
Slow Looking

Purpose of the Tool

Our day-to-day lives tend to be rushed. Slow looking can help us gain new insights about our context that we might otherwise overlook or take for granted. It can also be a means for better understanding the complexity of bigger systems operating in our teaching and learning contexts, which could in turn help us to identify and/or refine our innovation strategies.

BUILDING
INQUIRY SKILLS

You might use this tool as you begin to build inquiry skills in your study group and continue to use it throughout your CCI work as you learn, document, and collect data.

Suggested Time Commitment



This tool is a very flexible one and can be woven into everyday practice, even for ten-minute periods. Allow at least one hour to complete the full protocol and a further hour to debrief as a group what you individually noticed.

When & How

The protocol below can be used flexibly, at various times throughout your innovation project. Some of those times include the following:

- The full protocol can be used early on in your innovation project, to think about how your school, classroom, or other teaching and learning context operates as a system, helping you to identify promising areas for innovation.
- Once an innovation is underway, you can repeat the slow looking activity as a means for noticing any changes and then reflecting on the potential impact of those changes on the whole system.
- Steps 1 to 3 (and 6) can be used as a more general observation tool that you could incorporate into your regular practice for short periods of time. For example, what can you learn by looking very closely at how students are engaging or behaving? Are there aspects of your teaching and learning context that you never really look at but which reveal something about your own or your school's values or priorities?
- You could ask a colleague to use Steps 1 to 3 (and 6) when they observe your learning environment, even for 5-10 minutes. You could ask them to look at something in particular or invite them to look closely at something that catches their attention.
- The practice of slow looking could be incorporated into your documentation process. It could also be used as a teaching and learning strategy with students, including involving them more actively in the documentation process of their own learning.

Steps

1. Select your subject for slow looking

Choose a physical aspect or feature of your environment, a person or a group of people, or an interaction or event. This will be your observation “subject.”

2. Observe your subject

Look closely at the subject for at least five minutes and note down as many features as you can. Try to look at the place and/or people you’re observing as if for the first time. You might want to make notes about:

- Everything you see and hear
- Anything that is familiar about what you observe, and anything that seems unfamiliar or surprising to you
- A close, “zoomed-in” view of a specific aspect of your observation setting

3. Record your “wonders”

Write a list of questions or “wonders” that you now have about your subject.

4. Consider your subject within a bigger system

Think of a bigger system connected to the subject (e.g. the overall system for assessment in your teaching and learning context, the systems in place for a school to interact with parents). Try to imagine the bigger system in action and how your subject fits into it.

5. Visualize the system

Sketch a diagram that shows the different parts of the system and how they might interact.

6. Reflect

Reflect, either individually or as a group, on any new insights you gained from doing this activity. What are the implications for your innovation?

Attributions and Additional Resources

This tool is adapted from Project Zero’s Out of Eden Learn Project. The concept of “slow looking” is explored in depth in Tishman, S. (2017). *Slow looking: The art and practice of learning through observation*. Routledge: New York. It is defined more briefly in this blog post: Tishman, S. (2014, July 21). *Slow looking and complexity*. *Out of Eden Learn Educators Blog* (walktolearn.outofedenwalk.com).

