Project Title: Principles of Learning and Teaching 2007-2008

Team Leader: Leading Teacher Staff Development

Abstract:
The Principles of Learning and Teaching (PoLT) was part of the Flagship strategies introduced into schools. The six principles were used by teachers, and teams of teachers to reflect on practice and support professional discussions and strengthen pedagogical practices. Portland Secondary College decided to trial PoLT in 2007 (beginning with a voluntary group of classroom teachers and then followed by the Key Learning Area Managers (KLAMs)). We refined the process as we went, and, in 2008, all teaching staff at PSC underwent the PoLT program which was overseen by a Leading Teacher.

What was your focus and how/why did it come about?
Our aim was to use PoLT to consolidate and strengthen our current teacher learning communities undertaking curriculum research and classroom teacher improvement strategies. PoLT was the vehicle we used to officially quantify what staff were achieving in their classrooms and to gain feedback from their students. We had identified that staff needed more sources of feedback both from the students and their peers/mentors.

Why was this project important?
This project was important as it enabled classroom teachers to investigate the various principles they used in their teaching and which areas were strengths and which were weaknesses. It was aimed at building consistent, comprehensive and improved pedagogical approaches. This program was also part of a suite of action research being undertaken at Portland Secondary College at that time. Other research projects in 2008 included: The Leading Schools’ Fund – “Improving Student Journeys in Learning”; AGQTP – “Embedding ICT in LOTE Research and Development Project”; Teacher Professional Leave – “Developing models for Restructure at Year 7, and Peer Leadership at Year 9”; Faculty of Education, Monash University PEEL – “Project for the Enhancement of Effective Learning”; Teaching and Learning Federation – “Use of ICT to improve Koorie Literacy and Engagement; the Development and use of Individual Education Plans”; Mathematics Association of Victoria PLAT – “Professional Learning Assistance Team Project” – a Network focus; and, the BSW Region LIS – “Literacy Improvement Coaching Strategy” – also a Network and State focus. As every teacher was involved in the PoLT process, this assisted them in these other projects which were all aimed at developing and implementing strategies to improve teacher capacity and student learning outcomes.

What was done/what was produced?
Our Staff Development Co-ordinator completed the training on PoLT. Our Administration team then discussed its implementation in the College. We began in 2007 with a voluntary Focus Group of teachers and refined the processes we were using; Curriculum Managers in the College also completed the PoLT program, followed by the remainder of our teaching staff in 2008. Staff filled out an initial brief survey on each of the Principles and then sat down with a mentor and filled in the more detailed survey citing evidence of each Principle. Staff nominated a class to be surveyed on their teaching; this enabled them to gain quantitative data on student perceptions on their learning (and learning environments). Each staff member then received a comprehensive report comparing where they felt they were at in each of the Principles, and where their students had placed them. General trends, as well as individual professional learning needs were identified at this time. This helped inform staff development planning for 2009.

How did you measure its impact on teaching and learning? What was its impact?
We measured its impact on teaching and learning by teacher’s reactions to the surveys and the process of working with a mentor to analyse what was happening in their classroom in regards to a broad set of Principles. The amount of professional discussion taking place about the Principles included evidence teachers had for each of the Principles being covered. Collegial support was excellent when discussing what was happening in classrooms; highlighting a lot
of positives that teachers may have forgotten (or thought were unnoticed by colleagues or students). The development of individual action plans by teachers to improve on their weaker areas then occurred (after receiving their feedback sheets).

**What went well and why? What didn’t work so well? How did you deal with these issues?**

What went well were the collegiate discussions. Organising the completion of the surveys with all staff was quite a big job as was organising to survey all the teachers’ nominated classes – availability of computer rooms, and timetable issues also presented challenges. We dealt with these by spreading the load between the Curriculum Coordinator and Assistant Principal. There was also a challenge in getting some students to undertake the surveys with the correct amount of seriousness, but, generally, students responded really well in being able to provide feedback to teachers about their classroom experience.

**What are your future plans i.e. is the project/practice ongoing? How?**

After the completion of all staff undergoing their first analysis with PoLT, our Administration team wanted to look at strategies to help staff work on the highlighted weaknesses from the feedback sheets. The data provided valuable indicators of professional learning needs, as well as valid indicators of student learning preferences and enabled us to link PoLT to other effective school-based professional learning strategies. This therefore leveraged the Peer-to-Peer Observation staff development program at Portland Secondary College for 2009.

**References:**

- DEECD, “The Principles of Learning and Teaching P-12 Unpacked”,
- “Portland Secondary College, 8798, Annual Implementation Plan 2008”