

# *Full Staff Professional Learning Projects*

## **Project Feedback**

### ***Background***

Sacred Heart Girls College is a Catholic Girls secondary school in Hamilton with a roll of 910. Sacred Heart Girls College is part of the e-LFA cluster that is also comprised of Hamilton's Fraser High School. One of the professional learning focuses for 2011 has been school wide inquiry based projects.

### ***Intentions***

The major intention of this project is to provide a professional learning focus that both aligns the school wide goals listed below, as well as the Teacher's Council Criteria of continual professional learning and reflection.

The projects have been teacher selected and have been based on the three school wide goals of:

- 1. Increasing Merit and Excellence level grades in the senior school.*
- 2. Increasing literacy.*
- 3. Increasing use of ICT within the classroom.*

Due to the goals set the Year levels these projects are targeted at are years 11- year 13. The intention of this direction was to provide the following:

- Teacher ownership of their professional learning direction.
- Modeling of an Inquiry project cycle.
- Increased reflection of teaching practice in regards to both student outcomes and engagement.
- Increased sharing of ideas and reflection in cross staff and curricular manner.
- Increased skillsets and uptake of skill based workshops.

Through staff feedback it was found that the existing method of professional learning was not as effective as expected and staff members were finding it hard to concentrate in the afternoon professional learning slot. Traditionally professional learning had been a lecture styled format which was during meetings after the school day had concluded. Driven from this feedback the initial change was moving professional learning to a morning slot 8.15-9.30 on a Wednesday. The change fits with national focus on the Teacher's Council Criteria for all staff to be undertaking on-going professional learning. Current feedback from staff has been overwhelmingly positive and the change in time has led to a continual focus on professional learning within the college.

Teachers had full ownership in the area they were to focus on and this was then supported by a combination of exemplars as stated in the previous VLN upload.

## ***Interventions***

*Throughout this process there have been relevant workshops as well as milestone presentations to a full staff where reflection and discussion could occur. The project itself has continued as originally planned.*

### ***Impact on students/teachers/whanau, Reflection, Links to classroom practice***

As this project has been numerous areas and approaches I will now give examples from a selection of groups. This will also show reflection and how the classroom practices changed as an effect of the project.

A powerful outcome of these projects was both the sharing of ideas as well as the full staff reflection on teaching and learning. It was noted early in planning that is vital that some accountability is built into a project such as this. All staff were required to feedback to the group with their successes and failures and this provided an excellent platform for staff discussion to occur. The feedback was completed over a period of 3 weeks. I have randomly chosen two projects below to show the diversity of projects.

The first example is from a design group focusing on lifting achievement in a single senior design class. The initial idea was to co-construct a resource focusing on the genre of design as a way to increase student ownership and interest. Also the teachers wanted the students to be asking why, as well as making their own personal reflections on the content being covered. Group reflection and breaking down the issue made it clear that this was too large of a topic to make into a single resource and it changed throughout the year. The undertaking of the project as well as student interactions were tracked using a journal.

Initially the discussion led to a focus on the literacy being used by the students and more specific “modeled” tasks were produced that relate to the criteria and feedback was received on these. This feedback was group feedback and was positive in nature. For this project teachers had to be ready to “Take that risk” and also the following strategies were used.

1. Collaboration (increased discussion around standards and criteria).
2. More group focus on teaching. Problems were discussed and worked through as a group.

For point two it was important to build a structured method to work through problems and gain trust that opinion would be taken and discussed. “I know these girls – they’ve seen me at my best and my worst.” It was important to also observe other teachers with the group as to see what methods and strategies were also being used successfully.

With reflection one teacher came to the conclusion that maybe it was herself that was the problem and the students were more capable than initially realized. The increased modeling of problem solving and discussion around what was the expected outcome of the achievement was powerful and overall led to an increased achievement. Also it led to the students opening up old projects and breaking them apart to see what aspects they were lacking and what students needed to incorporate to gain the Merit or Excellence grades.

Another project example was using technology to improve participation in speech based (Interpersonal communication) assessments. The class that this project was a low ability senior class undertaking a work skills achievement standard. The Clientele is described as very diverse. One student is a selective mute and did not participate in any speaking task. Student's also were required to show self-discipline and the project was focused towards being student driven. In a previous year only one student had achieved the standard. Interpersonal communication requires two speeches, one is 2 minutes and the other is 4 minutes, both open ended informative speeches.

Initial brainstorming and observations of best practice pointed to the use of cameras, particularly the new "flip" style digital cameras to both reduce the fear of public speaking and to allow the students to observe themselves speaking. This proving powerful as a method for the students to then view and discuss/ analyze each other's speeches and speaking styles. This use of cameras during lessons led to students gaining confidence in both their own personal speaking as well as their skills in analyzing a speech for assessment. The final assessment was very successful with 13/14 students achieving the standard speaking about their own topic and this included the selective mute.

The main point to be made from these examples is that at a secondary level is that the majority of the projects used student voice heavily in decision making as well as continual reflection and change. Many projects ended up very different than the projects initially stated in early planning. It is important that the teacher is given both the time and power to change as required their focus. Also it has become apparent that when undertaking a project based inquiry feedback milestone is essential for both accountability and as a stimulus for teacher discussion.