Fitzroy High School

Case Study Topic – Teacher Development in an Innovative School Environment

Who we are………………

- Secondary College (middle years 7-10)
- 245 students
- Located in Fitzroy North, Northern Metropolitan Region (inner metropolitan)
- Opened in 2004 (1.5 years old)
- Principal – Tim Fitzgerald
- Team Leader – Pauline Rice

Where we started…………

Fitzroy High School opened its doors in 2004, with the aim of being an innovative school for students in the middle years, with a focus on teacher development. Following extensive consultation with the local community, it was agreed that if this school was to successfully engage, inspire and motivate students in the middle years, it needed to do things differently. As a first step, the school established three key educational principles, which were based on middle years research:

- learning through integrated inquiry
- personal learning
- working in and with the community

In this model, the school curriculum is organised around themes or the ‘big questions’ which engage students’ natural curiosity about the world and the communities in which they live. For instance, through the exploration of the theme identity (or who am I? and who are we?) the students examined questions and topics related to subject areas including genetics, history, politics and sociology. By exploring questions such as “how does genetics shape who I am?” or “how does our identity shape the future?” students can see the relevance of what they are learning.

Fitzroy also recognised that the traditional classroom approach was not ideally suited to this style of teaching and learning. Accordingly, the school established:
- multi-aged student teams – with a group of 8 teachers per team
- large, open physical spaces – suitable for team and inquiry-based learning
- personal learning model – where students work on projects which enhance and extend their learning, frequently working outside the school in the community
- personal learning plans – based on a range of data to identify development needs, and negotiated with students and parents. Teachers undertake intensive work with students to address specific learning needs and interests which may not be included in other parts of the inquiry-based curriculum.

At Fitzroy, the establishment of a performance and development culture was critical to the success of this new approach to teaching and learning in the middle years. Being a greenfield site, the school was fortunate to have some opportunity to recruit and induct teachers who had both the skills and the desire to work in an innovative team-based environment.

What we did............

Fitzroy has established a number of processes which provide the foundation of its performance and development culture, including:

1. **Select the right people**
   During the recruitment process, Fitzroy ensures that prospective staff have the opportunity to fully understand how they school operates, and to experience teaching in a team-based innovative context.

2. **Introduce multiple sources of feedback, including:**
   - **Lesson study approach**
     At Fitzroy, groups of teachers meet to design a series of lessons. They then observe a selected number of students using observation checklists and consider the **effect** that the teaching has on students in order to determine the influence of particular pedagogies on student learning. Following the lesson, the teachers debrief and reflect on what worked, what didn’t and what can be done to improve student learning. The aim of this lesson study is not to directly observe the **teacher**, but to observe the **effect** of the particular teaching practice on the students. Feedback from the lesson study approach may be incorporated into teach professional learning plans.

   - **Student diagnostic testing**
     Feedback is also provided to teachers through regular diagnostic assessment of students. Value-add techniques are used, based on a knowledge of students’ individual starting point. Specific goals are established for each student to ensure that they keep extending and enhancing their learning.
Individual learning plans are negotiated between the student, parents and the school and focuses on where improvement is needed. Achievements against the plan are monitored and recorded in a booklet.

- **Student Learning Logs**
  At Fitzroy, students record what they have leaned in a learning log, and use checklists to help them recognise and understand what they have learned and provide feedback to teachers about how effective the lesson has been.

- **Parent Feedback**
  Parent surveys are used to gather feedback on all aspects of the school and its teaching practice.

3. **Introduce Professional Leaning Plans**
   Professional learning plans are currently being developed for use by all teachers at Fitzroy. These plans will be clearly linked to the specific needs of the students within their teams.

4. **Link Professional Development to Student Needs**
   Similarly, any professional development undertaken at Fitzroy is clearly linked to students’ needs. For instance, the students in a team may be highly engaged by technology and learn best when technology is used in the learning process. The teacher may recognise this, but realise that his or her own comfort level with technology is low, so will need to undertake some professional development to address this issue.

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**What we’ve achieved………..**

Given that the school has been operating for less than 2 years, it is difficult to provide quantitative data to support the existence of a performance and development culture.

However, the school has found that:

- students are highly engaged in learning
- teach survey results are very positive, with high response rates
- parent survey feedback and anecdotal reports from parent-student-teacher interviews are very positive

In the future, the school plans to use the following indicators to assess the performance and development culture at Fitzroy:

- student attainment
- personal attributes
- qualities as learners
- value-add achievement against CSF/AIM data