



# Improving the Quality of Teaching & Learning

**Every Journey is Made Up  
of Many Small Steps**



## **What's Your Next Step?**



# Introduction



# Background

In setting up and delivering a twenty week CPD programme for teachers I learnt a lot. For the programme title I used the hashtag #OutstandingIn10Plus10. It was catchy, topical and tended to grab people's attention. In many ways it dates the work. However, from the outset I was clear:

*"This isn't about a quick fix to outstanding nor will it be the end of a journey for the teachers involved. As leaders, we must all be "people developers" and helping people take the next step, even when there is a long road ahead, is part of what we do. There is a danger that we are paralysed by the uncertainties and imperfections of the plans we have constructed."*

To Outstanding with #OutstandingIn10Plus10

*"This blog and the process is fraught with problems, I'm going to acknowledge them but move on regardless. They cannot be allowed to paralyse me into no action. Dylan Wiliam has spoken about the need to have six observers cross referencing their judgements to gain a level of reliability in grading lessons by observation. This makes sense but isn't a reason for not supporting colleagues, I just need to recognise the process is far from perfect."*

Next Steps to Outstanding

*"The actual notion of taking a continuous variable, think of this as measuring the quality of a lesson from 1-100, but then treating it as a discontinuous variable, only four grades – inadequate, requires improvement, good and outstanding, is clearly madness ... I acknowledge this but staff still deserve help and support to become better teachers. To not help and support is even greater madness."*

Next Steps to Outstanding

The first ten weeks of #OutstandingIn10Plus10 had a series of face to face sessions, pre-session reading and guided lesson observations. In the second ten weeks the teachers were required to work in triads, supporting each other, to develop their practice through lesson observations and coaching.

The second ten weeks turned out to be a bit of a disaster as the urgent always overtook the important. Too few lesson observations actually took place.



I initially set out to recruit three teachers – a single triad - who had been consistently graded good, in their teaching, but never outstanding. The course actually started with twelve teachers including a few who had an outstanding grade in a lesson observation. They argued they had just been lucky and wanted to engage in improving their practice. The conversations and discussions were richer for having this number of people. As with many schools we have moved on from grading individual lessons due to the lack of validity & reliability of this one off measure.

In numerous “good” lessons I have had the pleasure of observing there has been a great deal of work put into carefully planning the lesson. Thought has been given to the content of the lesson in terms of the expected learning gains and a series of activities have been planned for the students. The learning gains and lesson structure have both been tightly defined and the plan effectively implemented. In these lessons there is a balanced approach with both the learning and lesson structure being clear.

Sadly, too often I have also seen mediocrity grabbed from the jaws of greatness as the teacher sticks to the lesson plan too rigidly. The lesson becomes a series of activities with fixed, inflexible timings. Insufficient attention is paid to the learning. A classic example is the lovely little assessment for learning activity, sensibly placed in the lesson, to gauge progress. However, following its completion the teacher moves on to the next activity with little regard to the answers given by students. These lessons often have a tight lesson structure, activities and timings but looser focus on the learning.

This table was a first attempt at summarising my thoughts.

Grading	Learning Gains	Lesson structure	Focuses On
Satisfactory (R)	Loose	Tight	The activities
Good	Tight	Tight	The lesson plan
Outstanding	Tight	Loose	The learner

**Keep the Learning Gains Tight & The Lesson Structure Looser**



Quality of Teaching	Expected Learning Gains	Lesson Plan	Student Behaviour	Teacher Focuses On
Increasingly Higher Quality of Teaching	Loose	Loose	Disruptive	Survival
	Loose	Tight	Increasingly Compliant	The Activities
	Tight	Tight	Engaged	The Lesson Plan
	Tighter	Looser	Interdependent	The Learner

Keep the Expected Learning Gains Tight, Focus on the Learner

I've since revised the table but retained some of the original structure and ideas. The table is now a little more comprehensive including a strand on student behaviour. The table should be read as a set of potential *signposts* rather than a definitive statement about improving the Quality of Teaching and Learning. There is always so much more that could be said or done.

**Which strand would you use to help you take the next step?**



Photo Credit: [SteveC77](#) via [Compfight cc](#)



# You Don't Say, Sherlock

All Great Teaching is ...

... Learner Centred ...

... Who Else Would it Focus On?



When chatting with the teachers whose teaching had led to consistently good examination outcomes, at St. Mary's, they often rather sheepishly admitted that they didn't have very detailed lesson plans. What was obvious though was their planning was meticulously in terms of clearly defining the expected learning gains they were seeking. The lesson structure was deliberately kept loose because they wanted to respond to the learner rather than following a pre-determined plan.

Their focus exemplifies the work published by John Hattie which placed "Teacher Clarity", explicit identification of learning intentions and success criteria, as a key strategy. It is 8<sup>th</sup> in his list of interventions that had a positive impact on attainment and achievement.

One consistent tool they all used was the **SOLO Taxonomy**. It helped them *structure and sequence the learning* in order to move students to deeper learning in and across lessons (there is a section on the SOLO Taxonomy later on in this resource).

The teachers who consistently taught well had a significant and coherent view of learning within their subject. They expected students to work at a conceptual level. They focused on using knowledge and skills to develop students' deeper conceptual understanding of the subject.

One teacher described their "no faffing about, no pointless activities just a relentless pursuit of learning". She had already finished the term's work, as outlined in the scheme of learning, whilst other colleagues were worried they were running out of time.

The teachers had a "*pedagogical toolkit*", which had developed over time, and employed it as and when needed. They tended to be more discerning about what they did and didn't take from professional development sessions: using some Kagan, some graphic organisers/thinking tools, a number of the 5Rs – "*you nearly always have reasoning in a Science lesson*" – whatever would help learning without trying to cram a tick list of things into every lesson.

Teachers who consistently delivered great examination outcomes thought differently but sometimes didn't realise it – they worked more often, within their subject and pedagogy, at a conceptual level. They were relentless in their focus on the expected learning gains.



# Impact of #OutstandingIn10Plus10

*The comments on the following pages are a summary of the feedback from the teachers who engaged with the #OutstandingIn10Plus10 Programme.*

*They are their thoughts and reflections describing the direction of travel in their learning journey.*

## Improvements In Own Practice?

- ✓ Helped to see lessons as part of a “phase” of learning. More aware of the big picture so producing more coherent sequences of lessons
- ✓ Much better planning of individual lessons – clarity of focus on LO and evidence based review against these - constantly thinking about how to measure where the pupils are
- ✓ More focus on ensuring gains in learning and less focus on activities
- ✓ More and more aware of the importance of pace and timing within my lessons
- ✓ Less focus on planning more variety of activities and more on mastering a smaller number of activities which work for subject



# Impact of #OutstandingIn10Plus10

## What Are You Doing More Of?

- ✓ Thinking about learning as building blocks and asking myself, “What are the incremental steps needed?” when exploring a new topic. Planning series of lessons better to create a learning narrative
- ✓ Adapting more based on prior knowledge – increased challenge, for example Y9, who are completing work that have never been achieved before
- ✓ Rigorous pursuit of progress in learning - reviewing where we've been, where we are and where we are going more often
- ✓ Planning from LOs and “stickability” - #5MinLessonPlan being used. Using the LO to decide on activity type – i.e. teacher input, peer to peer, independent work
- ✓ Increase in peer assessment and focus on ensuring students understand what is required for excellent work - success criteria are more focused and meaningful
- ✓ Implemented routines consistently throughout the year. Big improvement on time management. Using the same thinking tools to allow pupils to hone them
- ✓ Focus on smaller number of pedagogical strategies but utilising them better
- ✓ Collaborative planning within department



# Impact of #OutstandingIn10Plus10

## What Are You Doing Less Of?

- ✗ Not planning to the minute but rather to the outcome
- ✗ Detailed lesson planning/micro planning
- ✗ “Busy” activities or “Filler” tasks – all tasks now must have a reason and learning purpose
- ✗ Talking less at classes where possible
- ✗ Assessment of progress through methods like thumbs up/down



# The Teacher Talk Dilemma

There is sometimes a traditional versus progressive style debate around teacher talk. I tend to be neutral on whether teacher talk is a good or a bad thing. It depends what the teacher is saying and what is expected of the students in terms of a response.

*“One of the major principles of learning is that a learner needs to make an active response to the source of learning. This idea runs through all theories of learning ...”*

*... The teacher’s role agreed upon by all parties and all theories of learning, is to invite and induce students to engage actively with learning sources. A great deal of information flows through teachers’ talk. But when a teacher exposes students to high levels of their talk, the students’ basis for knowing what is relevant and what is not can be undermined ...”*

Hattie & Yates (2014) – Taken from Chapter 6

Teacher input needs to be focussed, structured and sequenced. This is true whether it is as part of a presentation to students or in supporting group work. Teachers need to guide the students’ learning.

*“Studies into characteristics of effective teachers have found that they will explain material extremely well, but in brief periods of time, for instance 5- to 7-minute bursts, whereas a novice teacher would have taken longer ...”*

*... They found reducing teacher talk and increasing student talk was not enough ...”*

*Deliberate strategies are needed to structure student talk ...”*

Hattie & Yates (2014) – Taken from Chapter 6

Teacher clarity around the expected learning is part of what determines whether teacher talk is effective or not effective. This needs to be what we are discussing with each other not whether it is good or bad.



# What's the Next Step?

## ACTIVITY:

### **“Follow the Bright Spots”**

In your absolute best lessons what is happening? What are you doing? What are students doing?

What Makes These Lessons so Good?

What would you do to improve them further?



# Lesson Planning

Following the #OutstandingIn10Plus10 programme I started blogging about lesson planning. There was a quite substantial overlap between the two – keep your focus on the expected learning gains was the core message.

*“There are two parts in targeted learning: the first is being clear about what is to be learned from the lesson(s) (the learning intention); the second is having a way of knowing that the desired learning has been achieved (the success criteria). Targeted learning involves the teacher knowing where he or she is going with the lesson and ensuring that the students know where they are going. These pathways must be transparent for the students.”*

Hattie (2012), *Visible Learning for Teachers*, p. 47

Planning individual lessons tends to lead to a disconnect in the learning rather than a structure and sequence that develops:

- ✓ Learning from its basic facts to deeper understanding
- ✓ Discrete skills to the use of a range of inter-related skills required to produce the desired outcome.

## Don't Plan Lessons, Plan Learning



The extreme example of the individual lesson plan is the “show pony” or “jazz hands” lesson that is pulled out of the bag to bedazzle students and observers alike.

Photo Credit: Jazz Hands by O Ryization on [www.deviantart.com](http://www.deviantart.com)



*“Lingard (2007) and his team observed 1,000 classroom lessons and noted the low levels of intellectual demand, and there are many observational studies that highlight the overpowering presence of teachers talking and students sitting passively waiting ... teachers must have the mind frame to foster intellectual demand, challenge, and learning, because these are the powerful predictors of interest, engagement, and higher level and conceptual thinking that make students want to reinvest in learning.”*

Hattie (2012), *Visible Learning for Teachers*, p. 35

Over the next few years teachers the length and breadth of England will be planning and re-planning their lessons in response to an almost endless onslaught of curriculum changes. The curriculum has or is about to change across Key Stages 1, 2 and 3; there are new GCSE syllabi being introduced in 2015 and a whole raft of changes to A-level syllabi, some have already been introduced and others are about to be spewed out on the conveyor belt of curriculum change.

## **Lesson Planning Must Be An Investment in Students' Learning, Not a Waste of Teachers' Time**

### **Make Sure You Focus on Planning the Right Things**

I've written, seen lesson plans and observed lessons that are full of activities. They tend to be busy but wasted opportunities for students' learning. I now find myself automatically correcting anyone who tells me what they or students will be *doing* in a lesson. I'm simply not interested, in the first instance, what teachers or students will be doing. I'm much more interested in what students will be *expected to learn*. There should be no planning of lessons before the learning is clearly determined.

### **Expected Learning Gains First, Strategies and Activities Later**

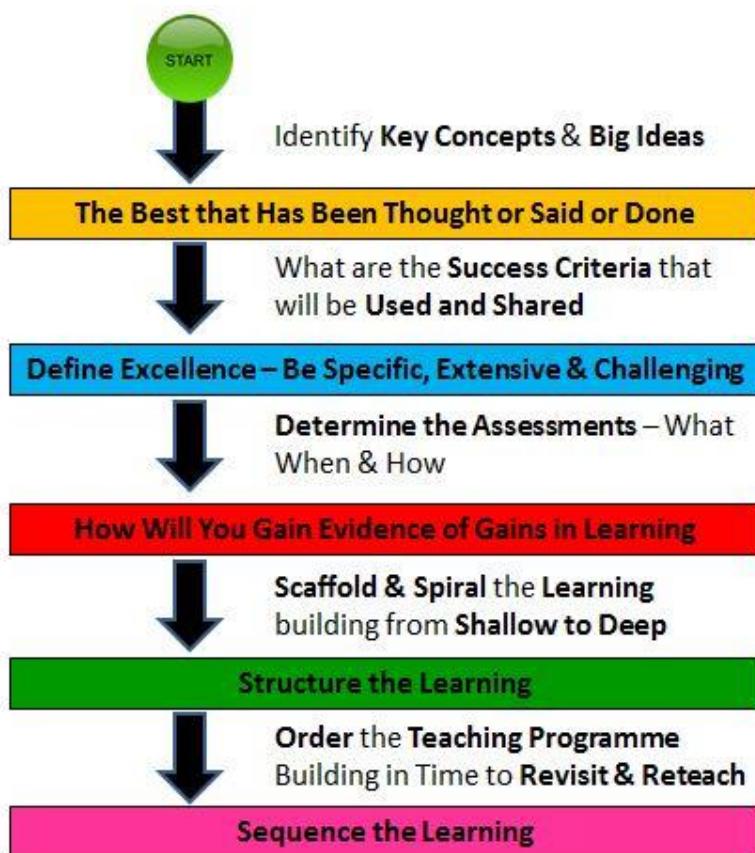


# You Don't Say, Sherlock

Great Teachers ...

... Plan the Learning Then the  
Lessons...

... and Deliver Consistently Well



Whilst it is not possible to live life backwards there is a certain advantages in being able to look back from the end point of a journey. Planning a child's education is potentially one of those times when you want to plan backwards. Lesson planning should start with the end point and then determine the paths to be taken to reach it. I wonder whether we actually do the opposite more often than not.

The series of lesson planning blog posts developed the idea that planning should start with the big idea, the key concept or the major works that you want to expose your students to? Then, determine what would you consider as excellence from your students and how this could be evidenced.

**When teaching students what would you expect her or him to know or be able to do?**

**How would you seek to evidence this level of competence?**



# You Don't Say, Sherlock

**Start with the Planning ...**

**... Act with Deliberate Intent ...**

**... Reflect & Improve Against  
Intention**



# What's the Next Step?

## ACTIVITY: Reflection

How Do You Usually Plan Lessons?

Which Elements of Your Lesson Plans are Most Useful to You?

Which Elements Would You Spend More Time On to Make the Plans More Useful?

What are Your Thoughts on the Lesson Planning Schema on the Previous Page?



# References

*Hattie, J (2012). *Visible Learning for Teachers*. London: Routledge*

*Hattie, J & Yates, G (2014) *Visible Learning & the Science of How We Learn*. London: Routledge*

## Original Blog Posts

[Consistently Good to Outstanding](#)

[Next Steps to Outstanding](#)

[To Outstanding with #Outstanding in 10Plus 10](#)

[To Outstanding with #Outstanding in 10Plus 10 – Mid Year Report](#)

[Lesson Planning: To Plan Or Not To Plan](#)

[Lesson Planning: Start At The End](#)

[Lesson Planning: End At The Start](#)



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