

## Meaningful Mindsets – Case Studies in Education

### Case Study 1 - Sue Byrne, Principal – Sunnydale Community College, Co Durham, UK.

I first came across John Corrigan's Performance Development and Coaching program in 2009, while attending a School Leader's Conference in the UK. I heard John speak about some of the work he was doing with Australian school communities which really triggered my interest.

My school is in a low socio-economic area and we faced some difficult challenges. We have high levels of children who qualify for free meals, and alcohol is a big issue across the community as well.

Our school was wasn't doing well at the time. In fact, **we were part of the "National Challenge" which represented the bottom 640 schools out of the 25,000 schools in England.** I'll tell you where we now sit four years later... but suffice to say we were ready for a change, pretty much along the lines of "when the student is ready - the teacher appears".

So after meeting with John and getting a handle on the program, I was keen to become involved. There were two aspects which really appealed to me:

- Staff development through cognitive coaching
- Student feedback to their teachers – which I believe is the most powerful tool in the toolbox.

I've never come across anything like that and I knew that if we wanted to achieve a positive change in our school, we needed to buy into this program. Looking back over the 4 years, I am proud to say that my instincts were correct.

Here are some of the ways the program has helped us:

The overarching goal for our school was to change the ethos and embed new behaviours. Before we implemented Group 8 Education's program, there was a fair bit of shouting at students. Many of our teachers weren't really concerned whether students turned up for school or not. All this has changed dramatically. **There's hardly a loud word heard across the school yard, and student absenteeism is no longer a concern for us."**

The culture of the school has improved significantly and the effectiveness of our teachers has improved as well. Because our teachers have become more reflective of their own practice and behaviour, there has been a positive influence on the students and their performance.

The Performance Development and Coaching program has given us a "common language" which helps us communicate in difficult circumstances. **Say a staff member gets agitated with an issue, we only have to mention "red zone", and it triggers an "automatic" reflection** by the person affected by the problem and immediately deflates the situation. The common language also works with students helping them understand what is going on for them when they are experiencing conflict. The "red zone", "blue zone" pattern interrupt helps everyone involved change focus from "being in it" to resolving the issue.

We started the program with our senior leadership team who got trained and coached by John. Then we trained a band of middle leaders, although the courses were slightly shorter. I must say, not everything was smooth sailing, initially the training for the senior staff members was quite sensitive, but in hindsight, we all found it beneficial.

John's implementation plan was detailed and worked well. If ever there was an issue, it had nothing to do with his process. This came down to the issues at our school. For example, we had to slow down parts of the implementation due to a senior staff member going on maternity leave.

John's cognitive coaching program has tremendously helped us improve our own effectiveness. The coaching is one of the things our senior staff members found most rewarding. We adopt John's coaching model whenever we're dealing with an issue, be it one on one or even in big groups. The culture of reflection and not blaming works really well for us.

We really are proud of our academic achievements, for example back in 2006; our school was significantly below the national average. By 2011 we'd been able to achieve 57% of the required 58% of the national average in some areas and in others our results were significantly higher than the national average.

We also had an inspection in 2011, in which we were described as a "good" school.

And while we know we've improved dramatically as a school, it's wonderful to get recognition from the Government as well...

***"Sunnydale Community College has again been hailed by a government minister for its academic performance.***

*The Shildon school has been officially recognised as being amongst **the top 100 schools in the country when it comes to year-on-year improvement** – the third year in a row that its achievements have been recognised by top officials.*

*It follows the publication by the government last month of the secondary school performance tables charting the achievements of students who left school last summer.*

*Minister of State for Schools Nick Gibb has now written to Sunnydale's head teacher Sue Byrne offering his congratulations of excellent achievement of Sunnydale's pupils.*

*He says: "Your results show that **you are amongst the 100 top performing schools** based on sustained improvement in each year from 2008 to 2011.*

*"I would like to congratulate your staff, governors and pupils for their hard work and success and to thank you for your leadership in continuing the drive towards the highest standards of educational achievement."*

*The accolade follows last summer's results in GCSE examinations and equivalent qualifications which again were a record with 94 per cent students achieving five or more A\*-C passes with 53 per cent achieving that level including English and Maths.*

*The figures maintained the school's year-on-year upward trend.*

*Mrs Byrne said: "It is the third year running that the improved performance of our students has been recognised in this way which is quite extraordinary.*

*'We are delighted that Mr Gibb has taken the time to recognise in writing the efforts of our staff and students to achieve these latest results.'*

All in all, a pretty good result, achieved through a lot of hard work by my team and the Performance, Development & Coaching program.

**Sue Byrne, Principal – Sunnydale Community College, Co Durham, UK.**