

Building teacher quality through effective instruction

MANY TEACHERS ARE KEEN TO IMPROVE THEIR LEVEL OF REFLECTION, THE QUALITY OF TEACHER-TO-TEACHER COLLABORATION AND CONSTRUCT MEANINGFUL CLASSROOM OBSERVATION AND FEEDBACK PROTOCOLS. IN 2015 SHENTON COLLEGE PRINCIPAL MICHAEL MORGAN CONDUCTED A CHURCHILL FELLOWSHIP HE WON TO RESEARCH EFFECTIVE TEACHING IN THE UNITED STATES. IT WAS CONDUCTED AROUND THE EXTENSIVE RESEARCH UNDERTAKEN BY THE BILL AND MELINDA GATES FOUNDATION IN SEATTLE INTO THE MEASURES OF EFFECTIVE TEACHING (MET) PROJECT.

EDUCATION MATTERS SPOKE WITH MICHAEL ABOUT THE SHENTON COLLEGE DIFFERENCE, THE CHURCHILL FELLOWSHIP AND WHAT IT TAKES TO BUILD TEACHER QUALITY THROUGH EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTION.

In Chicago Michael spent time with Fred Brown from Learning Forward, an organisation that has recently revised Standards for Professional Learning, discussing the importance of professional learning in school settings and its direct link to teacher evaluation, reflection and improving student outcomes.

At Harvard University he met with the Center for Education Policy Research (CEPR) faculty director Professor Thomas Kane, best known for directing the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation's Measures of Effective Teaching study, and project director Miriam Greenberg. They discussed aspects of their recent finding from the Best Foot Forward Project about the need for context specific observations and using video as a tool to support classroom observations and teacher evaluations.

HOW DOES SHENTON COLLEGE DIFFER FROM OTHER SCHOOLS?

Shenton College has a student repeated informal motto, which they call "The Shenton Difference". Shenton is very proud to be a public school. We feel successful countries are those countries that have very strong public institutions. We take great pride in being a strong academic school; however, we take greater pride in the fact that we achieve this in a public setting and under the various equalities that are part of public education.

We are proudly coeducational and Shenton College celebrates the fact that if a child is to move into a workforce and become a person who can work successfully with both males and females and understand the important aspects of tolerance and equality, then it's beneficial that these skills are nurtured in a school environment. Our universities and our workplaces are proudly coeducational and so is our school.

At Shenton we are also proudly inclusive. Shenton proudly co-exists with the Shenton deaf school. All of our students have the availability to learn Auslan, Australian sign language, as an additional language. We also offer French, Japanese, and Mandarin, however we acknowledge inclusivity of deaf culture by having deaf students learn alongside mainstream students and allow our students to learn deaf language and deaf culture. The Young Australian of the Year of 2014 and Shenton student was Drisana Levitzke-Gray. Drisana is a fine example of the importance of proudly inclusive education. She was the Young Australian of the Year, and she is proudly deaf.

Shenton College is also focussed on more than just academic excellence. We have a saying "Much More than Marks; Learning for Life". This idea implies that yes, marks are important, grades are important and academic achievement is important, but so too is progress and whole-child development. How you progress a child, and how you allow a child to actually grow and improve beyond the academics is also important. It's not just

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about the top-performing ATAR students, it's not just about those students with A's, and it's also not just about academic performance, it should be much more, it should be around one's social and personal development.

HOW DO YOU PROVIDE LEADERSHIP TO SHENTON'S TEACHERS?

That's a really timely question, actually. First of all, I'm pretty passionate about how leadership should develop others more than just the leader themselves. I believe educational leadership has to be defined in a simple way. Whilst I have great respect for the documentations around quality educational leadership and the AITSL standards etc. if a principal can't actually say what leadership is, who benefits or if they have to read it, they don't really own it. I see education leadership in four interconnected parts: in setting directions, in developing others and also in developing your school. The fourth part, which I think is equally important, is how you develop beyond the school to developing the system.

Directions for schools and teachers must be set based on quality information, and it is only by developing and supporting teachers that any sustainable change will occur in the classroom. Leaders have an important role to play in providing and resourcing support that will create the desired change. At Shenton College the type of leadership I try and provide is to be clear about the direction we are going, support teachers to affect the change and develop a culture of trust, and enable collaborative groups for teachers to work effectively.

We also try and map out the leadership pathway from those teachers who might be an aspirant leader. We try and identify the talent early, provide training and support and succession planning.

WHAT ROLE DO YOU PLAY IN THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF YOUR STUDENTS?

Direct and indirect. Directly the role I play is in the fact that the greatest influence on successful

students, according to all the literature, is the quality of the teachers that the child has. So directly being involved in the selection of teachers, I panel chair every recruitment into Shenton College. I don't outsource recruitment, teaching or non-teaching. The reason why is simple, I believe if you know that the greatest influences are the quality of your teachers, then that's probably the most effective end-line accountability point for the principal. That's my most direct influence.

The indirect influence is the substantial bit that probably doesn't get easily put into the metrics: the way in which you develop the culture of the school, the way you develop relationships and model trust and respect, the strategic aspects. These indirect influences have significant benefits to a child's learning.

WHAT DO YOU CONSIDER TO BE TODAY'S MOST IMPORTANT EDUCATION ISSUE?

I think we as a society have to remind ourselves of the importance of a robust quality public education system that allows success for our citizens and our children. We must be cautious not to over stratify our education system. I am not saying that you should deny people choice, I'm not saying that at all. I'm just saying that I believe that whether you send your children to a private or a public school, I believe parents ideologically want strong public school structures. If you want overall successful mean and median performance in education, if you want advantage for all, you have to have a strong public education system.

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES OF PROVIDING A 21ST CENTURY EDUCATION?

The greatest challenges are trying to provide today the educational attributes and skills and knowledge for the unknown future of tomorrow. One thing we have noticed with technology, and certainly with modern day community structures, is the portability of jobs and the shifting nature of skill-sets. Schools need to provide knowledge, skills and attributes that will best place their students of today in a position of competency and advantage for the society and workplace that they'll inhabit tomorrow.

HOW HAS BEING A PRINCIPAL CHANGED YOU ON A PERSONAL LEVEL?

I've found the greatest reward is it has given me an incredible confidence in the quality of teachers and students and a reassurance that things are going to



Michael Morgan took up his appointment at Shenton College as Principal in 2008. Prior to joining Shenton College, Michael was Principal Consultant and Principal in the Goldfields and Pilbara regions of Western Australia. Michael has extensive educational experience and a strong record of significant and successful leadership in secondary school education. He has established strong international and domestic education partnerships and strategic alliances with China, Singapore, and Japan. In 2013 Michael was announced as Secondary Principal of the Year and Shenton College was also announced as Secondary School of the Year. Shenton College was also ranked Australia's Top Comprehensive Public School by the *Weekend Australian* 1-2 June, 2013 and listed as the first Independent Public School to be selected for an exemplary study by the Director General of Education. Michael believes in a school that is "much more than marks". The College's motto established in 2010 "Much More Than Marks – Learning for Life" embodies his belief that a child's schooling experience is more than an outstanding academic result. He has implemented programs that empower teachers, educators and schools to develop their students' knowledge of the world and to foster the emotional and social intelligence they need to be active participants and leaders, now and in the future. Michael defines a successful student at Shenton College as one who will be entrepreneurial, able to work in teams, care for others and be an active contributor to a global society. He was awarded an Honorary Australian Council for Education Leaders (ACEL) National Fellowship and a Churchill Fellowship in 2014. Michael's Churchill Fellowship enabled him to conduct extensive research in the best performing schools and institutions in the USA identifying how they empower teachers to develop a culture of reflective practices.



be okay and to be confident in myself to affect change for the better.

I feel that I've been very fortunate to be in a range of schools and settings, and in all of those schools and settings I've been moved by the overall nature of the adolescent child and the desire of teachers to make a difference. There are characteristics in today's youth that I think should be celebrated more, such as tolerance. If we reflect back I believe the youth of today are far more tolerant than the youth of yesterday. I think they're far more inclusive than they used to be and far more able to accept difference.

The other thing I have found is it's enabled me to understand a lot more about myself. I have a greater understanding of my own responsibility to affect change. By my involvement in education, but mainly in principalship, I worked out, "Well, if you want to make those changes, then you're in a position where you have some ability to do it, however small, but go ahead and try." Whereas I think there were moments in my growing up which I just felt I had to just accept.

IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT TRAITS DO YOU NEED TO BE AN EFFECTIVE PRINCIPAL AND RISE TO THE MODERN CHALLENGES OF THE JOB?

I've been fortunate, both through my Churchill Fellowship and through my MBA that I undertook, to observe traits of effective leaders. Effective principalship put simply is: you've got to be going somewhere and you've got to have people following you. If you're not doing those two things, then you're not actually an effective leader, you're just a person going for a walk.

I believe the traits are that you need to have great relationship skills. You can call them EQ or emotional intelligence, but it is how you develop trust and develop support and empathise with others. Look, there's no doubt there are operational traits that are absolutely required in the role. Effective principals require specific operational skills and traits, and more so today the modern day principal requires very good business acumen around finances and human resource management as we devolve schools and make them more autonomous; however, if they cannot build

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cultures of trust and empowerment then I believe that they will not rise to meet the modern challenges of the job.

If you want to be a good, effective principal in the modern school, I think especially in a devolved, more autonomous school, you need to actually be very strategic. You need to be innovative, take risks (controlled/calculated risks) but you must take them. You're actually there to lead; you're actually there to do something. You're not there just to manage, so you need to have that strategic trait and skill set. An additional trait of modern day principals is you have to have in you that ability to see your part, beyond yourself and beyond your own organisation. You have to have that ability to be a little bit more holistic and see that just supporting your own school, or just being a part of a great school, isn't going to be enough. You've got to have a trait that enables you to see your part in the whole, your part in the system.

IN YOUR OPINION HOW CAN AUSTRALIAN SCHOOLS BEST IMPLEMENT EFFECTIVE EVALUATION OF TEACHING?

There's a couple of clear things here in terms of how you make more effective cultures of reflections of teaching beyond evaluation. If everything we're doing is just at the layer of accountability, we'll never have sustainability or improvement. If we look at the research that came from my Churchill Fellowship, which was involving the Gates Institute out of Seattle and the work they've done with the

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Measures of Effective Teaching Project (the largest funded study into measuring teaching) and working with the Centre for Educational Policy Research out of Harvard University, the comments that they make certainly talk about going beyond accountability to cultures of reflection.

So, how do we empower teachers to reflect on their own practice? So that empowerment is not something that is done to you. We need to create cultures in schools and amongst teachers where we go beyond the accountability moment to a state of teachers reflecting on their practice and acting on their reflections.

HOW DO WE ENABLE THAT REFLECTION?

Well, collaborative learning communities where you have set up reflective professional learning and observations with peers where you train teachers in observation and you reduce aspects of bias. You may be using video technology to allow multiple viewings of a person's teaching practice, which certainly reduces bias or use empirically tested student-based perception surveys. Properly constructed student surveys can provide a teacher with immediate feedback and highlight areas that they may need to put more focus into. You have 20 to 30 students in a classroom every day. Students are there and observing you as a teacher every day. Allowing students to have a voice and allowing them to have input in a constructive way, not a destructive way, is a powerful reflective tool that is certainly getting a lot more use around the world.

Those are the sort of things that we could implement to move beyond that evaluation/accountability moment and actually look at empowerment and upskilling.

HOW CAN SCHOOLS ENSURE THAT THESE IMPROVEMENT AVENUES ARE LINKED TO QUALITY PROFESSIONAL LEARNING?

I'm reading a soon-to-be-released paper from Dr Ben Jensen and Learning First on quality professional learning. Quality professional learning has to be about improving the quality of teaching: modes of delivery, how one engages a child, how one creates a creative classroom and how one creates critical thinkers, all that's really important.

We need to ensure professional learning support teachers to be content experts, so they are very knowledgeable of the course, of the subject and the content of their teaching. The only way that a teacher can deconstruct a lesson to allow for creativity is they need to have a highly-proficient understanding of all of the learning parts and how they all fit together. Professional learning needs to do many things but we need to ensure our teachers have a very sound knowledge of the content and how to engage children to learn it.



CAN YOU SHED MORE LIGHT ON THE STUDENT PERCEPTION SURVEY, AND THEIR ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES, IF ANY?

The student perception surveys were one of the things tested by the Measures of Effective Teaching out of the Gates Foundation. They looked at a constructive way in which students could have a voice, and could provide constructive feedback. There was a high correlation between a well-constructed student survey and teacher competence and teaching qualities. Well-constructed student perception surveys were shown to be a very beneficial and a very important way of providing evaluation and feedback that was empirically supported and valid.

So the advantages of surveying students is that they're not overly difficult to use, they're not a massive time impost to a teacher, and they empower students in the process. The disadvantages are: if you don't use quality surveys they have limited value. If teachers, administrators and students aren't trained in their use or in their purpose, then they can be abused.

I draw a parallel to collaborative learning. Collaborative learning has evidence to be effective, but you have to teach people on how to actually work in collaborative groups, you have to introduce protocols on how actually to collaborate. You can't just say, "Right, we'll just get in a group and collaborate." You need to train and empower people in the effective use of collaboration and in the effective use of student perception surveying.

Furthermore, in its first instance, surveying must not be used as a punitive measure or for an administrator to measure a teacher. The first instance of student



surveying information is between the student and the teacher, and to create a culture of trust but also a culture of communication. Students need to have an ability to communicate back on how they felt their course was delivered, on how they felt their discussions were encouraged, on what they felt about the learning environment of the classroom. At the same time, the teachers are empowered to reflect back to the students.

So you empower the learning partnership, which is both the teacher and the student. It's not designed as an administrative tool to garner information around the teacher's competence so it can be used as some punitive measure. If that's a part of its purpose, then it will have no other purpose than that purpose.

GENERALLY, ARE WE ANY CLOSER TO HAVING A SYSTEM THAT ENSURES TEACHERS ARE REVIEWED AGAINST RELIABLE EVALUATION PROCESSES TO MAKE SURE THEY'RE AT A STANDARD?

Well, I think we are. Each state sets up different registration boards and requires a certain quality. This is a positive step. We've put in some fairly good measures around teachers, out of AITSL etc. There has been some healthy discussion around the quality of pre-service programs, the quality of graduate teachers entering the system, the requirements for leaders and I believe we have enhanced the cultures of reflection that exist in most schools.

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If the question is, "Have we got more to do", the answer to that also is yes. But that second part, I believe, it's not just a political question, it's a social and societal question. Are we prepared as a society to support that? Do we as a society value our teachers? Do we as a society support our teachers?

The way in which we can attract some of our very best and brightest into the profession and retain them within the profession, are also big questions that we need to ask, not just, how we can 'evaluate' them more. Or make them more 'accountable'. Questions like these just appease our anxieties, it doesn't make many long-term sustainable changes or improvement.

HOW HAVE YOU IMPLEMENTED EFFECTIVE EVALUATION OF TEACHING AT SHENTON COLLEGE AND WHAT OUTCOMES HAS IT LED TO?

We've moved more into reflective teaching practices. So we have empowered the teachers to be a part of this process, it's a journey they've gone on now for about five years. We've got to a point where they very much have ownership over that process and they want to reflect on their practice. We have a process where they reflect on their teaching, they collaborate on their review, and they identify professional learning in support with administration that needs to be conducted.

We have resourced leadership development as well as resourced teacher development in terms of the provision of real quality professional learning. We reflect, we make sure we recruit quality graduates and quality educators into the school. We place the scrutiny early in our processes and then we work in an environment of trust and believe that we must all do our best to make a real difference to every child under our care.

