

Meaningful Mindsets – Case Studies in Education

Case Study 2 - Dr Mark Merry, Principal of Yarra Valley Grammar, Ringwood, VIC

“While Yarra Valley Grammar is a school that is doing well, I believe that there is room for improvement.

All schools, including our own, are hampered by difficulties in adjusting to changing circumstances. Schools are notoriously conservative and we tend to teach the way we were taught.

It is clear to me that to improve learning, the relationship between teachers and students needs to be improved, but having teachers genuinely review their practise is not an easy task.

We knew we needed to review our teaching and we knew that this was going to be difficult. Teachers are primarily practitioners rather than theorists and it is difficult to have them focus on why we teach the way we do.

Which is ironic as measuring other people’s performances is imbedded in the teaching culture. Teachers correct essays and tests, they write reports and set exams. They are immersed in a culture of assessment except when it comes to assessing themselves.

The idea of appraisal, feedback and continuous improvement with regard to teacher effectiveness is a generational change in education, albeit one that needs to be implemented carefully.

Having worked with John in another school context, I believed his program would be a good fit for our school in our quest to improve teacher performance.

The key element in any improvement program is building on the quality of the relationships in the classroom between teachers and the students.

I particularly like the Performance, Development and Coaching program because...

- It is based in sound theory.
- It is relatively painless to implement.
- The student feedback in particular is an excellent resource. Being both affirming as well as showing teachers what areas to focus on.”

We bought into the program and started with it in 2011.

The changes that I have seen since the implementation of the program include:

- Greater openness to discuss teaching and a willingness to have observers in the classroom.
- Teachers are more focussed on some core elements of their teaching and on their relationship with students in the class room.
- A secondary result has been that there is a sense that “others” know what they are doing in the classroom which leads to greater appreciation of their work.
- The acceptance of feedback as well as the encouragement to discuss teaching practice was evident from the first year.

“We had a very good end to the year. If you go to better education website and look up VCE 2013 you will find YVG attained our best VCE results ever. We moved from 77th in 2012 to 39th this year in the schools ranking.” – Mark Merry, 28/12/13

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