****

2021 Short-Term E-Exchange Program – Research Submission

Improving Leadership and Teacher Quality

Staff Professional Learning and Capacity

Mr Dale White

Elderslie High School

Deputy Principal

E-Exchange participant during 2021 with:

Ms Brita Goldie, Bassano School, Alberta, Canada

# Introduction

As part of the International [E-Exchange Program](https://education.nsw.gov.au/about-us/careers-at-education/scholarships-and-programs/international-teacher-exchange/short-term-e-exchange-program), a virtual exchange was completed between New South Wales and overseas counterparts. This exchange provided an opportunity for short-term one-on-one partnerships between educators with similar interests or fields. This action research report on the shared focus area was completed following the 6-week program.

The joint project between Mr Dale White, Deputy Principal, Elderslie High School and Ms Brita Goldie, Bassano School, Alberata, Canada explored a number of elements of leadership utilised between the two schools, districts and departments. Elderslie High School is a large 7-12 comprehensive high school situated approximately an hour from Sydney in the growing and thriving area of Camden in the South West area of Sydney. Bassano School is a K-12 rural school situated 90 minutes east of Calgary. There is a substantial difference in the size of each schools student and staffing population, however similarities exsisted within the curriculum area of Physical Development, Health and Physical Education as this is what both Brita and I teach outside of our leadership role within the school.

Both Brita and I hold the responsibility to improve the quality of staff through implementing engaging professional learning, setting high expectations for learning and growth, implementing school based and district policy and procedures combined with supporting student welfare and behavioual needs. Our curiosity to explore the similarities and differences within our leadership roles combined with sharing creative ideas, practices and learning underpinned the online exchange experience.

# How do you improve the quality of teaching and leadership across the school?

Both Brita and I met regularly to discuss a wide range of leadership challenges, ideas and experiences. The frequent conversations provided an understanding of each others context and the priorities for each school and system. The priorities of Bassano School included strengthening restorative justice practises across the school and improving in the elements of Visible Learning that lead to staff improvement. Elderslie High School also focuses Student Growth and Attainment, in particular Literacy, Numeracy and data driven practice, Enhancing Learning Culture, in particular, Quality Teaching Practices, Engagment of learners and Enhanced Wellbeing.

Our joint passion for improving the teaching and leadership capacity of our staff, combined with creating a inclusive school culture for growth to occur, was a seemless area for us to explore. The comparision of school similarities and differences was explored to determine the impact of a positive growth mindset upon staff.

We learnt that challenging staff to be open to new iniatives and reflect upon these opportunities within their teaching and leadership created a culture of growth and in turn enhanced student learning outcomes. We both supervise middle leaders and are regular observers of practice across the school which made us well placed to grasp the dynamic environments we faced in a traditional and COVID influenced setting.

# Signficant learnings / Findings

Both Elderslie High School and Bassano School are dedicated to building the capacity of their staff. Both schools have staff with a similar mindset, levels of experience and competency. A large proportion of staff at each school have been working in the same setting for a number of years and find it challenging adjusting to changing student mindsets and teaching pedagogies. Both schools have recognised the need to invest in their staff’s abilities and performance and have dedicated a number of professional development days and opportunities to this.

Both schools align their staff PL to their school planning directions, with staff professional learning typically delivered internally at Elderslie, whilst Bassano engages external academics. All Bassano staff attend large teaching conventions throughout the year that are specific to their learning and curriculum needs allowing them to refect, learn and collaborate across the wider school teaching community. Individual PL opportunities exist for Elderslie High School staff which are personalised and cater for the individual professional goals.

Yearly staff performance monitoring is conducted by supervisors and school leaders. Lesson observations are a common theme across both settings however, further exporation and analysis of teaching style and skill is conducted at Bassano School by recording teaching practice, individual & supervisor teaching reflection and exploration of professional understanding in a formal and structured manner. This process ensures staff are accountable for their teaching performance and professional growth at regular intervals and constructive feedback and reflection is explored to enhance the quality of pedagogical practice. The exploration of teacher mindset through pre planned, structured interviews allows staff to grow, adapt and be challenged while promoting a consistent practice across the staff within the school and district. Informal observations are conducted more regularly allowing staff to receive direct positive or growth feedback from the leaders of the school.

The realisation arose that greater reflection on practice is required in my own setting to allow teachers to develop their impact and in turn efficacy in teaching. Establishing a psychological safe setting and enhanced trust relationships with leaders across the school will contribute to growing the capacity of staff each year.

# Conclusion / Recommendations & sharing

After exploring the Bassano School experience and reflecting on my own practice and setting, we discussed a number of future directions for us to explore. Firstly, my interest in improving the mindset of teachers and their attitude, belief and understandings of their performance will be explored at Elderslie High School through a number of initatives highlighted in the 2022-2025 School Plan and the Performance and Development monitoring structures. Secondly, the wider implentation of colleague observations and individual critical reflection will align with the schools greater focus of teaching impact and staff efficacy. Both are strong measures of an improving teaching culture within a school. Thirdly, continuing the joint conversations between both schools becoming even more inclusive of other staff, especially middle leaders to share perpectives, experiences and learnings which are specific to the curriculum needs of our students.

# Acknowledgements

We both would like to thank the school principals and leaders at our prospective schools for the opportunity to participate in this joint learning experience as well as the NSW DET Teacher Exchange program and Alberta Teachers Association for their ongoing work in being a conduit in growing staff experinces and providing a platform to share this with colleagues from around the world.