Spirals of Inquiry Case Study
Sackville Street Public School

SCHOOL CONTEXT

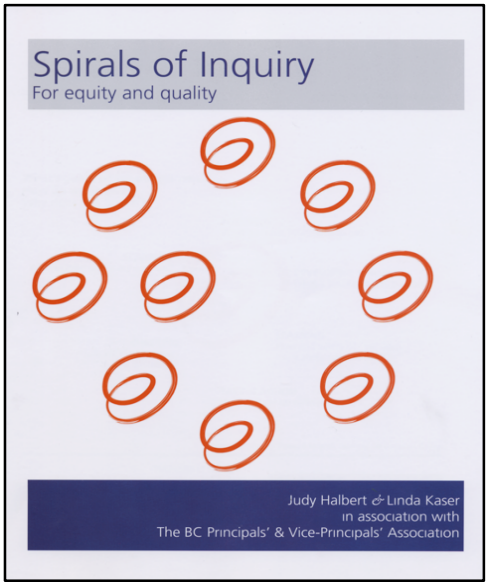
Sackville Street Public School provides a comprehensive and balanced curriculum of academic, sporting and cultural experiences. The school actively promotes its aim of 'Opportunities for All' to include students, staff, parent-volunteers and community helpers, in accordance with our school motto, a 'Sharing and Caring' environment. The high expectations of the whole school community are reflected in the welcoming environment, the quality of student welfare programs and academic achievement. Sackville Street, located in the South Western Sydney Region, has strong traditions of quality academic, cultural and social programs, which continue to be actively supported by students, staff and parents. The staff is made up of a core of experienced teachers who have contributed many years of service to the school. Recent appointments have included several early-career and temporary teachers who have displayed sound curriculum knowledge and effective student management strategies.

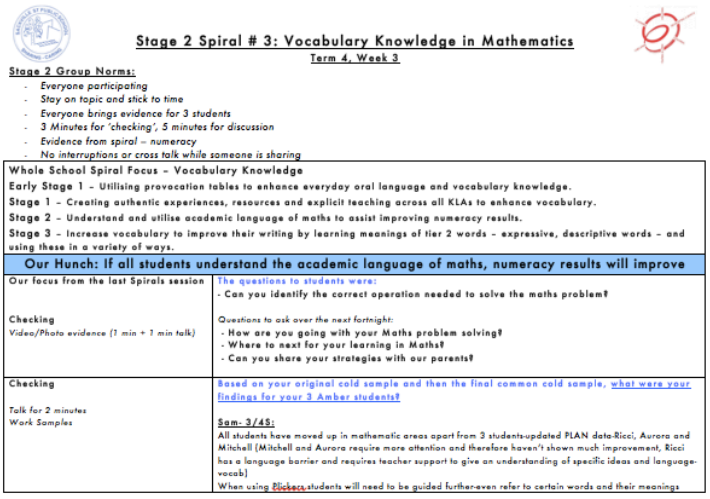
DEVELOPING A HUNCH

Our school has seen quite a journey of change over the past few years. Executive staff changes, a transient school population and large number of staff in relieving executive roles are just a few of the significant changes to our school community. The school has a proud tradition of placing students at the centre. Our school culture and ethos represents students as our core business. The development of school wide expectations that teachers will enter data using PLAN for all aspects and for all grades, led to a school wide shift towards formative assessment strategies being used across the board. It was widely agreed that a need for deeper understanding and skill development in Formative Assessment practices was needed if any significant shift in pedagogy was to occur. Students initially had individual learning goals in the whole school focus areas of Writing and Reading which then progressed to teachers having a keen interest in what is really going on for our learners in other aspects of literacy and numeracy. A few members of staff had limited experience in Spirals of Inquiry and the decision was made to look more closely at the strategies developed by Kaser and Halbert.

SCANNING AND CHECKING

Executive staff participated in a short professional learning session to develop an understanding of the Scanning and Checking stages of the Spiral. They then attended a variety of schools and professional learning sessions to build their capacity in facilitating spirals sessions. The decision was unanimous that we should throw ourselves in and 'have a go' at spirals. As an executive team, data and whole school practices were investigated and the decision was made to have a whole school spirals focus. Based on PLAN data, stages then decide on an area that they wanted to investigate during spirals sessions. Teams meet every fortnight for 2 hours during school hours.





Stage 2 Spiral # 3: Vocabulary Knowledge in Mathematics

Term 4, Week 3

Stage 2 Group Norms:

- *Everyone participating*
- *Stay on topic and stick to time*
- *Everyone brings evidence for 3 students*
- *3 Minutes for 'checking', 5 minutes for discussion*
- *Evidence from spiral – numeracy*
- *No interruptions or cross talk while someone is sharing*

Whole School Spiral Focus – Vocabulary Knowledge

Early Stage 1 – Utilising provocation tables to enhance everyday oral language and vocabulary knowledge.

Stage 1 – Creating authentic experiences, resources and explicit teaching across all KLAs to enhance vocabulary.

Stage 2 – Understand and utilise academic language of maths to assist improving numeracy results.

Stage 3 – Increase vocabulary to improve their writing by learning meanings of tier 2 words – expressive, descriptive words – and using these in a variety of ways.

Our Hunch: If all students understand the academic language of maths, numeracy results will improve

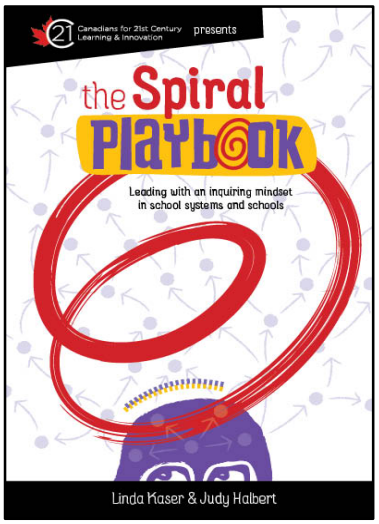
Our focus from the last Spirals session Checking *Video/Photo evidence (1 min + 1 min talk)*	The questions to students were: - Can you identify the correct operation needed to solve the maths problem? Questions to ask over the next fortnight: - How are you going with your Maths problem solving? - Where to next for your learning in Maths? - Can you share your strategies with our parents?
Checking *Talk for 2 minutes* *Work Samples*	Based on your original cold sample and then the final common cold sample, what were your findings for your 3 Amber students? Sam- 3/4S: All students have moved up in mathematic areas apart from 3 students-updated PLAN data-Ricci, Aurora and Mitchell (Mitchell and Aurora require more attention and therefore haven't shown much improvement, Ricci has a language barrier and requires teacher support to give an understanding of specific ideas and language-vocab) When using Plickers, students will need to be guided further-even refer to certain words and their meanings

FOCUSSING

When we began with Spirals we had one focus area school-wide. However, when the stages met and discussed their students and the data gathered to that point, it was quickly established that each stage needed to have a more focused area for their spirals. Each of the stage groups decided on a focus area and developed an action plan which drives the fortnightly sessions.

NEW LEARNING

Our school shows a significant commitment to professional learning in Spirals. All staff attended the 2 day NOII Symposium at Homebush in the school holidays. Staff attended and presented at teach meets and ignite sessions. Collective efficacy has been a pleasing outcome of our school professional learning culture. Staff are provided with updated literature and all processes around the spiral are based on the literature and research of the creators of the initiative, Judy Halbert and Linda Kaser.



CHECKING – HAVE WE MADE ENOUGH OF A DIFFERENCE?

Teachers share their spirals journey with each other during collaboration sessions and on School Development Days through short showcase presentations by all team members. All staff participate in the sessions and present throughout the showcase. Data is discussed at all staffing levels and a collective decision is made as to whether we have made enough of a difference. If the answer is no, discussions focus around different strategies to effect the desired change. Stages experiment with different strategies, such as maths groups, numeracy vocabulary learning plans or whole stage writing focuses.

TAKING ACTION – WHERE TO NEXT

Our staff has been involved in multiple school visits within our community of schools. We have had the benefit of seeing spirals in action, collaborating with our colleagues and utilising the resources they have created for their spirals. Sackville Street teams have also been involved in professional learning days run by NOII NSW. Our teams have hosted other schools who visited for a 'fly on the wall' session. The visiting educators watched a spiral from start to finish via a video link. The next steps for our school will involve more connection with other spiral schools and a continuation of our school focuses of Formative Assessment, Growth Mindsets and Spirals. Early in 2018 a number of our staff will be visiting schools in British Columbia, Canada to further develop our knowledge and skills of the Spirals of Inquiry process.