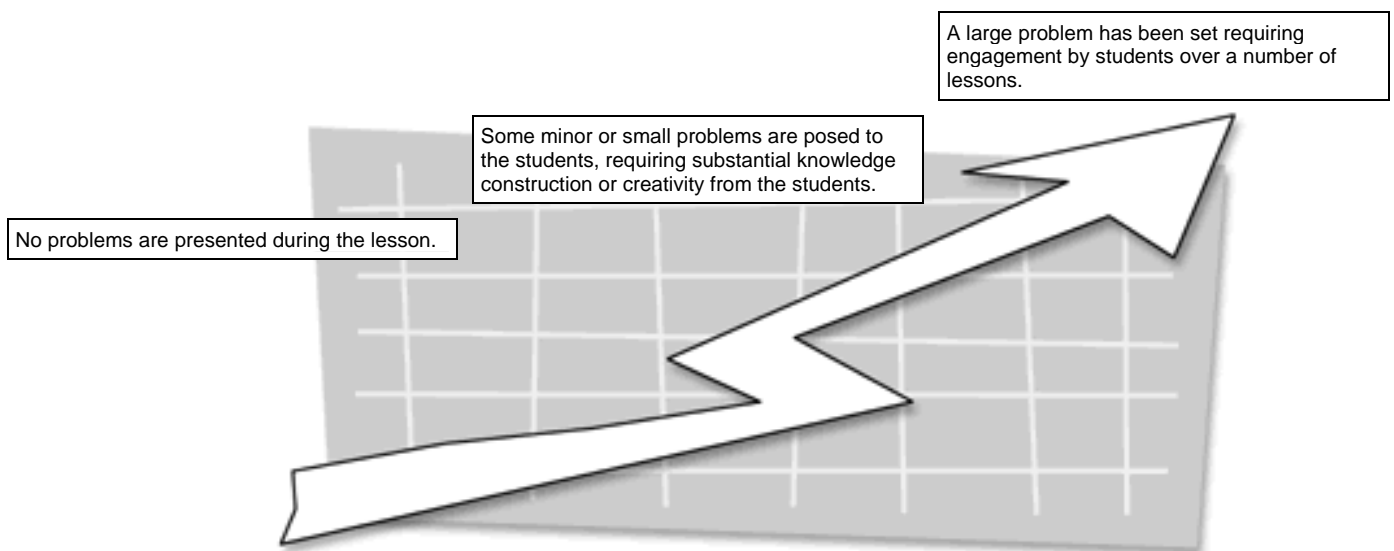
Example

A Year 8 Health and Physical Education teacher was working with the class on a unit about building a raft. Teacher-directed discussion and negotiation ensued about what skills the students would need to build the raft, and what outcomes they wanted from the exercise.

The students decided that one skill they needed to learn was how to work effectively in groups. In response to this, the teacher had the students play a game in the gym where they were allowed to throw balls in all directions, with the aim of keeping the balls constantly in motion. There was frenetic movement of balls around the class. The teacher stopped the game and asked how it could be modified to work more effectively. There was extensive discussion about rules. Much of this discussion was extended to take in questions about rules in society – who created them, why, whether they were able to be negotiated, whether everyone had the same opportunity to create the rules, and so on.

The game then continued under different sets of rules. The students themselves constructed the rules, argued why they were appropriate and looked at their effects. This one lesson was treated not as an isolated incident, but as focusing on the development of a skill needed for solving the larger problem.

This teacher conducted a number of other interesting lessons, all of them directed towards the problem of constructing a raft. All of the lessons were designed to build upon the skills and knowledge perceived by the students and the teacher as necessary to solve this larger problem.

Continuum of practice

A large problem has been set requiring engagement by students over a number of lessons.

Some minor or small problems are posed to the students, requiring substantial knowledge construction or creativity from the students.

No problems are presented during the lesson.

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