



Slow Looking

Learning to Look beyond First Impressions

Purpose of the Tool

Day-to-day work in teaching and learning contexts can often be rushed. The act of slow looking can help you to gain new insights about your context that might otherwise be overlooked or taken for granted. It can also be a means for better understanding the complexity of bigger systems operating in your teaching and learning context, which could, in turn, help you to identify and refine your innovation strategies.

When to Use

You might use the Slow Looking tool as you begin to build inquiry skills in your study group and continue to use it throughout your innovation work as you learn, document, and collect data. Its flexibility allows it to be woven into everyday practice—even for ten-minute periods—and also to be used at key points in the development of your group's innovation project.

Some of the ways in which Slow Looking might be particularly helpful in the inquiry-driven innovation process include:

- Using the full protocol early in your innovation project to consider how your school, classroom, or other teaching and learning context operates as a system in order to help you identify promising areas for innovation.
- Repeating the slow looking protocol once an innovation project is underway as a means for noticing any changes in your context and reflecting on the potential impact of those changes on the whole system.
- Using Steps 1 to 3 (and 6) as a general observation tool that you could incorporate into your regular practice for short periods of time—for example, to look closely at how students are behaving or to consider aspects of your teaching and learning context that you do not think about on a regular basis.
- Asking colleagues to use Steps 1 to 3 (and 6) as they observe your learning environment, even for 5–10 minutes. You could ask colleagues to look at something in particular or invite them to look closely at something that catches their attention.
- Incorporating the practice of slow looking into an ongoing practice of documentation (see the Documentation suite of tools).

- Using Slow Looking as a teaching and learning strategy with students, for example, by using Slow Looking to involve them more actively in the documentation process of their own learning.

Preparation and Other Considerations

Engaging in the practice of slow looking can be valuable either individually or in a group setting, and each of the following steps can be undertaken either individually or as a full study group. If using this tool as an individual exercise, you might want to reconvene with other members of your study group to share experiences as you reflect (Step 6).

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 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; and
 - 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 your school to interact with parents, etc.). 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 process or the innovation project(s) on which you are working?

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 S. Tishman (2018). *Slow Looking: The Art and Practice of Learning through Observation*. New York: Routledge. It is defined more briefly in this blog post: S. Tishman (July 21, 2014). *Slow Looking*