



Professional Engagement

Standard 6 – Professional Learning

Significant Episode: Gaynor Steele

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Finding 6.3: Feedback

Be both a mentor and a learner, as the act of giving and receiving feedback establishes safe, respectful relationships conducive to critical engagement and change.

Ensuring whole of site commitment to curriculum change through scaffolded observation and feedback.

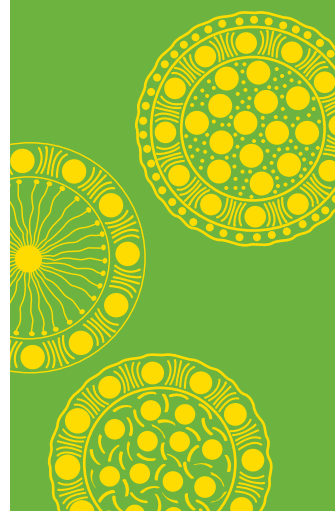
As the Principal at Noarlunga Downs P-7 School the *Make It Count* project has hugely influenced my practice as a curriculum leader. My goal is always to ensure excellence in teaching and learning in my school. My vision for this project was to see enthusiastic engagement in Mathematics by all students in the school, and especially our Indigenous students. This degree of engagement would lead to improved Mathematics outcomes across the school. We had many things already in place. Our teachers understood the importance of positive relationships with their learners and we had set an expectation with all of "Aiming High and Achieving Together."

As a leadership team we grappled with ensuring that all our teachers were fully participating in the project and embracing the new, scaffolded pedagogy in Mathematics that we were trialling and researching. All teachers had participated in the training but some practice had moved very little. We also had new teachers coming into the school since the start of the project and we needed to bring them on board quickly so that their students did not miss out. We could see the students of the teachers that were engaging were demonstrating vastly improved engagement in lesson, enjoyment and success in their maths. We wanted to support those who were engaging even more. I felt that if we did nothing to move the resisters we were in fact colluding with them. We could not allow less than the best for students who were already disadvantaged. We were determined to move the resisters for the sake of their students.

As a leader, I believe that modelling to staff what I want them to do is a powerful adult learning process. We decided to trial teacher observations and formal feedback using the successful practice of a previous curriculum change in the school. Teachers were advised that we were coming in to observe the teaching of the *Make It Count* maths lesson. In the first round of observations we used our lesson proforma from the project. On this we noted what teachers were doing well as we observed and made recommendations for ideas that they could try in future lessons. The suggestions were referenced against each aspect of a scaffolded maths lesson ie:

- Did the lesson have an explicit 'big idea'?
- Was there a lesson goal and a behaviour goal?
- Did the teacher welcome students into the Maths lesson with a warm up activity or a recap of the previous day's lesson?
- Was there explicit teaching and modelling to show the students the new maths?
- Was there opportunity for the students to practise the new maths?
- Were concrete materials used in the exploration of the maths, with their continued use as the students moved to greater levels of abstraction?

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- Did the teacher bring the children back together to explore their strategies and learning, and to jointly 'make meaning'?
- Did the teacher question throughout the lesson to check for 'handover' especially at the end of the lesson?
- Did the teacher use 'backward planning' to organize the next lesson or in deciding to revisit the learning for consolidation the next day?

In our first observations we did not give the teachers the scaffold of the proforma. As leaders we did some backwards planning. In order to improve our observation and feedback process, we realized if we gave the teachers the proforma before the observation the teachers would know what we were looking for. They would be better supported to do this work well. We fine-tuned the proforma adding the types of questions we were likely to be asking as we watched and this became our new observation tool.

Prior to the next round of observations, teachers were given the proforma as reference. Not surprisingly, the quality of the pedagogy in the observed lessons was greater, with students going far deeper into the learning. In the third round teachers were released to observe each other using the proforma and give each other feedback. We also released them to talk together and we saw deep discussion and sharing of many strategies to improve all aspects of the teaching and learning. In this round we put the learning back into the hands of those working with the students. I do believe that leadership modeling the observations first was necessary to the success of the later peer to peer observations.

Did we shift the resistant teachers? We certainly did. And we know this because of staffroom discussions. We hear them excitedly talking about their practice to colleagues. They have been re-energised through the observations and professional feedback. The process has prompted them to really utilize this new pedagogy in a thoughtful way. The engagement and success of their students in the maths, as a result, has also convinced them to continue. This process also speedily inducted teachers new to the school into the pedagogy.

As a result of this project I believe that the practice of scaffolded observation and professional feedback contributes to all students receiving the best possible teaching. Quality teaching is vital for all disadvantaged students and especially for Aboriginal students to maximize their potential. Scaffolding the observations with a specific observation tool and giving feedback is a powerful process to bring resistant teachers into a project. It is a strategy that I will continue to use in my curriculum leadership role in the future.

Some questions to prompt discussion:

1. *What did the leadership team at the school do to bring the 'resistors' on board?*
2. *Why is constructive feedback to teachers about their teaching of mathematics to Aboriginal students so important?*
3. *What other interesting or important aspects are in this Significant Episode?*

