Guide to using teaching strategies and resources

a) Process for designing targeted teaching strategies

Four workshops were held between December 2011 and August 2012, during which teachers from a total of 18 schools used formative assessment data to inform the development of teaching strategies, learning activities and resources. The process involved the validation of a Professional Learning Team Log (PLT) that facilitates teacher reflection regarding the identification and organisation of effective developmentally targeted teaching strategies. The definition of these teaching strategies was driven by the identification of students current zone of proximal development (ZPD), targeting the point of readiness to learn of students at different developmental levels.

b) Professional Learning Team Log

The underlying assumption of this process is that teachers who use a specific style of evidence-based teaching, and operate within a developmental learning paradigm have an increased effect on student learning outcomes. More specifically, the evidence suggest that with a data-driven, evidence-based approach to teaching and learning, teachers could manipulate the learning environment and scaffold learning for every student, regardless of the student’s development or intellectual capacity (Griffin, 2007).

The PLT log provides a means by which teachers can engage on this process, developing strategies in a way which clearly targets the students’ point of readiness to learn. By following this process, teachers interrogate the connectivity between the different elements composing the PLT Log: learning intentions, evidence, teacher strategy, learning activities, resources and review and
reflection (as presented in Figure 1). When teachers work collaboratively to ensure that these elements are aligned, the effectiveness of teaching interventions is significantly enhanced for students at different developmental levels.

![Sample PLT Log Template](image)

**Figure 1: PLT Log Template**

The PLT Log template provides a context for teaching reflection about how to interpret data and link this information to their own teaching, testing the links using the discourse of evidence and accountability among peers. This relationship between teacher behaviour, knowledge and values with student learning is a key issue addressed by the process of designing the PLT Log, as teachers are supported in the interpretation of data and in the link of their interpretation to targeted intervention in a differentiated instruction framework model (Perkins, 2006). Teacher professional dialogue in the process of working with the PLT Log involves critical and collaborative discussions, where teachers test their ideas about the links between assessment data, student learning and targeted teaching. In this way, teachers deepen their understanding of how students learn and how this is linked with their professional practice. This reflection also strengthens teachers' comprehension of the developmental nature of the construct areas in which they teach. Additionally, the analysis of the effectiveness of the intervention deepens teacher knowledge and understanding of how best to use assessment data to improve learning outcomes.

Team-based models are an effective form of professional development in comparison to traditional workshop models. Change in teaching practice can occur when teachers are engaged in examining their own theories of practice (Deppeler, 2007). This practice has been identified as an effective practice in improving teaching and learning (Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998; Taylor, Pearson, Peterson & Rodriguez, 2005).

c) Learning levels distribution

The challenge of defining suitable teaching strategies for students at different developmental levels within each year is informed by assessment data. The following graphs show the spread of students...
by year for all the students tested using the Assessment Research Centre Online Testing System (ARCOTS)\(^1\) in March 2011 (a total of 15,578 students for reading comprehension and of 14,304 students for numeracy).

---

\(^1\) Schools in the Assessment and Learning Partnerships Linkage project use ARCOTS to assess their students at two time points over the school year. ARCOTS is an online system and can be used to assess literacy, numeracy and problem solving. The testing system is quasi-adaptive to help teachers target assessments and match the tests to the student ability level to gain maximum information for teaching intervention.
As the graphs show, in each year level there are a number of different developmental levels that represent what the students are ready to learn. To address different student readiness to learn points teaching should be targeted, and differentiated interventions need to be used within the same year level. For example, if a teacher is working with Year 4 students in reading comprehension, the most likely distribution of levels will be from students who can “Locate and match adjacent words in text at word and phrase level” (Level A in the developmental progression) to a group of students who can “Infer author’s perspective from what is written and what is implied (and) Identify how different texts are structured” (Level H). In a similar manner, if a teacher is working with Year 4 students in Numeracy, the levels also are distributed between A and H (there are even a few students in Level I). This diversity needs to be addressed when planning if teaching is to target all students learning.

**d) Targeting teaching strategies**

When designing targeted teaching strategies for the different levels on the reading comprehension and numeracy developmental progressions, the key task for teachers was to articulate the skill then
match the **strategy** to the skill being targeted. The ‘strategy’ may consist of an overarching strategy and subordinate strategies or a series of related strategies. In matching strategies to the skill teachers checked that the specific objective that sits behind any given strategy was aligned with the **level** and **complexity** of the skill being targeted. The PLT log was used to document the sequence of strategies designed in the intervention so as to provide a framework for the learning activity and to support the further development of a bank of strategies.

Thus:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SKILL</th>
<th>STRATEGY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Based on</td>
<td>Is matched to Skill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developmental</td>
<td>Aligns with complexity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level</td>
<td>Strategy 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strategy 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strategy 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This process can be also used in a backwards-design approach enabling teachers to analyse activities/strategies they are currently using. To do this we start with the ‘Activity’ and apply the process in reverse, as reviewed in the following example:
Let us look at this backwards-design approach in relation to an example, e.g. ‘Word Splash’, see below, which is sometimes referred to as a strategy or an activity. We found this example on the web. (www.turningpts.org/pdf/Word_splash2.doc)
**Word Splash**

We read better when we read with purpose. Reading for leisure we supply our own purposes based on our interests and tastes. At other times purpose is provided to us by a particular task: we read the camera manual in order to learn how to operate it; we read workplace memos—either emailed to us or placed in our boxes—to learn (we hope) important information.

The word splash activity supports students’ reading by helping to provide purpose. It is especially important that struggling and reluctant readers are provided with a purpose before reading. A student generated word splash asks a group of students to quickly brainstorm on a large sheet of paper all the words they associate with the topic of the article they will soon be reading. The teacher can then review these words with the class by asking individual students to write a sentence using the word or by asking students to write a paragraph using some of the words. The teacher can also review words orally with students exploring the meaning of the word and the association the word has with the topic.

After reviewing the words, the class can begin reading the article. Using the word splash the student will read with recently activated background knowledge and with purpose as she discovers whether the understandings generated by the word splash can be confirmed or corrected.

Extracted from: www.turningpts.org/pdf/Word_splash2.doc

The posters of this ‘strategy/activity’ on the web go on to say: ‘A teacher generated word splash can be used when students are reading an article like this on a topic that may not be easily accessible to students. For example, a Word splash for an article on the importance of food can be:

**Teacher Generated Word Splash for “The Importance of Food” Science Chapter**
Breaking the example down using the backwards design method, we find the following:

**TOPIC**

**ACTIVITY (What students do)**
- Students brainstorm words associated with the topic
- Answer questions about the meaning of the words
- Write a sentence or paragraph using some of the words
- Read a selected article
- Discover whether the understandings generated by ‘word splash’ can be confirmed or corrected.

**STRATEGIES (What the teacher does)**
- Directs students to brainstorm topic
- Review words identified by students on a 1:1 basis
- Conduct class discussion to explore meaning of words
- Direct students to write a paragraph

**SKILL**

The question that we have to ask here is what ‘skill’ does Word Splash target? When we look at the learning intention a skill is not identified. As the activity currently stands it may work as an orientation exercise but is not going to be effective in targeting and developing a skill.

How could we develop this to explicitly target the intended skill? One skill that could be developed from this example is perhaps, prediction. How might the activity be modified to target that skill? At what level of complexity will it be targeted? What strategy would best target that skill at that complexity level (refer to taxonomy)? What would be the expected outcomes and evidence?

**e) The Strategies**

Bearing in mind the process previously described, the skill levels distribution and using the PLT Logs, the set of sample targeted strategies presented in this publication was developed. These strategies are mapped against empirically based developmental progressions in numeracy (number) and reading comprehension, copies of which are provided on the website.
It should be noted that the strategies presented are not ends unto themselves, rather they are means of promoting professional discourse: discourse about student developmental reading and numeracy levels, discourse about the elements of comprehension, discourse about teacher content knowledge, and discourse about teacher pedagogical content knowledge. In this way, these strategies are a sample of the kind of strategies that teachers can use for students at different developmental levels, but they do not intend to be a comprehensive set of samples. Instead, it is hoped that these set of strategies can be used to facilitate teachers’ collaborative reflection about students at different skills’ levels and then new targeted strategies can be adapted from the repertoire teachers already are using. Teachers are advised to use the strategies as starting points for discussions during PLT meetings and to consult the references listed on this website.

**Reading Comprehension**

The sample PLT logs demonstrate how skills at each level from A to L on the Progression of Reading Development can be taught progressively using ‘Waltzing Matilda’ as a common resource. In the first instance teachers should approach the PLT logs holistically and trace the development of skills across all twelve levels. This will strengthen teachers understanding of the developmental progression and of how teaching can be differentiated. The next step is to focus on a specific student, locate the student’s developmental level based on evidence of what the student can do, say, make or write, and identify the log which: (i) explicitly addresses the skill level the student is at, (ii) covers the skill level the student has progressed from, and (iii) points to the skill level the student will aim for next. The identification of a student provides the context of the skill level they are working at and therefore allows for a more meaningful engagement with the steps described in the log.

Though the sample logs can be used to teach the skills at each of the levels on the Progression of Reading Development their main purpose is to serve as a model for teachers to use, a model around which teachers can discuss and develop targeted and documented teaching strategies. Effective teaching has to take into account context and this is always changing. Effective teaching also draws on:

- teacher understanding of student developmental levels,
- learning intentions,
- knowing what evidence will describe when a student has mastered the skill,
- aligned teaching strategies, learning activities and resources.
- review and reflection.

Each of these steps is built into the PLT log. By following the steps outlined in the log, especially when this is done collaboratively, teachers can maximise their effectiveness.

**Numeracy**

What is true in terms of the use of the PLT log for Reading Comprehension is also true for Numeracy, the focus of which is on Numbers, one of four strands described in the Numeracy Progression already referred to.
In the document identified as “Numeracy Strategies by Skill Level Grid”, a brief description of the strategies – considering the learning intention, the teaching strategies and the learning activities – for each level is provided. Strategies at each level are organised taking into account three overlapping, flexible groups: junior years (from years 3 to 5), middle years (around years 5 and 8) and upper years (around years 8 to 10). This distinction acknowledges the different context for students even if they are at the same readiness to learn point. Therefore, the activities are contextualised according to the year levels students are typically in, but retain the same learning intention aligned with the developmental level. For some developmental levels, however, no teaching strategies are proposed. This occurs at upper years for Levels A and B and junior years for Levels J, K and L. These are shaded grey in recognition of the fact that students at these particular year level may be outside of the typical distribution in a mainstream school and that specialist support may be desirable.

A sample PLT log is provided for each developmental level highlighted on the grid in pink. At the end of each level, there are also a number of empty rows to highlight that this is a work in progress for PLTs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategies for junior years (around year 3 to 5)</th>
<th>Strategies for junior years (around year 5 to 8)</th>
<th>Strategies for junior years (around year 8 to 10)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Grey zone for students that, for example, are in Year 9 and cannot “Add and skip count numbers less than 20. Match number names with numerals. Recognise numeric patterns” (Level A in the developmental progression)

Figure 4: Numeracy strategies by Skill Level Grid

When teachers are working on the design of further targeted strategies using PLT logs, some questions that would be useful to interrogate the strategies proposed are:

1. Is the strategy addressing what the students are ready to learn at this particular developmental level? (to evaluate the suitability with the skills level)
2. Is a student at these years able to engage with that kind of learning activities? (to evaluate the suitability with the year level)
3. Can the teaching strategies for different levels be implemented simultaneously by the teacher? (to evaluate the classroom management feasibility).

When analysing the third question, it is important to consider that teachers may need some additional resources and support on how to organise the classroom for targeted learning activities to happen simultaneously. For example, many of the teaching strategies begin with a modeling intervention from the teacher. This modeling, however, does not necessarily need to be done personally by the teacher (that then will need to model to different groups at the same time), but can be done by a video, a worksheet, a laboratory description, or in different ways.

f) References


