

Module 8

Plenaries

Plenaries

Objectives

- To develop an understanding of the value and significance of plenary sessions
- To promote the use of a range of plenary sessions as a vital and integral element of all lesson types

Resources

- OHTs 8.1–8.6
- Handouts 8.1–8.5 (handout 8.1 is OHT 8.5)
- Leaflet *Making good use of the plenary*, which can be downloaded from the DfES consultants' website: www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/ks3consultants – one copy for each participant
- Video sequences for this module
- Flipchart and pens

Session outline

75 minutes

8.1	Objectives	2 minutes
8.2	Plenaries	4 minutes
8.3	Advanced warning of the plenary	2 minutes
8.4	Purposes of plenaries	10 minutes
8.5	Observing plenaries	18 minutes
8.6	Hazards of plenaries	10 minutes
8.7	Extending the repertoire	20 minutes
8.8	Plenary session	6 minutes
8.9	Ready for more?	3 minutes

Notes for presenters

It is vitally important that presenters do not allow early activities to take up the time which is allocated for the plenary session and thereby model poor practice.

8.1 Objectives

2 minutes

Show **OHT 8.1** and introduce the module.

Objectives OHT 8.1

- To develop an understanding of the value and significance of plenary sessions
- To promote the use of a range of plenary sessions as a vital and integral element of all lesson types

Read the following Ofsted evaluation quotation about the Key Stage 3 Pilot (also included in the leaflet *Making good use of the plenary*) and say that it gives the particular context for this module:

‘From the outset, plenaries were often the weakest part of the lesson. Good planning was critical to the success of plenaries. Often there was insufficient time for them, typically because teachers underestimated the time required for activities in the main phase of the lesson. Plenaries were often the least active part of lessons. Teachers tended merely to sum up what happened during the main phase and pupils did not have the opportunity to articulate what they had learned. When pupils had such opportunities, they proved an important part of the learning process.’

8.2 Plenaries

4 minutes

Show **OHT 8.2**, which defines plenary sessions, noting that this definition is about purpose rather than timing.

Characteristics of plenaries OHT 8.2

Plenaries:

- draw together the whole group;
- summarise and take stock of learning so far;
- consolidate and extend the learning;
- direct pupils to the next phase of learning;
- occur at strategic moments in the teaching sequence;
- often occur at the end of lessons but can occur at other points in the lesson;
- highlight not only what pupils learn, but how they learn;
- help determine the next steps in learning.

Make the following points:

- Plenaries should be planned – spontaneous plenaries tend to be less effective.
- Plenaries should link carefully to the objectives, outcomes and success criteria of the lesson as a whole.

8.3 Advance warning of the plenary

2 minutes

One way of making a plenary more effective and engaging is to 'forewarn' pupils. At this point tell the participants that, near the end of this session:

- There will be a focused plenary.
- It will involve both 'volunteers' and 'conscripts'.
- It will seek to answer two questions:
 - What are the main arguments you would use to persuade a newly qualified teacher (NQT) to use regular plenary sessions?
 - What can be done to ensure greater pupil involvement in plenaries?

8.4 Purposes of plenaries

10 minutes

Ask participants to spend 3 or 4 minutes, in pairs or groups of three, listing the purposes of plenary sessions.

Receive feedback, asking participants to distinguish the purposes for pupils and the purposes for teachers, and record responses on a **flipchart**. When the flipchart lists have been built up, ask participants which purposes they consider the most important. Probe for justification. The intention is to build a strong case for the inclusion of plenaries in lessons.

Show **OHTs 8.3 and 8.4**, which may be helpful to focus the discussion. However, avoid the suggestion that 'these are the answer sheets'.

Purposes of plenaries OHT 8.3

Plenaries are vital elements of lessons because they fulfil a wide range of purposes. In particular they:

- help pupils to crystallise, understand and remember what has been learned;
- refer back to the learning objectives;
- create a sense of achievement, gain and completion;
- take stock of where the class has reached in a task or a sequence;
- take learning further and deeper;
- provide an opportunity for the teacher to assess learning and plan accordingly;
- recognise and value the achievements of individuals and the class;
- prompt deep thinking by pupils about how they have learned.

Other uses of plenaries OHT 8.4

Plenaries can also help teachers as they seek to:

- develop and instill a habit of reflection about/on learning;
- stimulate interest, curiosity and anticipation about the next phase of learning;
- help pupils to change what they have learned into a form which they can communicate;
- draw out applications of what has been learned;
- highlight and change misconceptions which have developed;
- highlight progress made and revise personal or group targets;
- develop assessment for learning;
- help develop pupils' perception of themselves as learners.

8.5 Observing plenaries

18 minutes

Prepare participants for the first video sequence by showing **OHT 8.5**. This poses some questions to consider while watching the video. Distribute **handout 8.1** to participants.

Video analysis	OHT 8.5/Handout 8.1
How does the teacher help pupils to:	
• plan, monitor and reflect on their learning?	
• appreciate the value of their thinking?	
• summarise their learning?	
• make good progress?	

The first video sequence shows a geography teacher with a Year 8 class, who are set 3 out of 4, at Knottingley School in Wakefield.

Show the **first video sequence** and take immediate feedback from the whole group, referring again to the questions on OHT 8.5/handout 8.1. Record responses on a flipchart. Look for the following responses in particular:

The teacher:

- values the pupils' ideas and encourages them to explain themselves clearly;
- encourages groups to plan and record their strategies before the task;
- gets pupils to reflect on their progress and refine their strategies halfway through the task;
- collates their strategies on the board;
- encourages them to reflect on the value of working together;
- consolidates their strategies by suggesting a pattern in them and links that pattern to writing;
- gives them a task at the end of the plenary that helps pupils focus individually on the skills they have been developing.

8.6 Hazards of plenaries

10 minutes

Acknowledge that plenaries are not without their hazards, and explain that this part of the session considers solutions to some common problems.

Distribute **handout 8.2** and identify individuals or groups of participants to consider each situation and suggest ways of resolving the problem.

Hazards of plenaries		Handout 8.2
Challenges/hazards	Suggested solutions	
Clear the way when plenaries allowing the plenary to be covered or missed over by other closing activities such as homework setting		
People find the lesson is over and don't hear it verbally		
It's just business - getting back to work, collecting resources and repeating the objectives		
It's ignored but because it's always the same routine		
Clear and full resources used in one lesson exchange		
The teacher does the activities and the participating learning instead of pupils		
The learning remains implicit		
The teacher simply repeats everything students agreed		
Pupils with SEN can be disadvantaged if they are working at a level below that of the rest of the group		

Use **handout 8.3** to help you to debrief quickly and provide some practical solutions.

Hazards of plenaries		Handout 8.3
Challenges/hazards	Suggested solutions	
Clear the way when plenaries allowing the plenary to be covered or missed over by other closing activities such as homework setting	Use a pupil as a timekeeper Plan specific times for the sections of the lesson and stick to them Plan the plenary properly - you are too busy to neglect it	
People find the lesson is over and don't hear it verbally	Get pupils to announce what they will have to do in the final plenary Involve more pupils in writing or contributing to the plenary Identify individuals and discuss first that is that seen to manage the plenary	
It's just business - getting back to work, collecting resources and repeating the objectives	Change your routine Go for novel practices which to engage attention Get feedback at the beginning of the lesson	
It's ignored but because it's always the same routine	Plan what topics of plenary Design each plenary to suit the lesson and its objectives Commit to the plenary in other public spaces for the next lesson	
Clear and full resources used in one lesson exchange	Be explicit and demanding, making the resources visible for a high quality feedback Use grading questioning Engage justification Focus emphasis on the new skills and knowledge that have been acquired	
The teacher does the activities and the participating learning instead of pupils	Embed the importance to answer questions to work in one theme Ensure that pupils are prepared and have time to prepare Engage pupils in the questioning	
The learning remains implicit	Ask 'What have we learned in today's lesson?' Use the explicit learning points in your planning Get pupils to articulate the most things that help to achieve the objectives in explanations	
The teacher simply repeats everything students agreed	Clarify using the pupils' words, then ask pupils to articulate the consequences of explanations Ask how the new learning might be applied in another context Concentrate on generalisations and key concepts Ask different groups or individuals to offer new points or comment on other groups to show repetition and re-emphasis	
Pupils with SEN can be disadvantaged if they are working at a level below that of the rest of the group	Plan questions at a level that pupils can respond to Provide support to help pupils to be confident about making a response Use probing questions if they have been clear, for support Use group activities that create challenges for pupils and opportunities to articulate and explain what they are doing or their own learn Emphasise the importance of everyone contributing	

8.7 Extending the repertoire

20 minutes

The second video sequence shows a series of extracts from lessons where teachers have tried alternative approaches to improve the effectiveness of plenaries. In particular, they have tried to capture and maintain engagement and make the plenary as interactive as possible.

Distribute **handout 8.4**. Ask participants, when they watch the video, to use the fourth column to record some ideas for the possible application of the strategies to their own subject. The bottom row is provided for participants to record other ideas that the video might trigger.

Emphasise that the strategies employed here cover just a sample of the wide range of strategies available.

Show the **second video sequence**.

Extending the repertoire		Handout 8.4	
Strategy	Example	Subject/ context	Application in my own subject
View diagram	Year 9, Chiswell School, Nottinghamshire	Design technology	
Odd one out	Year 8, Minster School, Nottinghamshire	Geography	
Test this hypothesis	Year 9, Millthorpe School, York	History	
Others			

Ask participants, in groups of three or four, to reflect upon what they have seen and then suggest which strategies they found to be particularly effective and potentially valuable in other subjects and contexts. Record their answers on a flipchart. Probe for their reasoning.

If appropriate, regroup participants into subject-based groups to share ideas about applying these strategies in participants' own National Curriculum subjects (last column).

Distribute **handout 8.5**, which lists some keys to successful plenaries and alternative approaches. The **leaflet** *Making good use of the plenary* can also be handed out at this time.

Twelve keys to successful plenaries		Handout 8.5	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Plan for the plenary as a distinct element of the lesson but specifically designed to help deliver the lesson key objectives. 2 Choose the type of plenary which best fits the lesson's purposes. 3 Ensure that pupils feel confident and expect that they will all contribute to the session. 4 Provide opportunities for pupils to review and clarify their learning. 5 Allow and encourage reflection on what has been learned and how. 6 Use varied strategies rather than a repeated routine (remember the kinesthetic learner). 7 Extend pupils' feedback by probing and extending questioning. This is to avoid low-level reflection. (See also module 4 'Questioning'). 8 Synthesise in order to be explicit about big concepts and to aid memorability. 9 View the plenary as a key means of delivering progression - make sure the plenary places out the progress made in the current lesson and extends thinking further, particularly over a series of plenaries. 10 Downsize pupils' strategies to organise and remember what they have learned. 11 Build up a meta-language in language to help pupils talk about their thinking and learning in a way which helps them with future challenges. 12 Make sure the place of the plenary is secure (ensure time allocated is not usurped by other activity). 			

Explain that the following are some constructive approaches to plenaries.

- Ask pupils to draw out the most important points, explaining why they are significant.
- Ask pupils to think of consequences, implications, parallel issues, and exceptions.
- Ask pupils to generalise from their own experience.
- Ask pupils to apply their learning to a new context.
- Give the main points and ask pupils to illustrate each one.
- Ask pupils to explain the objective and how it can be achieved.

- Ask pupils to devise golden rules or tips for others attempting the same task.
- Ask pupils to write up their findings on the board, on posters or in a PowerPoint presentation and then allow time to view, interrogate and/or prioritise.
- Provide 'prior warning' about what the plenary will involve.

8.8 Plenary session (using previously announced questions) 6 minutes

Explain to participants that, in this instance, you intend to hold a quick-fire plenary using an approach not unlike one they may have come across in other situations. It involves the first person starting off a sentence and the next person is then required to repeat what the first person said and add another section.

This continues around the room using volunteers or conscripts. Each person adds one extra phrase or sentence.

The presenter should start the process with this stem:

'When I meet our NQT I shall try to persuade him/her to have a plenary in every lesson by explaining that plenaries are really helpful in judging whether the pupils have understood the new key ideas I have introduced.'

Ask a conscript/volunteer to repeat the above plus one suggestion. Repeat this for perhaps six more participants.

Repeat this routine for the second of the previously announced questions.

8.9 Ready for more? 3 minutes

Show **OHT 8.6** as a basis for future action by participants.

Ready for more? OHT 8.6

- In a departmental meeting view the two video sequences from this module and use handout 8.5 as an agenda for discussion.
- Discuss the strategies illustrated and share ideas about how they can be applied in your subject. You may find it helpful to use module 7 'Starters' for other ideas that can be used in plenary sessions.
- Agree on five strategies that you will trial and introduce them over a four-week period.
- Discuss how each of those strategies can be used to maximise pupil progress.
- Share the pupil responses with colleagues in a further meeting.

Objectives

OHT 8.1

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- draw together the whole group;
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- occur at strategic moments in the teaching sequence;
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Purposes of plenaries

OHT 8.3

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Plenaries can also help teachers as they seek to:

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Video analysis

OHT 8.5/Handout 8.1

How does the teacher help pupils to:

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Ready for more?

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Video analysis

OHT 8.5/Handout 8.1

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Hazards of plenaries

Handout 8.2

Challenges/hazards	Suggested solutions
Class time runs short (therefore allowing the plenary to be overrun or taken over by other closing activities such as homework setting).	
Pupils feel the lesson is over and don't treat it seriously.	
It's just business – getting back in seats, collecting in materials and repeating the objectives.	
It's grown dull because it's always the same routine.	
'Show and tell' sessions result in low-level exchanges.	
The teacher does the activities and the underpinning thinking instead of pupils.	
The learning remains implicit.	
The teacher simply repeats everything; nothing is gained.	
Pupils with SEN can be disadvantaged if they are working at levels below that of the rest of the group.	

Challenges/hazards	Suggested solutions
Class time runs short (therefore allowing the plenary to be overrun or taken over by other closing activities such as homework setting).	Use a pupil as a timekeeper. Plan specific times for the sections of the lesson and stick to them. Plan the plenary properly – you are less likely to neglect it.
Pupils feel the lesson is over and don't treat it seriously.	Tell pupils in advance what they will have to do in the final plenary. Involve more pupils in running or contributing to the plenary. Identify individuals and forewarn them that it is their turn to manage the plenary.
It's just business – getting back in seats, collecting in materials and repeating the objectives.	Change your routine. Go for novel plenaries which re-engage attention. Set homework at the beginning of the lesson.
It's grown dull because it's always the same routine.	Plan varied styles of plenary. Design each plenary to suit the lesson and its objective. Sometimes use the plenary to whet pupils' appetites for the next lesson.
'Show and tell' sessions result in low-level exchanges.	Be explicit and demanding, sharing the success criteria for a high-quality feedback. Use probing questioning. Require justification. Place emphasis on the new skills and knowledge that have been acquired.
The teacher does the activities and the underpinning thinking instead of pupils.	Resist the temptation to answer questions as well as ask them. Ensure that pupils are primed and have time to prepare. Require pupils to do the questioning.
The learning remains implicit.	Ask 'What have we learned in today's lesson?' List the explicit learning points in your planning. Ask pupils to articulate the main things that help to achieve the objectives.
The teacher simply repeats everything; nothing is gained.	Quickly recap key points yourself, then ask pupils to articulate the consequences or implications. Ask how this new learning might be applied in another context. Concentrate on generalisations and key concepts. Ask different groups or individuals to offer new points or comment on other aspects (to deter repetition and require depth).
Pupils with SEN can be disadvantaged if they are working at levels below that of the rest of the group.	Pitch questions at a level that pupils can respond to. Provide support to help pupils to feel confident about making a response. Use teaching assistants, if you have them in class, for support. Use group activities that involve challenges for pupils and opportunities to describe and explain what they are doing at their own level. Emphasise the importance of everyone contributing.

Strategy	Example	Subject/ context	Application in my own subject
'Venn diagram'	Year 9, Chilwell School, Nottinghamshire	Design and technology	
'Odd one out'	Year 8, Minster School, Nottinghamshire	Geography	
Test this hypothesis	Year 9, Millthorpe School, York	History	
Others			

Twelve keys to successful plenaries

Handout 8.5

- 1 Plan for the plenary as a distinct element of the lesson but specifically designed to help deliver the lesson's key objectives.
- 2 Choose the type of plenary which best fits the lesson's purposes.
- 3 Ensure that pupils feel confident and expect that they will all contribute to the session.
- 4 Provide opportunities for pupils to review and clarify their learning.
- 5 Allow and encourage reflection on **what** has been learned and **how**.
- 6 Use varied strategies rather than a repeated routine (remember the kinaesthetic learners).
- 7 Extend pupils' feedback by probing and extending questioning. This is to avoid low-level reiteration. (See also module 4 'Questioning'.)
- 8 Synthesise in order to be explicit about big concepts and to aid transferability.
- 9 View the plenary as a key means of delivering progression – make sure the plenary draws out the progress made in the current lesson and extends thinking further, particularly over a series of plenaries.
- 10 Develop pupils' strategies to organise and remember what they have learned.
- 11 Build up a 'meta-language'; a language to help pupils talk about their thinking and learning in a way which helps them with future challenges.
- 12 Make sure the place of the plenary is secure (ensure time allocated is not swamped by other activity).