

Glenmore Park Public School
SPIRALS CASE STUDY

Focus: How to embed collective teacher efficacy into the current school culture.

Scanning: After completing a self assessment against the NSW Department of Education's School Excellence Framework, it was evident that the staff were individual silos working side by side, knowing only the children in their class. At most, a handful of staff could discuss an isolated grade. Professional learning had become a one size fits all model and staff were disengaged from the process.

Focus: As a school, staff felt that they didn't need to change their current practices as they were working and met the required outcomes. We needed to shift the focus from individuals and classroom silos to make the learning across the school visible. W. Edwards Deming stated that *"Without data, you're just another person with an opinion."* Through visible learning we wanted to shift the school culture to one where everyone was responsible for the learning of all our students.

Hunch: Summative assessments were at the forefront of student achievement and despite staff being dedicated, they were time poor to be able to implement anything additional. As such, teaching practices would stay the same as would our results.

New professional learning: John Hattie's research and findings (2009) on what efforts had the greatest effect size were pivotal to our starting point. Teacher clarity (0.75), Piagetian programs (1.16), student expectations (1.33), classroom discussion (0.82), Feedback (0.73), teacher estimates of achievement (1.62) and collective teacher efficacy (1.57) then became at the forefront of our decision making.

Whilst we knew the direction we needed to embark on, there were still elements that were missing, as staff morale was low due to a perceived increased workload and prior mindsets. Hence Carol Dweck's work on 'growth mindset' was imperative to promote change amongst both students and staff. The power of 'yet' and bringing the joy and love of learning for staff was paramount to the success of our change in school culture.

Spirals of Inquiry became the final piece of the initial puzzle as we invested our financial resources towards our greatest asset - our staff. We had previously invested time and professional development towards inquiry based learning for our students (with some success), so the natural progression towards this inquiry approach for staff seemed inevitable. The research intertwined and supported our initial scan.

Taking action: Prior to starting Spirals, it was necessary for us to begin with the foundations of Formative Assessment namely Learning Intentions Success Criteria (LISC), feedback and learning goals.

We began with a focus on LISC, so that both staff and students had a purpose to what they were learning and why it was important. To take current programming and modify it, first in writing and then in mathematics was something that needed to flow smoothly and with limited resistance from staff.

Staff that had displayed a keen interest in this area were able to view it in action at other schools. This ignited a fire as they came back inspired and started to embed it into their teaching practice. The professional dialogue began to filter throughout the school like ripples on a pond. Fairly soon we had bump it up walls (linking to writing) appearing so that tasks were becoming differentiated to meet the needs of individual students rather than a one size fits all model. Whilst we were making gains in this area, staff were becoming 'change weary' as previous practices were being used in conjunction with current practices, rather than '*letting some go*'. We made data across the school visible, and held meetings to enlighten the staff on whole school data and how it linked to current research, the School Excellence Framework, our School Plan, NSW syllabus documents and our reports. This assisted in providing a basis to work from, as prior to this, the information and sharing of data was unheard of.

Armed with this information, we felt that the natural progression was to move to individual learning goals, due to the differentiated nature of tasks appearing in classrooms. The momentum began to wane amongst staff as the consensus was that mastery had not been achieved in the implementation of prior initiatives.

Carol Dweck's work on growth mindset then came into play. Using this as a springboard to instil this type of mindset within our students, we discovered that displays were appearing within rooms. Through implementing this mindset in their classrooms, staff began to use the language with each other. The power of 'yet' had taken hold and we began to gain back that momentum. Our staff were now ready for Spirals of Inquiry. With an effect size of 1.57, it was decided that staff were our greatest resource, so professional learning time was structured into one school day each week. Nothing was to interrupt this time as it was essential that the learning was valued.

After reviewing our school data, writing became our focus. In particular, the data showed that if we put our efforts into the students who were just below where they needed to be, our results would improve by around 80% for each grade.

Through the collection of work samples and video evidence, staff were able to formulate their hunch based on what they found. The research affirmed current practices and highlighted areas that required us to focus on. The evidence that needed to be collected each fortnight was integral for our school to maintain the focus and strive for impact. This was initially confronting to staff and the additional workload put a strain on relationships. After 3 spirals sessions, those that had committed to the process and hard work, began to see an impact. We were making a difference! That in itself was powerful and from there we haven't looked back.

Checking: Staff, despite being time poor, wanted to share their learning with the rest of the school because what they had learnt had changed their teaching practices and impact was evident. Their findings have been driving the learning within the school and that has empowered all staff to see that they make a difference to the achievements of their students. The professional dialogue is frequent within the staffroom and staff are keen to share photos and videos of their impact on student learning. Teachers are reflecting on what they are doing and openly admit to changing their practice depending on what they have discovered through their Spirals sessions. On our continuum of learning, staff are now asking for not just the general area that students are working on, but specific markers so that they can build upon them immediately in the new year with their new class. Time is a precious resource and staff have seen the impact that a fortnight can make to a child.

They freely admit to knowing where their students are, without needing to look at work samples and how they have raised their expectations of what can be accomplished. Staff admit that they have never worked harder, but the impact has been immense and drives them to continue.

Reflections/ Advice: When you value your staff and make them your top priority, you promote a culture of worth and belonging. To block out time, within a school day, to say your learning is worthwhile you empower your staff to strive for something meaningful. We have invested in our staff, and the results have exceeded anything we could have imagined. Staff have regained the love of learning that we always try to instill in our students.

With a new year, comes new teams and new strengths and relationships. With new teams, comes new leadership opportunities. Each member carries invaluable knowledge from their Spirals that they will impart and lead their new team in. This will only strengthen the bonds between staff and open up the paths for professional dialogue. We are already thinking ahead with our data and where we put our focus in week 1 of a new year.

Spirals of Inquiry is a journey that has turned our school around. We are a team that are constantly working towards the collective achievements of students within our school. For schools who feel they aren't ready....add in the word 'yet' because our growth mindset has seen a shift that has to be seen to be believed.