

Using student voice to inform teachers' professional practice



Nigel Wakefield – Deputy Principal (School Performance) Australind Senior High School, Western Australia.

Australind Senior High School (ASHS), an award winning regional high school in the South-West of Western Australia, is the only school in Australia to be selected to trial AITSL's professional standards for teachers. Nigel Wakefield reflects upon his initial motivation to trial the standards at ASHS.

Considering the school improvement cycle to date, I thought that the next big ticket item to be introduced should be the national teaching standards. Finally, we would have something to anchor a quality teacher program to: standards that are consistent across the national stage.

Prior to my current role, I worked for the Department of Education WA as a Principal Curriculum Officer in Professional Support, delivering professional development and consultative support in data analysis and school planning across the state. On reflection, I was accustomed to delivering blanket professional learning to schools - a one size fits all model where attendees sit through the session regardless of individual needs or aspirations.

What excites me about the Standards is that teachers, regardless of their developmental stage, can map themselves to the Standards, and thus engage their thought processes

to assess performance and plan for improvement. This is an exciting revelation, when one considers this on a national scale. However, the conundrum always lies with the accuracy of one's own judgment. It's therefore necessary to seek other forms of feedback to help triangulate *actual* teacher performance.

With this in mind, ASHS has taken a progressive step towards student engagement in a pilot study titled *Using Student Voice to Inform the Improvement of Teachers' Professional Practice*. Although the use of student feedback has been trialled in many studies across the world, it is still not a common practice in Australian schools. We wanted to break the mould, to challenge the belief that the classroom teacher is the fount of all knowledge. We intend to develop a culture where student voice is valued as quality feedback in the teacher development cycle.

I am well supported in the project by the head of Society and Environment, Richard Ewing. We have designed a school improvement model using collaborative pairs of teachers from a range of learning areas. The pairs will film classes and analyse each other's performance in relation to specific standards that have been identified by individual teachers as areas for improvement. Students within classes will be surveyed to seek the targeted feedback required.

Richard and I were thrilled to attend the training sessions in Melbourne. The response from the Science, Information and Communication Technology and Mathematics Education in Rural and Regional Australia (SiMERR, the University of New England) and the project team from the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) was warm and extremely positive and we found the training that they conducted in Melbourne outstanding. It was an amazing professional development opportunity and networking experience, where we were able to whittle down our ideas and crystallise them into a coherent project design. We are now very keen to start analysing the student feedback data – to see what comes out in the wash.

Nigel Wakefield

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