

Feedback Case Study



FEEDBACK FOR LITERACY AND NUMERACY

GUNBALANYA COMMUNITY SCHOOL
GUNBALANYA, NT

aitsl
Australian Institute
for Teaching and
School Leadership
Limited

- 🌀 VERY REMOTE
- 🌀 GOVERNMENT
- 🌀 P – 12 / COMBINED
- 🌀 ICSEA 527
- 🌀 20 TEACHERS
- 🌀 235 STUDENTS
- 🌀 LBOTE 99%
- 🌀 INDIGENOUS STUDENTS 100%

(Accessed from MySchool - May 2017)

Identifying a need

Gunbalanya Community School identified the need for an evidence-based and data focused approach to teaching literacy and numeracy. Concerns were raised when its 2013-2014 NAPLAN results showed a reduction in student performance in reading (Years 5 – 7) and writing (Years 3 – 5). School leadership focused on Hattie and Timperley's Feedback model and its four levels of feedback as a key approach to improving the literacy and numeracy of their students.

The leadership team started with aligning feedback to school goals and then developed a gradual whole-school implementation approach and engaged staff to create a 12-month action plan.

“ It is important to get the teachers on board with it from the beginning, and really ask them what it is that they would like to know. ”

Belinda Davis, Senior Teacher 1 for Primary

KEY IMPLEMENTATION PRACTICES

Consistency in practice in using feedback. Developed a consistent language throughout the school so all students are hearing the same language in all classes.

Impact coach – who is also the data coach – supporting staff to work with data.

Fortnightly grade level meetings to analyse student data, reflect on feedback practice and ways to improve, and plan for the next two-week cycle.

Observations and walk-throughs are used to expose teachers to in-class feedback practices and give school leaders an idea of how feedback is being implemented for evaluation and improvement purposes.

IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

1. **Identified a need** to address declining student achievements, evident in NAPLAN results. School leadership adopted *Visible Learning* and feedback as a whole school approach to improve students' outcomes.
2. **Started in-house professional learning** sessions to introduce feedback as a tool to bridge the gap between current understanding among students and intended outcomes.
3. **Conducted observations and walk-throughs** to support teachers and monitor the implementation of feedback practices.
4. **Worked collaboratively** through meetings and professional learning sessions to share and refine effective feedback practices.
5. **Adopted conferencing to build students'** capacities to accept and work with feedback.
6. **Monitored progress** through data collection and analysis, adjusting practice and making necessary changes.

Implementation narrative

To equip teachers with the necessary knowledge to trial feedback practices in their classrooms, the school started by conducting in-house professional learning sessions. Teachers led trial practices in their classrooms and worked collaboratively to review and refine these.

The Northern Territory Department of Education and external *Visible Learning* consultants provided advice, as well as further information and resources to support professional learning on data analysis and feedback.

The whole-school approach at Gunbalanya is focused on eliciting and gathering evidence of student progress to inform next steps in learning. Teachers hold year level meetings fortnightly to analyse student data, reflect on teaching practice and student progress, and collaboratively plan for the next two weeks.

In their planning, teachers focus on differentiating the learning for students, including creating individually-targeted success criteria. Examples of student work are brought to these meetings, shared, discussed and used to identify learning needs.

Feedback practices are being implemented in literacy lessons, mainly for writing, while some teachers have started to incorporate these into reading sessions as well. The school has identified maths as the next focus area for enhancing feedback practices.



KEY FEEDBACK PRACTICES

Conferencing about literacy is held at the end of a writing session. Teachers have one-to-one conversations with students that are focused around learning intentions and different ways of working towards their goals. These discussions are guided and informed by success criteria, templates and rubrics.

The Three Questions: During conferencing, teachers provide comments by addressing the three main feedback questions (How is the learner going? Where is the learner going? How to get there?) to frame the learning process.

Learning intentions and success criteria are used to clarify the direction of the intended learning and track students' progress. These are referenced during conferencing and displayed visually on data walls.

The Turtle Tracks are a visual indicator of student progress in literacy, reading and comprehension skills. This involves students in monitoring their steps towards their goals and celebrating when they move up a level.

Self-regulation: teachers try to build student capacity as independent learners by supporting them to think about tasks on their own before they approach teachers for help.

Peer feedback is used in reading groups. Students are asked to read parts of the same text, listen to each other and provide feedback on two points of strengths and one weakness that they could improve on.

Building students' capacity to work with feedback through increasing learners' resilience. This has changed the way that students perceive making mistakes in the learning process, and made them more open to constructive criticism and other forms of feedback.

Teachers develop and set clear learning intentions and specific goals for students. Learning intentions are displayed in classrooms for reference. Teachers also use conferencing with students to clarify the direction of the learning, assess progress and provide instructions on how to move forward, as well as to agree personal learning goals. Conferencing is normally done at the end of a writing session to check for understanding and to ensure students are going in the right direction.

The school has developed "Turtle Tracks" as a way to involve the primary students in tracking and measuring progress towards their goals for literacy, reading and comprehension skills. Students get to celebrate success when they move their turtle along the track. For secondary students, visual pathways and maps are used.

Gunbalanya's leaders and teachers use observations and walk-throughs to support and monitor new feedback practices and to learn from each other about how those practices work inside the classroom.

Introducing observations was a direct response to teachers asking for help from colleagues to use new approaches. Before an observation, the observer fills out a template with the teacher about what the focus will be and what the observer is seeking to learn.

The observer watches their colleague's lesson to learn what works in their approach. Afterwards, the teachers discuss the session, with the observer reflecting on what they noticed and what methods they could take back and try in their own teaching.

One of the challenges that the school faced was introducing and normalising a feedback culture among students. Early on, feedback was perceived negatively, with students taking comments personally. Teachers worked with students to change their mindsets to view feedback more positively as something that helps them to improve and grow.

This was achieved through building students' capacity to become more self-regulated in their learning. During conferencing, students pinpoint areas of strength and areas for development in their own writing. This gives them ownership over the feedback and improvement process. Students were supported to develop the language to talk about their learning achievements, which built positive experiences around feedback.



ENABLING CONDITIONS

Two teachers operate in each class – an Indigenous and a non-Indigenous teacher.

Teachers work collaboratively to assess student data and plan lessons. They are open to embracing the new feedback culture.

Using the Aboriginal Literacy Strategy,

a systemic literacy initiative to assist remote teaching services. It focuses on consistent and sustainable pedagogy, evidence-based planning, careful text selection and explicit EAL/D instruction.

A positive feedback culture lets students know that it's about being evaluated on the progress they make, and not about being compared with other students in their class.

IMPACT

- NAPLAN data shows steady growth in student performance.
- Students using the language of feedback – normalising the use of feedback terminology across the school and establishing a feedback culture.

Some teachers have introduced peer feedback in reading groups, where students provide two positive comments and one suggestion for improvement. Students are asked to reflect on given tasks independently before turning to their teachers for help.

Students at Gunbalanya are learning English as an additional language, which posed an extra challenge for teachers introducing feedback practices. As providing written comments wasn't always effective, teachers had to think of alternative ways of delivering feedback, such as through visual tools like the TurtleTracks.

The supportive school culture has been a key factor in overcoming many of the barriers that arose during the implementation process. Gunbalanya's teachers are flexible, open to new ideas, and highly collaborative. They are keen to promote feedback and embrace change that enhances student learning.

The school works with the community to secure their buy-in to its goals. It engages parents and gets their support wherever possible in implementing new approaches. Working with the community and sharing feedback with parents is something that the school is exploring and working towards.

“ Feedback is something we naturally do as teachers, but it's really trying to raise the level of that feedback to be more task or process specific and then moving into a self-regulation area of feedback. ”

Belinda Davis, Senior Teacher 1 for Primary

