




# Classroom observation and peer support




*A program that helps teachers explore their understandings of what is happening in their classrooms, and supports them to use these insights to improve student learning. Participants learn to help colleagues to think about their teaching and student learning.*

Developing a critical reflective practice



Redgum  
consulting



It is teachers who, in the end, will change the world of the classroom by understanding it.

Lawrence Stenhouse<sup>1</sup>

Teachers who learn how to look at and reflect on classroom and school relationships and who develop the skills of trying out new practices, will be the most effective in bringing about long term change to improve student learning. The Classroom Observation and Peer Support Program<sup>2</sup> (COPS) is centred on the teacher's ability to understand classroom interaction, on the basis that this is where we believe we can have the most impact on student learning. The program provides the space and time for teachers to reflect, learn new skills and to practise them with support from each other.

It is assumed that teachers enter COPS with prior experience, knowledge, skill and understanding about teaching and learning. The outcomes for the course are described in terms of participants deepening their knowledge by using new processes in classroom observation and peer support.

## Three elements in the Classroom Observation and Peer Support Program

Typically, a group of 8-16 teachers from a school engages in a program combining:

- Group workshops facilitated by a trained leader.
- Paired observation and feedback cycles.
- Structured personal reflection.

### 1. Teachers learn to observe classroom action, testing their theories about what works and why

In COPS, teachers learn how to observe classroom action with greater awareness of their own thinking and of students' behaviour and learning. This awareness is achieved through consideration of real events in the classroom, described and reflected upon critically. The teachers' assumptions about student behaviour and learning are brought to the surface and challenged, allowing for new theories about teaching and learning of particular concepts or skills to emerge. Teachers learn to think about what is happening in the classroom. They learn how to generate a range of hunches about the learning and social behaviour they are observing, and how to test these hunches out against the information available. The hunches are framed in terms of patterns emerging in the interaction. They explore the intrapersonal, the interpersonal and the social systems at work in the classroom.

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1. Stenhouse, L (1975) *An Introduction to Curriculum Research and Development*, Heinemann, London, p, 208.

2. Acknowledgement: *The Classroom Observation and Peer Support Program* was based on The Classroom Relationships Project, Education Department of WA, 1984 – 88 described in Williams, T., Colliver, R., (1986) *Excellence in Teaching: Lessons From The Classroom Management Project*, Education Department of Western Australia. Numerous changes have been made to the structure, processes and intent of the original project as it was first developed and implemented. Some of these changes may not now represent the previous project as it was originally intended. In particular we would like to acknowledge the work of Tony Simpson.



## 2. Teachers learn to make use of colleagues' ways of seeing and doing things

At the heart of the project is the effective pairing of colleagues who learn how to observe each other teach, how to describe classroom interaction, how to give each other structured feedback and how to help each other think about their teaching. The pairs learn to observe, describe and question their teaching practice and to validate those aspects that are effective. Teachers learn how to focus the classroom observation and offer feedback which is supportive of insight and experimentation. Teachers learn how to help each other explore possibilities for teaching which help students learn, rather than assessing each others' teaching in 'right and wrong' terms.

By working together over an extended period, teachers accumulate knowledge of each other's work and each other's way of seeing things. Using the methods taught in COPS, teachers are able to open each others' eyes to new ways of helping students to learn.

In this way, COPS provides opportunities for collegial professional development that are so often lacking in the private and autonomous experience of teachers working alone in their classrooms.

## 3. A group of teachers learn skills for working together


As a result of the workshops and paired interviews with the COPS leader, the work of the group of 8-16 teachers exhibits the key features of a professional learning community. Teachers use reflective dialogue for talking about teaching and learning; teachers share, observe and discuss each others' teaching methods and philosophies; teachers are focused on student learning; teachers work together; and they work towards developing shared norms and values. They begin to develop a shared language of practice.

Teachers begin to see ways of applying COPS skills and processes to other forums and groups in the school. As teachers understand and redefine what is happening in the classroom, they begin to see possible extensions and applications of their practice to the way in which groups of students and teachers engage in their work across a wider range of school activities. The process can be used by the school to help understand an issue that is troubling people and/or it can be used to support the implementation of any new approach being taken up across the school.

Giving harsh feedback is not helpful, giving no feedback is wrong and giving only positive feedback is dishonest. Feedback that is more descriptive and less evaluative is the goal.  
Nancy Mohr<sup>3</sup>

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3. Mohr, N., 1998, *Creating Effective Study Groups for Principals in Educational Leadership*, April 1998, Volume 55, Number 7, ASCD.



We transform dysfunctional relationships into functional ones, not by continuing to do what we already know how to do more intensively and with greater enthusiasm, but by learning how to do new things and, perhaps more importantly, learning how to attach positive value to the learning and the doing of new things.

Richard F. Elmore<sup>4</sup>

## Key outcomes from Classroom Observation and Peer Support

### Teachers and their students' learning

- Teachers learn to observe, describe and analyse their own classroom action
- Teachers learn to focus on student learning before reflecting on their teaching
- Teachers develop new ways of thinking about their teaching
- Teachers are empowered to try new ways of teaching

### Teachers and their colleagues learning together

- Teachers learn to be 'critical friends' for each other
- Teachers learn to work in a learning community
- Teachers develop confidence in applying their new thinking to wider school issues

Personal reflection on our experience is how we learn from experience. Reflection contributes to the refinement of subsequent action and to the building of a repertoire of professional craft knowledge. And, of course, reflecting on practice – by observing practice, by writing about practice, by engaging in conversation about practice, by embracing the differences we encounter in practice - builds a school culture hospitable to both learning and community.

Roland S. Barth<sup>5</sup>

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4. Elmore, R.F., 2000 *Building a New Structure For School Leadership* The Albert Shanker Institute.

5. Barth, R. 2001 Stepping Back in *Journal of Staff Development*, Summer 2001 (Vol, No.3), NSCD.

## Program Structure Options

Steps	Option 1: Full course	Option 2: Shorter version
Getting started	2-day workshop or 2 x 1 –day workshops Observing, describing Giving and getting feedback Analysing classroom action Working with partners A focus on you as a teacher and learner Working as a group	1-day workshop Observing Describing Giving and getting feedback Analysing classroom action Working with partner
Observation and feedback by partners	Partners must observe each other teach and give each other feedback at least once.	
Interview 1	Pairs are interviewed to follow up progress and learning about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student learning and teaching</li> <li>• Following the process</li> <li>• Partner relationships</li> </ul> If a pair is struggling with the process a school observation session will be held in lieu of the interview.	
Observation and feedback by partners	Partners must observe each other teach and give each other feedback at least once.	
Mid-project day workshop	Workshop: Reflect on their partnership, Reflect on their learning as teachers and about teaching A focus on the student and practice role reversing with students in classroom action Re-focus their observations	
Observation and feedback by partners	Partners must observe each other teach and give each other feedback at least once.	
Interview 2	Pairs are interviewed to follow up progress and learning about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student learning and teaching</li> <li>• Following the process</li> <li>• Partner relationships</li> </ul>	
Observation and feedback by partners	Partners must observe each other teach and give each other feedback at least once.	
Final workshop	Final 2-day workshop or 2 x 1-day workshops Reflect and document their learning about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partnership</li> <li>• Role of critical friend</li> <li>• Learning about teaching and learning</li> <li>• New development focus for their teaching</li> <li>• Focus on the whole class rather than the student</li> <li>• Learning about collegial groups</li> </ul>	Final 1-day workshop Reflect on their learning about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partnership</li> <li>• Role of critical friend</li> <li>• Learning about teaching and learning</li> <li>• New development focus for their teaching.</li> </ul>
<b>COST</b> <i>Includes:</i> Preparation, facilitation and feedback with school. • All course materials. <i>Does NOT include:</i> GST • Travel costs • Catering • Teacher relief Room hire	\$15 400  <i>Price calculated for a group of up to 10 participants.</i>	\$11 000



### Option 3: In-school Intensive with Consultant-in-residence

With a COPS leader resident in the school for a week this option can target three groups of staff – a group of proficient teachers (or a team), a group of new or struggling teachers and the leaders responsible for providing their support and management.

1. A group of up to 10 proficient teachers or an existing teacher team, learns some of the essential elements of classroom observation, describing classroom action, giving and getting feedback, being a critical friend, working in a collegial group etc. This group then puts in to practice their skills during the week, and meets regularly with the consultant to deepen their learning. Issues and ideas for ongoing learning and development will be identified by individual teachers and the group of teachers.
2. A group of up to 5 new or struggling teachers along with those responsible for providing their support and management. Leaders and teachers, at some point, need to deal with classroom observations, feedback and judgments about teaching practices. This program is designed to assist leaders and teachers to establish a supportive AND challenging way of working with each other. Time is provided for the teachers & leaders to debrief their work. There will be opportunities to focus on some basic principles of lesson design and understanding classroom action. The facilitator gives feedback about application of the skills taught in the workshops.

#### An example of a one-week program...

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
<p><b>Full Day Workshop</b> Working with up to 10 volunteer teachers for training in classroom observation and giving feedback to colleagues including tools for analysis.</p>	<p><b>Observation</b> Teachers from day 1 work in pairs to observe each other and give each other feedback.</p> <p><b>Workshop am</b> Working with 5 struggling teachers (including school leaders with supervision responsibility).</p> <p><b>Observe a lesson</b> together and follow with 30 minute debrief.</p> <p><b>Workshop pm</b> Finish with workshop on some 'basics' that came out of the observations for the teachers.</p>	<p><b>Full Day Workshop</b> Workshop with day 1 group. To reflect on first observation. Make plans for second observation. Deepen analysis of work.</p> <p><b>Observation</b> Teachers from day 2 teach lessons as normal with observation from leaders followed by feedback session.</p> <p><b>After school workshop</b> Work with teacher and leader group from day 2.</p> <p>How did it go? About teaching, about process and about leading.</p> <p>What worked? Why? What didn't? Why? What next? Why</p>	<p><b>Observation</b> Teachers from day 1 set up and conduct another round of observation and feedback.</p> <p>Teachers from day 2 have another go with leader and consultant observations and feedback.</p> <p><b>Workshop pm</b> Day 2 group debrief, lessons learned and ideas for future development</p>	<p><b>Workshop am</b> Debrief the learning from teachers day 1.</p> <p><b>Workshop mid-day</b> Debrief the learning from the teachers day 2.</p> <p><b>Workshop pm</b> Debrief the learning with school leaders.</p>

**Cost: \$11 000 (not including GST, workshop location, catering, teacher relief, travel).**



## Option 4: Program Modules

The course can be taken in a series of modules. The first module can be taken to ascertain interest and later modules picked up if the interest is sustained. Schools can choose this way. Clusters of schools might choose this option where small groups of teachers (minimum 2) from a range of schools create the group.

### Course outline

#### *Module 1:*

*Workshop one:* An introduction to observation and peer support

*Between workshops:* Partners observe each other and have a structured conversation afterwards

*Workshop two:* Deepening the analysis of classroom action

#### *Module 2:*

*Workshop Three:* Exploring self as a teacher

*Between Workshops:* Partners observe each other and have a structured conversation afterwards.

*School Visit:* Consultants visit each school to interview partners about their learning (on-line if distance a factor).

*Workshop Four:* Role reversal with students

#### *Module 3:*

*Workshop Five:* The class as a learning community

*Between Workshops:* Partners observe each other and have a structured conversation afterwards.

*School Visit:* Consultants visit each school to interview partners about their learning (on-line if distance a factor).

*Workshop Six:* Documenting your learning.

#### *Costs:*

**Module one:** \$550 (inc GST) per person or \$440 (inc GST) per person if more than 2 people from the same school attend.

**Module two:** \$660 per person or \$550 per person when more than two people from the same school.

**Module three:** \$660 per person or \$550 per person when more than two people from the same school.

**Discount if enrolled in all three modules at once:** \$1320 per person or \$1210 per person when more than two people from the same school.

The understanding that real learning comes slowly, through the construction of meaning, the recognition of patterns and the creation of relationships.

Stephanie Pace Marshall <sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Pace Marshall, S (1999) A possible new story for learning and schooling – Enabling a ‘new mind’ for the new millennium in *The School Administrator*, December 1999, AASA.



## Option 5: Negotiate a unique program to suit local needs

Various other formats are possible including:

- Shorter but more frequent workshops particularly where working with an existing team.
- Training the trainer models working with school leaders to help them develop the necessary skills and knowledge to build on this work, or develop this as a way of working in their school.

There are some essential elements that must be part of every program.

1. Time for the teachers to learn and practice:
  - Observing
  - Describing
  - Analysing class action
  - Working as a critical friend to help their partner think about their teaching.
  - Reflecting on their learning (about teaching, about student learning and about being a critical friend) along the way.
2. The process of observing and being observed and having follow-up structured conversations with your colleague.

It is virtually impossible to create and sustain over time conditions for productive learning for students when they do not exist for teachers  
Seymour Sarason<sup>6</sup>

I have learnt how powerful our learning can be if we allow ourselves to both lead and follow, to share and listen, to question and be questioned, as equals with other thoughtful peers.

Teacher

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<sup>6</sup> Sarason, S 1990 *The predictable failure of educational reform: Can we change course before it's too late?* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.





## Training to be a Program Leader

Developing the expertise to run programs like this is attractive to teachers who have participated in COPS and wish to be involved more. However, developing the expertise is more than a one-stop shop. The following represents one approach that would satisfy our requirements. How much of the program a person needs to undertake would depend on what other training, experience and expertise they have.

Individuals wishing to work as independent consultants need to negotiate a process with Redgum Consulting. The costs will depend on how much time the trainee is able to give. Once training is completed, individuals will contract with Redgum Consulting on how they will continue to do this work.

Different models can be developed to suit a school system wishing to introduce this way of working in a sustained way within their system. Costs of the training program will need to be negotiated.

Stage	Event	Description
1	3-day workshop	Background to the program. Introduction to the process. Reflection on self as learner and teacher. Working with, and leading, a group.
2	Identify a school who wants to do the program.	Trainee shadows the Program Leader while a school undertakes the COPS program. Trainee and Program Leader debrief after each day of the program.
3	2-day workshop	Workshop with the training group to debrief their observations of the program and review the plan to run a program themselves. Contracting the work with a school.
4	Identify a school and contract with them to run a COPS program	Trainee leads the program while COPS Program Leader shadows the trainee during the face-to-face work. Trainee and Program Leader debrief after each day of the program.
5	2-day workshop	Workshop with the training group to debrief their first program as the leader. Review the program and plan for future work.
6	Identify another school and contract with them to run a COPS program	Trainee runs the program but seeks feedback from program leader through email.
7	Accreditation	Trainee is accredited as leader on the successful completion of this program and the submission of a reflective journal kept throughout the process.
8	Ongoing	New Program Leaders continue to contract and run programs as per agreement with Redgum Consulting Pty Ltd.

One essential requirement of the leader is to be present...to the other person...be available...for the other person...be willing to help...the other person. Need to think about them, their situation, their work, their issue and help them reflect on their thinking. This requires the capacity to manage your own response to what is going on.

John Hogan and Geoff Stewart



## Developing leadership through peer observation and support

A similar observation and peer support process has been developed for leaders.

This program has been developed using modules. Instead of peers observing each other in classrooms the work involves any leadership situations during a work day whether that be working with teachers, students, parents or colleagues.

Contact us so we can develop a program for you or if you are interested in joining one we might advertise soon.

### Course outline

#### *Module 1:*

*Workshop one:* An introduction to observation and peer support in a leadership context.

*Between workshops:* Partners observe each other and have a structured conversation afterwards

*Workshop two:* Deepening the analysis of workplace action and leadership work.

#### *Module 2:*

*Workshop Three:* Exploring self as a leader

*Between Workshops:* Partners observe each other and have a structured conversation afterwards.

*Workplace visit:* Consultants visit workplace to interview partners about their learning (on-line if distance is an issue).

*Workshop Four:* Role reversal with others

#### *Module 3:*

*Workshop Five:* The workplace as a learning community.

*Between Workshops:* Partners observe each other and have a structured conversation afterwards.

*Workplace Visit:* Consultants visit each workplace to interview partners about their learning (on-line if distance is an issue).

*Workshop Six:* Documenting your learning.

#### *Costs:*

**Module one:** \$550 (inc GST) per person or \$440 (inc GST) per person if more than 2 people from the same school attend.

**Module two:** \$660 per person or \$550 per person when more than two people from the same workplace.

**Module three:** \$660 per person or \$550 per person when more than two people from the same workplace.

**Discount if enrolled in all three modules at once:** \$1320 per person or \$1210 per person when more than two people from the same workplace.

... it is important to take time to notice how your own leadership style has changed in response to the pressures of this uncertain time.

Margaret Wheatley



## Program Leaders

### John Hogan

John has developed the Classroom Observation and Peer Support Program over the past 7 years. In that time he has run the program in a range of schools in a variety of formats. He has extensive experience, expertise and training in reflective practice, action learning and group work, supporting leaders through coaching and supervision, and in the provision of professional development and training courses. He works with organisations, groups and individuals as they engage with change through his business Redgum Consulting Pty Ltd. He has a Certificate of Group-work Leadership (1991) and Certificate of Supervision (2002), Perth, Wasley Institute and completed courses in Group Dynamics and Consultancy (1998), and Workplace Observation (2000), Melbourne, Australian Institute of Socio-Analysis (AISA). He is a member of the Action Learning and Action Research Association. He has worked for over 35 years either as a teacher or working with teachers. He works with the Australian National Schools Network and Big Picture Education (both not-for-profit) to help rethink schooling for a more socially just world.

### Marie Finlay

Marie Finlay is an educator, facilitator, coach and storyteller. Marie is an experienced facilitator of adult learning with a depth of knowledge in-group process. She has worked in a variety of organizations at both state and national level. She has worked in this capacity across a broad client group and a wide range of issues. She has worked as a teacher, lecturer and facilitator in primary, secondary and tertiary education in both the public and private systems. Her experience encompasses establishing a centre for gifted students, coordinating the Managing Student Behaviour Program, facilitating a collegial group of superintendents and professional development for teachers and principals. She has researched Barriers to Promotion for Women in the Education, and issues for Women in Education working in country areas. She consulted and facilitated the Women in Leadership program for ECU. She has a certificate in Group work Leadership from the Wasley Institute (88), a Diploma in Ontological Coaching and Certificate IV in Workplace Assessment. She continues to participate in supervision with the Wasley Institute.

### Steve Miolin

Steve is a secondary school teacher from Western Australia with 28 years experience. He has both participated in and led Classroom Observation and Peer Support programs. During the past 6 years he has delivered Classroom Management & Instructional Skills training programs to experienced and new teachers. In that time he has continued to teach. He has observed hundreds of lessons and given feedback to

teachers about their successful application of the skills learnt in the workshops. Steve's priority is classroom teaching and a commitment to training that recognises and respects the complexity of the work teachers do. As well as his extensive and recent classroom teaching experience, he has worked in various administrative positions. This has included a short time as Principal and 4 years as Deputy Principal at Manjimup Senior High School. Prior to that, he worked across a district, coordinating and delivering a range of professional development programs.

### Geoff Stewart

Geoff's school consulting work has focused on helping teachers and leaders to step back from their work, individually and in teams, to make more informed judgments about their situations and the actions they want to take. Geoff is an experienced classroom teacher and school leader. He has had recent training and experience as a facilitator in Classroom Observation and Peer Support programs in schools, and in the Classroom Relationships Project dating back to the 1980's. He was the chief writer of the WA Education Department's resource kit, *The Reflective Teacher*, published in 2003 and was a facilitator in the SCOPE project (self-directed action learning for teachers) in the mid-1990's. During the last fifteen years, Geoff and his family have spent periods working on Australian and international development projects in South and South-East Asian countries. Geoff has been a member of various school, curriculum and staff development project teams in the Western Australian government schools system. For ten years, he was a teacher and Head of Department (English) in Western Australian schools.

### Leith Hogan

Leith works with Redgum Consulting Pty Ltd as a teacher and school leader coach. She works as a lecturer in Reflective Practice at Curtin University. In both roles she has a particular focus on working with new teachers to help them develop, and understand their practice. Leith has a passion for helping teachers focus on student learning. Leith has had a long career as a teacher working K – 12 including 15 years in special education. She has worked as a district literacy leader and a state advisor for teachers working with Autistic students. She has been a deputy principal in both a primary school and a secondary school. She has had training in Cognitive Coaching (Center of Cognitive Coaching, USA), has completed units in counseling both in UK and WA, training in supervision from the Wasley Institute. She works with the Australian National Schools Network coordinating the Cognitive Coaching Hub, and coaching other ANSN National Hub Leaders.



# Classroom observation and peer support program

## Expression of interest

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Position \_\_\_\_\_

School/College \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Fax \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_ Date        /        / \_\_\_\_\_

- Option One Full Course
- Option Two: Shorter Course
- Option Three: In-school Intensive
- Option Four: Program Modules
- Option Five: Negotiated a unique program
- Training for becoming a Program Leader
- Developing leadership

**When completed please return this form by email or by  
fax to 08 8433 3178 or ring John Hogan on 041 793 1991**



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