

Building a culture and cycle

Australind Senior High School, Western Australia

Case study and materials connected to the video of effective existing performance and development practice

Australind Senior High School is a large Year 8 to 12 secondary school of just under 1000 students located near Bunbury on the south coast of Western Australia. It has a stable, experienced staff.

The school's entry point to performance and development was its decision to focus on quality teaching as a central component of its proposal to become an autonomous independent state school.

In determining on this focus the school used the *National Professional Standards for Teachers* as a starting point to conduct conversations about what constituted good teaching practice and as the basis for determining what good teaching looked like in the classroom.

The Pilot Program

During 2011 the school established a pilot program that involved volunteer teachers drawn from a cross section of the staff carrying out a self-reflection of their teaching against the *National Professional Teaching Standards for Teachers*. The self-reflection was designed to assist the teacher to determine the gap between their practice and that described in the Standards. This self-analysis was then validated by feedback from two sources – firstly from students who completed a survey form on the teacher and then feedback from a peer teacher, chosen by the teacher, based on a classroom observation. In the case of the peer teacher, the classroom observation and subsequent discussion and feedback was a component of a pairing arrangement whereby the teachers involved worked together to discuss their self-reflections, and carry out mutual classroom observation and feedback.

The self-reflection and feedback was accompanied by the guarantee that the teachers' development needs as identified by the process itself would be met through appropriate teacher learning programs provided through the school.

Based on the success of the 2011 pilot the school has developed and extended this performance and development process to involve all teachers in 2012.

The 2012 Performance and Development Process

The current performance and development process includes a number of distinct but connected elements.

1 Self-reflection and analysis: the first step in the current process is a continuation of 2011 process of the teacher self-reflection on their teaching practice with a gap analysis against the national Standards. This has now been extended to all teachers and is followed by the validation process which is carried out during the first semester.

2. Validation: During the first semester the self-reflection and gap analysis is validated by:

2.1 Student feedback – all teachers receive feedback on their teaching via a simple student questionnaire on their teaching.

2.2 Peer feedback – all teachers now work with a peer, who is selected by mutual agreement between the teacher and his/her peer. These teacher pairs then carry out classroom observations of each other based on prepared lesson plans with the purpose of providing feedback based on observation notes drawn up according to a lesson observation protocol. To prepare these pairs of teachers to carry out the lesson planning, classroom observation and feedback conversations, teachers are given training in all these activities at the start of the year.



About

Australind Senior High School identified performance and development as a primary focus when they became an Independent public school in 2011. As part of their focus on student outcomes and quality teaching they worked hard to familiarise their teachers with the *National Professional Standards for Teachers*. The annual review for each teacher is informed by a range of data including teacher self-reflections against the Standards, student feedback, classroom observation and feedback from a peer and also from their head of learning and school leadership. In 2012 Australind introduced a professional learning program addressing classroom management and instructional strategies.

Questions for discussion

1. Have you identified what effective teaching looks like in your school context and with reference to the *National Professional Standards for Teachers*?
2. What protocols or procedures should be in place to support the collection and use of student feedback?
3. What are the potential benefits of pairing up with a peer, observing each other's classroom teaching, and providing feedback?
4. Australind have evolved their performance and development work considerably in the last twelve months. What is the role of leadership in managing such change?

School context

Australind Senior High School
Australind Western Australia

School type: Government
Stage of schooling: Secondary
School location: Provincial

3. Performance appraisal: After the self-reflection and analysis and the validation processes are completed there is a more formal performance appraisal process carried out with all teachers in the second semester. This consists of a formal classroom observation of each teacher carried out by a member of the senior leadership of the school and the head of the relevant learning area. Each teacher prepares a lesson plan prior to the lesson to be observed, the lesson is then conducted and observed by the two leaders and observation notes are taken. A feedback conversation follows the lesson and written feedback is subsequently provided to the teacher.

4. Professional development: The professional development that accompanies this process is focussed on three areas. Firstly the teacher development activities, contrary to past practice in the school, are organised to meet the individual needs of teachers as the teachers have identified them through the performance and development process. Secondly, but connected to teachers individual learning needs, common needs are identified and the school takes measures to ensure teachers have access to appropriate programs that meet these needs. An example of the common needs that teachers have is in the use of information technology.

Thirdly, and most significantly, the school has organised a professional learning program for all leaders and teachers around teaching practice itself. It is called the Classroom Management Strategies (CMS) program comprising 5 x 1 day workshops on classroom management with four classroom conferences and 3 x 1 day workshops on instructional strategies with three classroom conferences. It is being delivered by the Behaviour and Well Being area of the Department of Education (WA).

To ensure that the school leaders are demonstrating instructional leadership and are in a position to fully appreciate the value of the program, the first group to undertake it has included all members of the school's leadership team including the school principal, and one teacher from each learning area. The program has involved all participants going through the process of developing lesson plans, teaching lessons under observation and receiving expert feedback from the trainers. The program is now being rolled out to all teachers over time.

An important extension of the CMS program is that two school leaders and three teachers have completed additional training and gained accreditation in classroom observation. This accredited expertise is designed to assist the school to develop consistency and reliability in its classroom observation and feedback practices.

5. Review discussion: The final element of the school's approach to performance and development is a review meeting and discussion between the individual teacher and the relevant Head of Learning Area (HOLA). This is designed to take place after all other elements of the process have been completed and brings together all the feedback gathered by and about the teacher during the year. An important focus of this meeting is the teacher's future development needs which can then be translated into the teacher's professional development plan at the start of the following year.

A key to the implementation of the process to date has been the strong promotion and support provided by the school leadership. This not only includes the senior leadership, led by the school principal, but also a number of significant middle level leaders who have become champions and advocates of the school's performance and development process. This has been particularly important in a school that is not disadvantaged and has an experienced and well established teaching staff. An extremely important element in this leadership is the way the senior leadership has modelled the process that other teachers are being asked to undertake by being among the first to go through a process of preparing lesson plans, conducting lessons under observation and receiving verbal and written feedback on their teaching.

Implementation

Australind joined a national pilot study with AITSL as a means of progressing their performance and development practices and familiarising their teaching staff with the *National Professional Standards for Teachers*. The volunteers chosen to participate in the pilot study were teachers who were respected within the school and who were opinion leaders and effective communicators. These teachers became ambassadors for the evolving performance and development practices.

More classroom observation was required but this was not a process embedded in the culture of the school. The first stages of observation included peer observation from a teacher selected colleague. This allowed teachers to experience observation without feeling threatened or judged.

The schools involvement in the CMS programme has provided a common language to define classroom practice and student engagement. The whole administration team were the first ones to engage in the CMS programme, to have their lessons observed and assessed. This was an intentional strategy to build instructional leadership capabilities and prove to the staff that the administration team were willing to experience the same professional learning as their teaching staff.

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