Monitoring the Quality of Pedagogy

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ABSTRACT: This article discusses the need for and use of instruments for examining the quality of pedagogy from the perspective of school leaders. It uses the instruments developed with the New South Wales Department of Education and Training to support the NSW model of pedagogy, known as the NSW Quality Teaching model (QT). The need for an explicit model of pedagogy is discussed and the strategic choices in model development are outlined, including reference to student outcomes, maximising the challenge to current practice, balancing maximum challenge and maximum realism, detailing the level and form of the data gathered (such as language employed and use of quantification), and the fit within already existing information. A brief overview of the model and instruments is followed by advice on both conducting a pedagogy audit and moving from an audit to improving pedagogy.

Introduction

How does a principal know the teaching occurring in his or her school is really good? What do we call high quality teaching anyway? There was a day when it was common to hear about principals who ‘knew’ their teachers were teaching well because all the kids were quiet when the daily hall walk occurred. There was a time principals would say they knew students were learning because they were generally happy and doing what was asked of them. Few educators these days, however, would readily accept that either of these conditions (however rare they may be) really tells you whether or not high quality teaching is occurring behind the closed doors of classrooms. Even as teachers and principals and other schools’ teachers open up their doors, encouraging students to be more active and engaged in meaningful activities, even as schools have become places where a significant amount of information is gathered about student outcomes, having clear evidence about the quality of teaching is still very difficult to find and surprisingly rare.

In this article I will discuss the need for and use of instruments for examining the quality of pedagogy from the perspective of school leaders. To do this, I will be using the instruments Jennifer Gore and I developed with the New South Wales Department of Education and Training to support the NSW model of pedagogy, known as the NSW Quality Teaching model (hereafter QT). I keep comments on the technical and statistical development of the NSW model and its associated instruments to a minimum in order to focus this discussion on the value and use of such instruments more generally.

While most of this discussion will be using schools as the organisational point of reference, I should note that the issues discussed here have applicability well beyond schools. Students and colleagues with whom I have worked have applied this view of pedagogical leadership in a very
wide cross section of organisations, from tertiary institutions and early childhood centres, to corporate and military training programs; from small local departments to a whole national system of teachers’ development. Assuredly, the details of the models of pedagogy taken to be valid in each context differ, as do the specific concerns of professional development. While there is ample room for theoretical debate as to why, or whether or not, processes of pedagogical leadership are really transportable, here I will simply make the pragmatic observation that I, and many other people with whom I work, have found these similarities on a regular basis.

In essence then, this is a very pragmatic and practical analysis. For this reason, I have adopted the first person voice and will be drawing from a variety of research projects on which I have worked as a means to illustrating and illuminating the practical concerns my students have experienced and shared with me in a course I have taught, together with John Schiller, for more than a decade.¹

The Need for a Model of Pedagogy

Before venturing into the prospect of improving the pedagogy of an organisation, we should be very upfront and say that you cannot improve pedagogy without having some model of pedagogy as your guide, or your goal. Improvement implies change toward some end-point, and when it comes to pedagogy we need to make that end-point really explicit.

The reasons for making this point are both pragmatic (it is pragmatically true – you are going to be using a model whether or not you say so), and because this point is often ignored by school leaders when they take up the mantel of becoming instructional leaders in a serious way. That is, it is very common to see discussions of instructional leadership in which the desired model of pedagogy is either non-existent or simply not stated and assumed. When no clear explicit statements about what kind of pedagogy are made, it is all too easy to see that any attempt to improve pedagogy would be open to highly subjective and often changing ideas about what teachers should or shouldn’t do. If a given leader happens to have a brilliant model in their head, they will eventually need it to be public at some point. There are reasons for wanting that to be public sooner rather than later.

One problem related to having an explicit model of pedagogy turns up when pedagogical commitments are made that would be hard to defend. A brief scan of professional statements about instructional leadership would find that organisations representing principals (internationally as well as in Australia) will often make blanket statements about what the committee who developed the statements agreed represents good teaching. Unfortunately, many of these statements are either patently false, overly vague, or simply without any solid evidence. It is common in Australia to find big claims made about the importance of pedagogy based in ‘learning styles’ or pedagogy which is ‘student-centred’. For example, recent curricular reforms in Queensland, Victoria and Tasmania all call on the rationale of meeting student learning styles in a more student-centred pedagogy. While these are very, very common claims, neither has a rigorous basis in solid educational research. There is no coherent theory or model of ‘learning styles’ much less any research that demonstrates pedagogy based on them produces better student outcomes (see OECD, 2002 for similar comment on this point from those doing research in the area). Likewise, while the
notion of making pedagogy student-centred is part and parcel of the orthodoxy among early and primary educators, it really is a very vague label that has been applied to a wide array of practices and which has never really been demonstrated to result in significant gains for students (of course, it would be hard to demonstrate this, since the idea of ‘student-centred’ pedagogy does not have a definition that can be readily examined).

Each of these positions has direct implications for the daily work of teachers, so each really should be open to much more public critique. Making them explicit, allows that debate to occur. Organisationally, these debates should not be avoided, since the process of having the debate is one way of leading to a shared understanding among teachers and greater clarity about just what is valued and desired by the organisation. In the examples given above, each could be refined into a much more specific definition that might well have a solid research base, depending on how you refine it (although I know of no solid base for any ‘learning style’ definition in terms of student outcomes produced). These debates are great opportunities to develop professional dialogue about pedagogy, teaching, learning and curriculum. While each of these terms carry varying and overlapping definitions (which is part of the need for open dialogue among teachers working together), for the purposes of this article ‘pedagogy’ is taken to include both classroom instructional practices (teaching) and assessment practices. This definition is adopted from the work of Newmann and Associates (1996) and the one adopted for the development of the NSW Quality Teaching model.

**Strategic Choices in Developing a Model**

Having established that it is a good idea to have an explicit model, there are still many questions to be considered before developing a model. Since answers to these questions need to be determined in relation to each organisation, and the knowledge any one leader has of her or his staff, I will pose them as general points and choices, trying to simply highlight the considerations to be made. I have chosen these particular issues as these were the main ones explicitly in mind when we developed QT.

The first principle from which we developed QT was that the model had to be defended by reference to student outcomes. That is, each component of the model was to be defended on the basis of a reasonably solid case that the qualities of pedagogy in the model improve student learning outcomes. We specified which student outcomes further by keeping our focus on academically-based outcomes. In this case, the rationale is fairly straight-forward, taking academic outcomes to be 1) social in their own right, and 2) the central business of schools (see Ladwig, 1998). Of course, this is a choice not everyone would make, but whatever choice is made really does need to be defended. There are two dimensions to this rationale which need addressing in such a defence. The first is taking student outcomes as a base (as opposed to, say, teacher satisfaction). The second is determining which student outcomes are to be central (academic as opposed to, say, sporting outcomes).

Each of these decisions is very important, since whatever stance is taken carries implications for larger questions about teachers’ professional development. That is, whatever the principles articulated in defining the parameters of model choice should be consistent with the principles for
the development of teachers' professional knowledge. This question is known as the question of the coherence (see Newmann, King, and Youngs, 2000; Newmann, et al., 2001), and its logic has a ring of common-sense. If teachers' professional development is consistent with what you expect of them as teachers and does not give them contradictory messages about what is valued and should be done, it is much more likely they will demonstrate pedagogical improvement (King, 2002; King and Newmann, 2000).ii

The second principle we were concerned to keep in mind when developing QT was to maximise the degree to which the model challenges current practice in a way that would improve the outcomes we set as the benchmark for this exercise. There is a negative, flip-side to this principle that may clarify the issue since this negative view has daily expression in schools. In effect, having worked in school reform a long time, and knowing many NSW teachers, we wanted to make sure that we reduced the 'we already do that' response. This can be known as a 'maximum impact' intent. The reason for naming the flip-side, however, is to recognise that choosing what model to use is something of an art form which needs to be exercised with a lot of practical reasoning. The point of this principle is simply to remind us that picking what language and concepts to include in a pedagogy model should be done with an eye toward maximum challenge, if it is going to have any effect toward change, and have relevance for more than a few months. (If it is a small challenge, you would need a new model very soon.)

Of course, there is another end of the change spectrum. The third principle seeks to strike a balance point, reaching for maximum impact almost immediately requires also minimising the degree to which the model seems beyond reach. This can be thought of, in practical terms as increasing the 'I can do that' response, in a sense maximising the practical realism of the model. Striking a balance between the second and third principle is something that really needs to be analysed in relation to the specific organisation at hand. Of course, this could be done at any level of an organisation (or even at an individual level).

There is no universal formula for finding a balance between maximum challenge and maximum realism, but knowing whatever the current morale and dispositions to change teachers are experiencing is obviously important. Many authors have written of these dynamics and the issues related to them, but they would include understanding 'change fatigue,' 'professional stagnation', 'burnout', and a host of other issues that have clichéd labels (see Leithwood, Steinbach and Jantzi, 2002). However clichéd the labels, the reality for teachers, schools and systems are profound and making a reasonably accurate judgement about where to strike the balance between being realistic and pushing toward an ideal is one of the perennial dilemmas of all change agents.

The next principle relates to deciding what level of detail and in what form the pedagogical model needs to be articulated. In many schools with which I am familiar, this has taken the form of very general principles, articulated in very general ways (as in the first articulations of the Coalition of Essential Schools in the United States), but in most of my experience, at some point much more detail is needed for teachers to use to reflect on their work. In the case of the NSW QT model, the ground work had been laid in that many schools in NSW were familiar with and using research instruments used as part of the Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Study (QSRLS) to measure a construct known as 'productive pedagogy' or its pluralised form 'productive pedagogies' (see Ladwig, 2004 for more detail on that instrument). For the remainder of this
discussion, the singular form is adopted in accordance with the initial research construct and the actual findings of that research. The form of that instrument was as observational items for external observers in classrooms, each coded on a 1 to 5 Likert scale. For research purposes, explicit definitions and observational notes had been developed along with specific definitions for each level of the 1 to 5 coding. This general form means that schools and teachers have a level of detail which assists them in making observations of their own work, and the 1 to 5 coding scheme allows them to make relative judgements about the quantity of a particular item. Judgements about whether more or less of a specific item was of concern had to be made relative to the internal conceptual constructs of the productive pedagogy model, known as ‘dimensions’.

When developing the NSW QT instruments, our experiences of working with schools using the productive pedagogy instruments were a guide. First, while the level of detail was generally welcomed by teachers, the language of the productive pedagogy instrument was sometimes more of a barrier than an aid. This is readily understandable. Since we had developed the QSRLS instruments for research purposes, the specific wording and level of specificity for each item and each code was not designed for general consumption, but was more of a short hand for a relatively small group of researchers to gain reliability. That is, we knew the instrument was good enough to get a level of reliability for our research, but we had not written it so that it would make sense to anyone else beyond the research team. It was not surprising that some of the language was not easily accessible to many teachers. Consequently, one aspect of developing the detail needed for QT was an attempt to keep the language reasonably accessible.

On the other hand, we have to acknowledge that there were instances where we purposively did not alter the theoretical language used in the QT instrument, if it conveyed an important set of ideas that really is best taken as a professional language and seen as that. This too is a professional judgement, but the basic argument also has a practical implication. While it is common for teachers (and politicians) to say that theoretical discussions of pedagogy are far too jargonistic, and I personally could name plenty of examples where language is unnecessarily complicated when there is an attempt to act theoretically, it is also important to realise that the public call to make all language about teaching ‘common sense language’ has its own limits. Personally and professionally, I think it is a mistake to believe that teaching can be best understood in totally open language. There is such a thing as professional understanding. If it were possible to name all that is important in teaching using a language everyone can understand, theoretically there is nothing that could be called teacher expertise. Professional language exists for many reasons, and educators should not shy away from using it sensibly and explaining that language to others.

In addition to questions of language choice is a perhaps even more perplexing question about whether or not to use instrumentation that quantifies qualities of pedagogy. The phrase just used, ‘quantifies qualities,’ makes it clear that such an exercise is not simply a matter of putting a number on a set of behaviours that are easily observed by an untrained eye. If we are talking about aspects of pedagogy that require professional judgement, we are assuredly doing more than just counting how many students are paying attention at five minute intervals to get a measure of ‘engagement.’ Such measurement systems do exist, no doubt, but very, very few have been able to demonstrate any positive impact on students’ academic learning outcomes. (Engagement, when defined more broadly, does predict a lot of other important schooling outcomes, see Willms, 2003). Measuring the dimensions of pedagogy named in the QT model, however, is a matter of
first making a judgement about the degree to which classroom practices or assessment tasks demonstrate sophisticated pedagogical concerns. In essence the question here is ‘to count or not to count?’

The decision made in developing the material for the NSW QT model was firm that having instruments which allowed counting would aid schools and teachers in tracking relative changes and improvements in their pedagogical improvement work. In essence, the fact that these things could be counted was seen as a major strength of the tradition on which the model was based (which included Authentic Pedagogy and productive pedagogy, see Ladwig and King, 2003). In policy settings in which school improvement mechanisms include demonstrating growth, having instruments that could provide quantitative analyses of something so central to schools as the quality of its pedagogy is clearly of interest to at least some school leaders and school systems.

One final principle to consider in developing a pedagogical model relates to how the model, and any instruments developed to assist implementing the model, fit within the range of other, already existing information related to the quality of pedagogy. There are at least two sides to this issue. On the one hand, it is useful to relate the model to whatever other information a school, or organisation, already has about its pedagogy. This needs to be done in conceptual terms and in terms of building complementary evidence. Conceptually, there is a big advantage if the model relies on concepts that can be articulated in terms of other existing pedagogical information. In NSW schools this primarily means making sure the QT model was consistent with the demands of the NSW syllabuses, which are developed by a separate legislative body known as the NSW Board of Studies. In terms of deciding just what is taken as evidence of pedagogy and building a suite of complementary evidence, the goal would be to have triangulated data that provides a reasonably comprehensive view of the organisation’s pedagogy. The NSW QT instruments are designed to be used when observing teaching practice, called ‘classroom practice’ (this does not literally mean teaching in a classroom, but includes teaching in other settings), and when analysing written assessment tasks (since assessment tasks are a major pedagogical tool). The decision to not develop a separate set of student outcome indicators was made since such indicators, in NSW, could and should be garnered from within each NSW syllabus. The decision to include instruments that would give direct evidence about classroom interaction and the quality of tasks set for students was based on an understanding of what information is typically not available in NSW schools and which was seen as valuable. Both classroom practice and the quality of tasks are quite direct manifestations of the nature of pedagogy that students experience (perhaps the most direct).

**Brief Overview of the NSW Model and Instruments**

Before moving into a discussion of how the NSW QT instruments might be of use for school leaders, a brief summary of what the model looks like will be useful. This will be very brief, but a more complete explanation can be found on the NSW-DET curriculum support website.

The NSW-QT model is comprised of three ‘dimensions’ of pedagogy: **intellectual quality**, **quality learning environment**, and **significance**. Each of these dimensions are observable in classrooms and evidence for them can be found in written tasks (text) given to students for
assessment or learning purposes. General descriptions of these dimensions were generated for both classroom practices and assessment tasks. To give a general sense, the dimension descriptions for observing classroom practice are the following:

Intellectual quality refers to pedagogy focused on producing deep understanding of important, substantive concepts, skills and ideas. Such pedagogy treats knowledge as something that requires active construction and requires students to engage in higher-order thinking and to communicate substantively about what they are learning. Quality learning environment refers to pedagogy that creates classrooms where students and teachers work productively in an environment clearly focused on learning. Such pedagogy sets high and explicit expectations and develops positive relationships between teachers and students and among students. Significance refers to pedagogy that helps make learning more meaningful and important to students. Such pedagogy draws clear connections with students’ prior knowledge and identities, with contexts outside of the classroom, and with multiple ways of knowing or cultural perspectives (NSW-DET, 2003, p.10).

For classroom practices, each dimension of the QT model is observed through six more detailed ‘items’ just as they would be in a classroom observation schema for research purposes. Elaborated definitions, guiding questions, 1 – 5 rating scales and further notes and examples were developed for all of the items. Space does not permit a full explication of each of the items in the NSW QT model here, but it is possible to glean a sense of them through their guiding questions. Table 1, below, presents the items of the NSW-QT model alongside the guiding questions developed for classroom observation, organised according to the dimension in which each item belongs.

Since each of these items has an accompanying rating scale, it is readily possible to employ the QT instruments to gauge, generally, the nature of students’ experiences in a class. In the case of written assessment tasks, this is also true of getting a sense of the nature of what that task asks of students. Because it really is not possible to make any judgement about some of these items when analysing written tasks, four of these items are simply not included in the version of the instruments developed for that purpose (see NSW-DET, 2005). Inclusivity, engagement, social support and students’ self-regulation are the items omitted from the assessment task coding guide.

The rating scales for each item typically make distinctions based on whether or not the quality in question is observed, how many students engage in that manner for how much of a lesson (what, who, when / for how long). However, it is also important to note that the rating scales themselves often include distinctions that help clarify just what is meant in the elaborated definitions. For example, the rating scale for explicit quality criteria draws a distinction between procedural criteria (statements about what students should do) and criteria about the quality of work expected and then moves on to assess the degree to which students actually use the criteria while working. These distinctions are made as you move ‘up’ the rating scale from a ‘1’ to a ‘2’ and so on. In this sense, beyond the elaborated definitions and notes, the rating scales themselves ask observers to make quite significant distinctions that are readily translated into practical insights for improving pedagogy.

As anyone who has tried to change pedagogy in a school knows, however, making the transition from observation and analysis to diagnosis and improved practice is much more easily said than done.
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Conducting a Pedagogy Audit

Assuming for the moment that a given school has a model of pedagogy to work from, whether that has been developed amongst teachers locally or picked up from some pre-developed materials (such as the NSW QT), there is still a big step to take as soon as you ask whether or not the pedagogy in your school is similar to the adopted model of pedagogy. If we cast the items of a model in the language of standards, of course, the formulation of this question shifts to, ‘Does the pedagogy of your school meet the standards?’ Once again, it is clear the choice of language can have a dramatic impact on an organisation. Analysing teaching in relation to a desired model sounds a whole lot different than assessing pedagogy to determine if standards are being met, but at the end of the day these are very similar analytical exercises. The notion of meeting standards carries a large set of concerns about accountability mechanisms and surveillance, but the analytical task is that same as it would be if in peer-based self-reflection exercises.

Many models of organisational change suggest a crucial step is some form of information gathering or research about the current state of affairs in the organisation. In this respect, changing a school’s pedagogy is no different than any other form of organisational change. There are, however, some relatively unique considerations for which it is wise to be prepared. Responses to the NSW QT model that teachers and other school leaders have shared with me offer a case in point. On the one hand, when it comes to examining pedagogy through the QT lens, educators often recognise that there really is nothing new in the model, the form of the synthesis is new, but what is in it is not. All of the items have a substantial history and are readily recognised, perhaps in alternative terminology, by most teachers as representing things known to be ‘good teaching’. These reactions can be taken as evidence that the model has some validity in relation to the ‘maximising realism’ principle. Most teachers see it as within reach.

On the other hand, once serious analysis begins, and school educators start looking for evidence that the pedagogy of their school provides substantial intellectual quality, for example, the shoe shifts to the other foot. That is, consistent with much of our prior research (see Ladwig and King, 1992; Newmann and Associates, 1996) most school leaders find that the quality of pedagogy in their schools is not quite as high quality as they at first think. This reaction can be taken as evidence that the model has some validity in relation to the ‘maximum challenge’ principle. This later reaction quite often really hits home once a serious attempt to gather evidence about pedagogy begins. In this stage of the change process, it is important to undertake what I refer to as a ‘pedagogy audit’.

Suggesting that a good place to start implementing a model of pedagogy is conducting a pedagogy audit may well sound ominous, but the notion of audit carries some important ideas that should be kept in mind and quite separate from any experience we might have of cold meetings in stark rooms with a representative of some governmental tax agency. I know of no one who looks forward to an audit, but audits serve a vital function that should not be left only to fiscal matters. In the first place, audits are designed to check whether or not things are as we think they are; in a sense they are a reality check. In the second place, audits carefully determine what resources are where. Both of these functions need to be addressed if a school leader is going to make sound decisions about 1) what direction he or she should take in guiding a school forward, 2) what
resources are already available upon which the school can build a local strategy for pedagogical improvement. There is, of course, a human side to each of these, but most obviously a leader needs to know who in the organisation might assist in a change agenda and at least some teachers need to see that their knowledge and expertise is recognised, acknowledged and respected. A pedagogy audit is designed to meet these needs.

Now here is the tricky part. Imagine that you are leading a school that is like most schools and you really do not have any direct evidence of pedagogy to hand. Your school annual reports have information on student outcomes, both academic and behavioural. You know which teachers students say they like. You know which teachers you think are exceptional teachers, or which teachers all the other teachers think are exceptional teachers. You may have observed some teachers. You might even know, in a high school, which teachers have students that regularly do well on state exams (in Australia both Victoria and NSW have means of determining this very well). Very few school leaders, however, have any direct evidence of the quality of pedagogy in their school that is based on a public and shared model of pedagogy. Given this, two conclusions are likely to be reached at the start of an initial pedagogy audit: 1) you need to get direct evidence, and 2) you need to start with whatever is the best you have to hand. The question here is, ‘How do you use what you have?’

One of the first things that needs to be done with any of the evidence available to schools is to interrogate that evidence and question if it really is good evidence of the quality of teaching. Whole cohort student outcomes (say Year 3 Basic Skills test results) may reflect teaching if you can take the students’ background characteristics into account, including prior achievement. Even if you can take these background variables into account (which is statistically not that easy), which teaching is reflected in that test? Suppose you have several years of substantial value added data suggesting that your students consistently outperform otherwise predicted levels of achievement, does that mean all of the pedagogy in the school is contributing? Some? The point of these questions is simply to remind readers that all the skills of analysing data need to be brought to bear on the evidence schools have about pedagogy. Is it direct evidence? How much of the students’ experience does it represent? How confident are you about the data itself? All of these are standard research questions that need to be brought to the table during a pedagogy audit.

There are three main sources of direct evidence of pedagogy: 1) direct observation of classroom practice, 2) the artefacts (written or constructed) that students use to guide their assessment or other learning tasks and 3) curriculum outlines, (unit and / or lesson plans). If a school has direct evidence of these, applying the NSW QT model is simply a matter of using the instruments designed for these purposes (it is possible to modify your reading of the classroom observation material for analysing the plans leading to those activities, be that lesson or unit plans). Along with the actual instruments and their guides, Jennifer Gore and I have worked with the NSW-DET in developing companion booklets that contain suggested activities and discussion of how it might best use the instruments in the NSW system.\vi

From an Audit to Improving Pedagogy

Clearly the pedagogy audit would be only a second step in a long road to improving pedagogy, but
it fits well within many of the well known models of change already available, and it has the added advantage of being about what many teachers see as their core business. There are many ways and means of moving on from an audit towards improving practice, and there is a host of literature on this issue. For here, I would just like to offer comment on some of the issues of concern or caution that should be articulated upfront.

First, it is clear, particularly in NSW, that direct observation of pedagogy is often a sensitive issue. In many ways teaching is the most intimate area of professional practice for teachers, and unless there is substantial trust, respect and professional dialogue already in place, it is probably not wise to start building a pedagogical change agenda by quickly fronting up to classrooms to make observations. (NSW, of course, had a long history of inspectors until the 1990s, and many current NSW teachers have less than optimal memories of that experience.) Given this situation, it might be less threatening to begin analysing pedagogy by examining assessment tasks or lesson designs. While these are experienced directly by the students, for teachers it is sometimes less confronting to examine text rather than themselves. Whatever the reflection procedures, an ethic of mutual professional respect and trust is paramount.

Second, once a group of teachers begin analysing each others’ pedagogy and thinking about how they might improve what they do (the act of analysing almost always suggests ways of improving things), they have taken up actions that are consistent with one of the most central concerns of contemporary policy: accountability. Here we must recognise that beginning a pedagogical improvement strategy is a fundamental step toward building an ethic of responsibility and accountability. (Indeed, we could question whether or not an ethic of responsibility and accountability really does exist if there is no clear commitment to regularly examining pedagogy in a school.)

Finally, a note about the NSW QT model specifically. Teaching is a very complex enterprise and no one would expect teachers to use the exact same methods or procedures from one day to the next, nor even from one moment to the next (much less from one subject area to the next). On the other hand, part of the reason the NSW QT model was developed and has been adopted by many schools within and well beyond NSW (many international jurisdictions, even in the US, are importing the information and resources) is because it is a common language about teaching that assists teachers from a wide variety of areas to come together and work together on teaching. It was designed to be applied across all subject areas in K-12 settings for the vast majority of students (applications in Special Education are developed and are being examined).

Given this tension, between recognising variance and finding value in a common language, the NSW QT model is designed to not be taken as a monolith. While the dimensions, intellectual quality, quality learning environment, and significance, are important for all students, there are many, many ways to get high levels of each in any one lesson. The model does not restrict teachers from using very traditional methods, in fact traditional methods can be highly valued when they are directed to concepts and ideas of central import. There can be substantial variety among the items and still have overall strength recognised at the level of the dimension.

Nor does the model say that absolutely every lesson needs to be ‘high’ on every dimension. One of the most important steps to take when analysing pedagogy is to place the analysis back into the specific context and purpose of the teaching. Analysing is by definition a ‘decontextualising’ act. Making the professional judgement about what it best, when, is something we can research,
but in schools it is a matter of professional judgement for teachers, professional judgements they are best placed to make. In this sense, the NSW QT model is designed to recognise, support and assist teachers as true, knowledgeable and independent, professionals. For school leaders who wish to improve the quality of what is arguably ‘the core business’ of schools, it is crucial to have models of pedagogy and instruments measuring that quality for teachers to use in a larger process of professional improvement. In essence, while schools have become much better at measuring their improvement, it is vital that such reforms include daily teaching practice if school improvement efforts are to translate into improved student learning outcomes.

References


ENDNOTES

i In this sense, what I have to say here owes much to the work and insight of John Schiller and those students. I would like to thank them and express my gratitude for the opportunity to work with them over the years. What is said here, of course, is my own doing and not to be blamed on them.

ii The frequency of direct contradiction between teachers’ professional development and a school’s stated model of pedagogy is unfortunate and easily illustrated by noting that these contradictions, in Australia, are usually reinforced by competing and at times contradictory demands from systems: like having curriculum boards focusing on the generating of higher level thought and intellectual work (for entire states), while also having to respond to national pushes to use basic skills testing in ways that preclude a focus on higher level analysis from students. While basic skills are not, in themselves, contradictory to higher level analysis, organising accountability structures that value only basic skills are.

iii As the co-director and designer of the QSRLS, and as the one who did all of the modelling for the development of Productive Pedagogy, I hope readers permit me speaking about the QSRLS in the first person.

iv After the development of these instruments, the NSW DET also developed a student and teacher survey instrument for measuring pedagogy to complement the QT instruments. These survey instruments are available from the Department’s Measurement section, but a small word of advice should accompany them (advice the Measurement experts in the Department would share as well). That is, these instruments were developed to expand existing school life surveys to include pedagogical concerns, but asking teachers and students to measure pedagogy independent from specific training is not always a reliable exercise. Teacher self reports must be taken as that, self-reports. And students are not always able to make the same level of sophisticated judgements about teaching as would teachers who have been trained to examine pedagogy. For the NSW instruments, apparently, high school students provide much more valid and reliable judgements than do their younger counter parts – for obvious reasons. They can see the distinctions being made, whereas most other students do not, typically. This is not to say that students and teachers can’t make such distinctions – but that substantial professional development for both would need to accompany such efforts. And as a note: some schools in NSW have had students coding teachers’ teaching. It is possible.

v See http://www.curriculumsupport.nsw.edu.au/qualityTeaching/. For a more detailed analysis of how its predecessors were developed, see Ladwig, 2004. Since this specific article is about the use of models such as the NSW QT model and not a defense of that model, no discussion of how this model relates to a wider array of other literature on teaching has been included here. Readers wishing to follow this line of thought would be interested to see Ladwig and King, 2003.

vi These are all available from NSW-DET. Contact details are found on the website.

vii The Professional Learning in Education Research Group at the University of Newcastle, in collaboration with the NSW-DET, has been running a teacher based conference on pedagogical improvement for several years – in Newcastle, in the summer holiday period for NSW teachers. Each year the conference reaches capacity very soon after we open registration. Each January I am
reminded of the strength of teachers’ professional interest and commitment, when given the opportunity to spend time working on what many of them rightly value most, their teaching. Information on this conference, known as the Pedagogy in Practice conference, can be found at: http://www.newcastle.edu.au/school/education/

viii I have in mind here the growing literature on teachers’ professional development. It has to be acknowledged that both in the case of beginning teachers and for in-service teachers, there is not a substantial body of empirical evidence that change strategies lead to changing pedagogy on a large scale. That is why there is such a current interest in research and reforms that ‘scale-up’. For specific local strategies, however, the work of the Coalition of Essential Schools in the United States and that of the Australian National Schools Network in Australia serve as good entry points for practical approaches to this issue.