

A Teacher's Story

The Reception class had completed a weekly writing task and were reflecting on their own learning and achievements with a strategy called the exploding atom. The exploding atom is an all in strategy useful for teachers to gain insights from students around knowledge, skills, concepts, and/or understandings.

To create an exploding atom with a class, all participants form a circle facing inwards and a statement or question is posed by the teacher. If you agree with the statement you walk into the core of the atom, if you totally disagree you stay on the outer edge and if you lie somewhere in between these 2 extremes you place yourself accordingly along the invisible personal continuum you have between the outer edge and the inner core.

More importantly, teachers are able to notice trends and patterns in student placement and dig deeper, ask them to share, or explain why they have chosen to be where they are.

So on this particular day there were many Receptions who, after the statement, "Who did their best writing today?" placed themselves at the core, a couple on the outer edge and a few somewhere in between.

Fast thinking indicated most of the class had tried their best but the teacher had a question for one of the middle dwellers which could have been asked of any individual, "Can you explain to us why you have chosen that spot?" Her response, "When I thought about it - doing my best writing I know that I didn't always use finger spaces and full stops."

This information is valuable to a teacher as you are able to see how their position in the atom was influenced by their understanding of success criteria when writing. You also observed many of those in the centre of the atom rethinking their chosen place and wiggling back a little. This created an opportunity where students were then asked to do a new exploding atom in response to the question, "Who used finger spaces well in their writing?"

