

Making it Happen: five steps to better teaching

Explore -> Experiment -> Improve -> Celebrate -> Embed

Why five steps?

- It's important to get it right. Research shows that teachers have three to four times the effect on student achievement as their managers or any other whole college factor
- Teaching can only improve if teachers change what they do
- Only teachers can change teaching (Desforges)
- Changing teaching is itself a learning process for the teacher (Joyce and Showers)
- Learning requires clear goals, discovering how to do it, practice, support and feedback, reward and recognition for success
- Investment is necessary: give people time or save them time to make time to develop. This could pay for itself: if one extra student is retained this would pay for at least one hour of 'remission'

(((** This section needs to be written after the introduction)))

Explore

Explore the context

Given our course and our students etc, what are the key issues and problems in ensuring success for all?

- What is the success rate for this course?
- Do you recruit with integrity, and get the bum on the right seat?

Consider:

- diagnosis and remediation of deficiencies in prior learning, including key skills
- giving students support in proportion to their need with consequences for falling behind or attending poorly that provide support and ensure the student keeps up

How?

- Staff development day exploring issues and difficulties in search of positive and forward looking strategies for improvement. This could be combined with the next section on exploring present practice

Explore present practice

How do we differentiate at present?

- 'Swap shop' where staff bring ideas that work for them. This can be within an existing team, or between different teams.
- 'Bring and buy' that is, a swap shop where staff commit to try one of the ideas presented by another member of the team and report back how it went.
- Other staff development sessions.
- Discussion at meetings

Explore the pedagogy

What other learning and teaching strategies could we use to differentiate better?

The following could use the ideas described in section ?? of this document

- **staff training day** or staff development session led by the team leader or a learning and teaching expert e.g. teacher training staff mentors, advanced practitioners etc
- **staff training course:** This is likely to be better than the above, and would be a series of, say, six short 'twilight' staff development sessions, held on different days of the

week to ensure everyone can attend at least some of the sessions. After each of these sessions participants try out new ideas, and the outcomes of these trials are discussed at the beginning of the next session. Such a course may be accredited by a local university towards a CPD qualification in some cases. Clearly attendance can be mandatory, or voluntary. If the attendance is mandatory consider the paragraph below on 'time'.

- Divide up the ideas in the book amongst your team and ask each person to prepare to present their section to a meeting or series of meetings
- Team leader studies the materials and then presents the ideas at a team meeting
- Trawl the literature, the internet, best practice networks etc for other ideas.

BOX

The college that devised the 'staff training course' described above on a mandatory basis found that an Ofsted inspector was highly supportive of the project. The sessions were delivered by staff from their initial teacher training courses (Cert Ed etc). Lesson observation showed much improvement in all curriculum areas. Staff were not keen at first but later warmed to course and rated it highly.

What pedagogy should we explore?

Some changes to teaching will reap great improvements in student achievement, others might make little difference. The teaching methods that have the greatest impact on student achievement have been identified by a huge synthesis of educational research carried out by Professor John Hattie of the University of Auckland New Zealand. The aspects of teaching that have the greatest effect on achievement are;

- Active learning
- Feedback: that is, clarifying goals and the criteria for excellent work, telling students what they do well in terms of these goals, and setting them targets for improvement to close the gap between the goals and their present performance.

Experiment

Plan Experimentation and implementation

Decide as a team and as individuals how you will differentiate better. It is always possible to improve no matter how experienced or practised you are, so no member of the team should be exempt from improvement and development.

- The team produce a development plan or action plan including experiments and other activities with clear statements of who will do what by when. Volunteers will have more ownership than conscripts.
- A means of monitoring supporting and evaluating these developments is decided. see 'improve; section,
- The experiments are divided up between the team members so that:
 - all the most productive avenues are explored
 - every teacher practises some new strategies
 - **piloting**: each member of the team could be given some new teaching strategies to try out on behalf of the team.
 - **mentoring**; more substantial projects are done in pairs, or the teacher trying it out is given another member of the team as a mentor or 'critical friend'.
- **Action Research projects** are set up for more substantial experiments or developments. These are funded to release the staff involved from some of their teaching duties. One hour off a teacher's timetable creates two hours a week development time.

- A 'Celebration' and reward strategy is decided and the team are told of this in advance so as to provide a focus and a deadline for completion for the developments. See below.

Improve

Improve and 'coach-in' strategies

Teachers develop strategies for themselves and the team, while receiving support and coaching from the team and others

- Experiments and other activities are monitored and supported by the team leader
- Teachers 'buddy up' in pairs to support and encourage each other. You would need to define this role and perhaps some groundrules such as how often the pair meets and for how long, the agenda for this meeting and so on. The pairs could of course do this for themselves and then report their decision to their line manager.

The pair may or may not act as mutual mentors to question each other about practice, to learn from them and/or to identify areas for improvement. The pair could then guide each other towards framing experiments and could monitor their progress perhaps with observations.*

- Support is offered by Advanced practitioners, Teaching Mentors, etc where possible
- Discussions in team meetings are used to support and monitor progress.
- All agendas have '*learning and teaching – 10 minutes*' at the top. Team members take it in turn to report on progress and get advice and support. Time is created for learning and teaching by ensuring that meetings are not used to disseminate information, e-mail and pigeon-holes are used for this instead.
- Link peer observation or other observation to the developments in new strategies, perhaps using observation as an opportunity to learn from the teacher being observed rather than as evaluation/measuring tool

*There are some useful materials on mentoring processes in "Mentoring Towards Excellence" published by the AoC, every college that is a member of the AoC should have a copy.

Celebrate

Celebrate Success

Teachers report on their experiments, explain their reasoning, and share their strategies. This is better done at an event than on paper. These events seem frightening to some managers, but they invariably go well if planned for, and if the spirit in which they are carried out is positive.

How?

- A formal dissemination event where staff recount their experiments, and explain what worked for them. The dissemination could be to the teacher's own team, or to a senior manager, or committee of managers, however, it might be better done to another teaching team. Two teaching teams could pair up for the purpose.
- a 'Learning Fair' at the end of the academic year where teams get together to
- A standing, unstaffed exhibition in a public place explaining the experiments and the 'before and after'.

Creating an 'audience' for the team's findings and strategies has many advantages.

- It creates a focus for teachers to work towards and a sense that what they are doing is to be valued and respected, not just hidden behind the classroom doors.
- It is more motivating than presenting findings in a paper-based manner, or not presenting them at all.
- It creates a sense of responsibility, ownership, and commitment to the development.

- It rewards staff for their ideas, efforts and for the risks they have taken.
- It provides an opportunity to learn from each other and to spread good practice.
- It models and values continuous improvement by experimentation
- Team building
- Its fun

There is a dissemination event planned right from the beginning where the strategies experimented and developed are presented by those who have been working on them.

If there is some way of measuring the impact of the developments this would be most helpful. This could be done for example by a student questionnaire or by lesson observations. The ideal would be to measure important indicators before and after the experiment, indicators might include students' preceptions of how engaged they feel in lessons, or lesson observation grades.

Embed

Embed practice

Changes are made to the schemes of work, lesson plans, assignments, worksheets, course management, etc to embed the strategies that have been found to work.

Teaching teams change, and the work done to improve differentiation needs to be put into a form that enables someone joining the team anew to profit from it.

This ensures

- changes are fully thought out, and don't just remain in teachers' heads
- If a teacher leaves the team or teaches different units next year, their ideas and development work are available to their successor
- Consistency of approach.

As well as changing the established documentation and procedures mentioned above the team could also produce the following if it improved the learner experience. Otherwise there would probably be better things to do.

- A differentiation policy document
- A 'teacher's handbook' for the course which briefly describes generic teaching strategies that differentiate well and that experiment has found to suit the students and the subject(s). This might include alternative question and answer methodologies and other teaching methods.

Time

The process above requires substantial development time. At least some time will need to be provided if the outcomes are to be meaningful.

- If there are high expectations of substantial development being undertaken then staff will need remission from their usual teaching loads in nearly all cases.
- Staff development days can be set aside for teams to direct their own development work, hold meetings, research teaching strategies and so on.
- Special 'away days' or 'stop the track' days where the time table is suspended for development to take place.

In many cases the development work will improve retention and achievement, and so can be seen as an investment rather than a dead cost. If one extra full time student is retained by the development, this can save the college more than £1000.

Not the steps but the stepping

It would be possible to go through the above process and hardly change teaching at all. It would also be possible to use it to transform teaching beyond all recognition. What makes the difference is not the steps, but why and how they are carried out. The true focus and intention of the process is what will decide whether the outcomes will have value.

There is a danger that managers, or even worse the teachers, will see the 'Embed Practice' phase as being the true focus and goal of this whole development process. Such an 'instrumental' approach is common in FE and is deeply undermining of quality for it creates the appearance of improvement and quality while hiding its opposite.

It would be worth sacrificing some consistency and rigour to foster the right attitudes from the team. If the process is carried out in the right spirit commitment from the team might grow as the process unfolds.

Deciding factors for quality change as opposed to apparent change are perhaps best summed up by the 'values drives behaviour' approach. See for example Runshaw College's Beacon dissemination materials:

This would involve establishing from the start and emphasising throughout, strongly if necessary, that the real purpose of the whole process is to improve student learning, and so improve students' life-chances. Teachers touch students' lives for ever. If differentiation goes better, some students will pass who would have failed. This means that some students will progress and get careers, challenges, rewards, and lives they would not have got otherwise. It is easy to lose the thread of the individual student story in the gross procedures and aggregated data that teachers and managers must deal with daily.

Managers will do this better by actions than by words. If managers are seen to be obsessed with documentation rather than the student experience, their teachers will be too, or they will be cynical and go through the motions rather than engage with the substance fully.

It is not difficult to dissipate and squander the effort of teachers in paper chases that only distract them from their true purpose: getting students to learn. That is not to say that all paperwork is a waste of time. Some paper improves learning, but not all. There is a real professional judgement to be made here. On the one hand managers must ensure that the processes that support learning take place efficiently and effectively, but on the other hand they must have the confidence in themselves their staff to remove bureaucratic procedures that add little or no value to learning, and so release teachers to teach.

Inspections often have the effect of increasing a managers desire for paper 'evidence'. But if the evidence is very time consuming to collect, this will reduce the quality of the student experience the main focus of inspections.

Using the five-step process.

The five step process can be used as a tool to help evaluate the effectiveness of strategies to improve learning and teaching. It is worth considering what would be the effect if, as is usually the case, at least some of the five steps are missing. This helps see the

importance of the missing steps, but will also help managers to see how to improve existing systems.

Why do we need five steps?

Research shows that staff training often does not change teaching

A review of research carried out by Joyce and Showers shows that the traditional model of staff training has no effect on the classroom practice of the participants. Despite this fatal blow the old staff-training model staggers on in many colleges; but if teaching is to improve we must first change our training practice.

The good news is that training **can** impact very markedly on teaching, but only if that training follows a certain design. The irony is that the design required is that of good teaching:

Theory: explain and justify the new approach

Demo: Show/model how it can be done in practice

Practice: let the teachers try doing it this new way

Feedback: give the teachers feedback on their use of the new way

Coaching: help teachers work out what to do next to improve their new approach

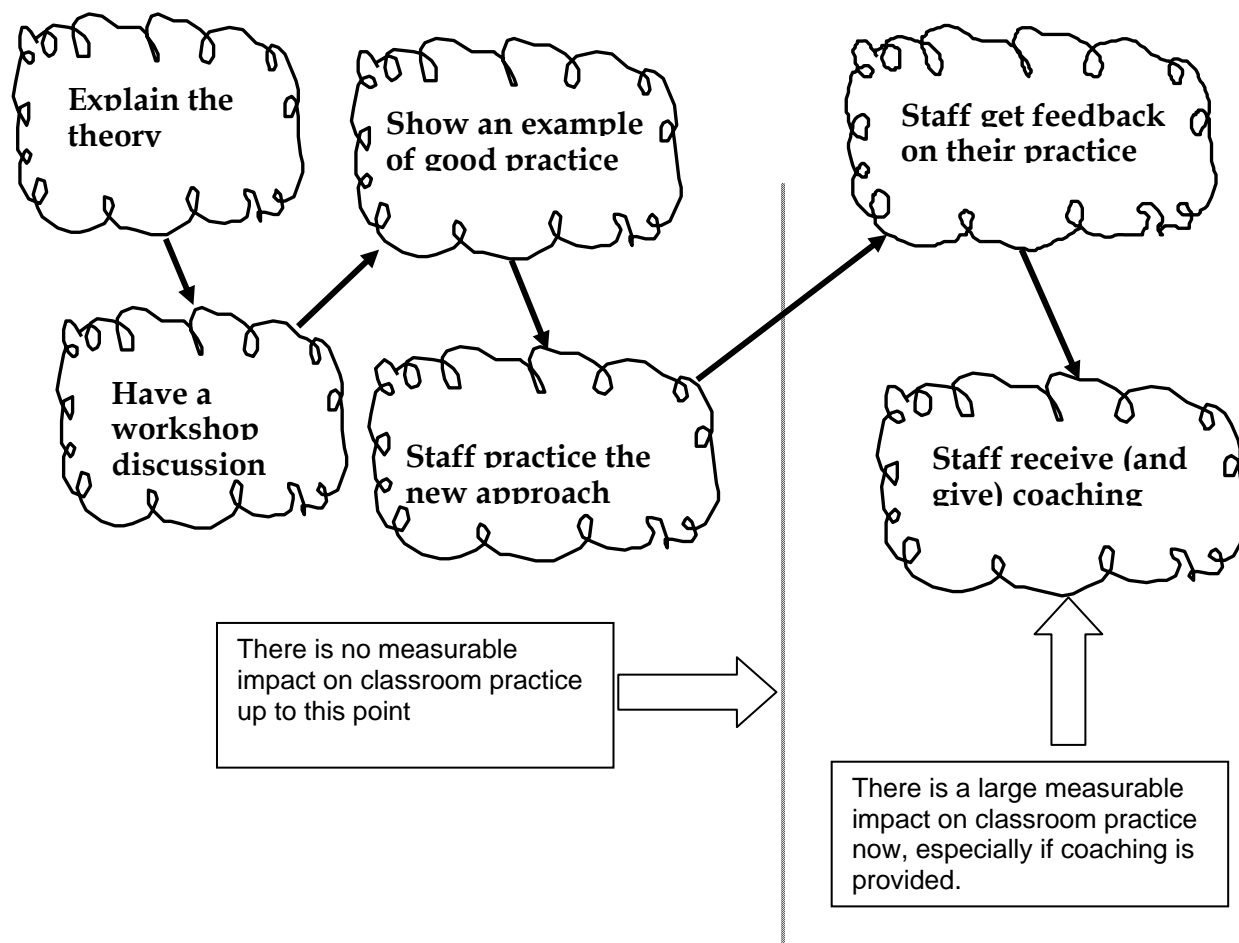
It seems that teachers learn to improve their teaching in much the same way as learners learn, say, to improve their problem solving in trigonometry. By didactic methods certainly, but mostly from corrected practice with feedback and help (coaching). Surely we teachers should always have known this? We all know that it is only when we begin to apply our learning that the real difficulties, and the real learning starts.

Yet if you look at most staff training sessions they often only provide the theory, and if we are lucky, some examples of good practice: that is 'the demo'. The trainer may use active methods to teach the theory, but there is no requirement that the participants apply the new ideas in their own teaching, let alone that they get the vital feedback and coaching on their change of practice.

Joyce and Showers studied 200 In Service Education and Training (INSET) programmes for teachers, each of which was designed with the specific aim of changing classroom practice. They found that even when teachers were given an opportunity to practice the new approach they quickly slipped back into their customary practice after a few trials. Perhaps their most telling and disturbing finding was that teachers could be very enthusiastic about training, fill out their happy sheets with glowing phrases, and leave the session radiating resolve. But a few weeks later they had crept back into their comfort zone, and reverted to their old practice.

This was not laziness, or even the distraction of other priorities, though the marking pile and knee-deep in-tray can hardly have helped. It was not even their reluctance to change, but the lack of feedback and coaching. We all know that when we are taking risks and doing things differently things never work perfectly first time. We need an opportunity to check whether we are doing it right, and a chance to adapt our practice to make it work better. A few teachers can do this for themselves, but most of us need a structured opportunity or this follow up on our practice. This feedback and coaching does not need to be provided by the trainer, staff can support each other.

Joyce and Showers: A review of 200 INSET programmes showing that training design determines whether training will be implemented.



By 'feedback' Joyce and Showers mean information for the teacher on the effectiveness of their implementation of the new strategies. This could be provided by an observation, though this may not be easy to arrange. Alternatively the teacher may simply describe how they are implementing the new approach, and what happened as a result, including both positive and negative outcomes, preferably with some documentation or other evidence, and some thoughts on the difficulties that they encountered. This will often be enough for fellow teachers to give the teacher some support and help. Other evidence that can help colleagues provide feedback are: a video or tape of the lesson; student's work; students' views on the new approach; etc.

'Coaching' involves using feedback to provide the teacher with any extra help they might need to implement the new strategy. New strategies rarely work perfectly first time and coaching provides the experimenting teacher with some help with their difficulties, and some idea about 'what to do next'. The devil is in the detail when implementing most teaching strategies, and context is very important. What works for one class may fail in another. Approaches need to adapt to the nature of the students, the subject matter, and to other contextual factors.

Who should provide this feedback? Coaching can be carried out by a mutual self-support group, or can be lead by someone with learning and teaching expertise such as an advanced practitioner.

There is more to coaching than advice and guidance on the implementation of improved teaching strategies however. A good coaching session is inspiring, it fosters a blame-free culture where initial failures are laughed off as inevitable, and seen as valuable learning experiences. It shows how to make ideas work in the challenging reality of the workaday teaching situation, and it reconfirms the goals and content of the training. Teachers often leave coaching sessions with their determination to succeed redoubled.

((Box))

Some findings in Joyce and Showers Research

- What the teacher THINKS about teaching determines what the teacher does when teaching
 - Teachers are likely to keep and use new strategies and concepts if they receive COACHING
 - Competent teachers with high SELF-ESTEEM usually benefit more from training
 - Individual teaching styles do not often affect teachers' abilities to learn from staff development
 - Initial enthusiasm for training is reassuring to the organisers but has relatively little influence upon learning
 - What does matter is the TRAINING DESIGN not where it's done or who does it
- B Showers et al 'Synthesis of research on staff development' Educational Leadership (Nov 1987)

((box end))

Joyce and Showers' review makes some other telling points. They insist that the goal of training should not be simply to get the teachers to adopt new methods and practices. It should aim to change the way the teachers think about teaching. The 'training' should appeal to fundamental principles of what constitutes good teaching and learning. Once teachers think in a new way about learning and teaching, they will often find ways to apply these principles that the trainer would never have thought of.

((Box))

DEVELOPING TEACHERS: EMPIRICAL RESEARCH (Joyce and Showers Student achievement through staff development (1988))

Training Components and Combinations	Training Outcomes		
	Knowledge	Skill	Transfer of Training
Information	.63	.35	.00
Theory	.15	.50	.00
Demonstration	1.65	.26	.00
Theory, Demo	.66	.86	.00
Theory, Practice	1.15		.00
Theory, Demo, Prac		.72	.00
Theory, Demo, Practice, Feedback	1.31	1.18	.39

Theory, Demo,
Practice, Feedback,
Coaching

2.71

1.25

1.68

((box end))