



Co-teaching in flexible learning spaces

School Based Research Project 2015

Interim Report

Claremont College

Project overview

The *Co-teaching in flexible learning spaces* project aims to look at the question of whether co-teaching contributes to improved quality of teaching, and student academic and social outcomes. As part of this project, Claremont College has created flexible learning spaces across grades K-6 and implemented shifts in pedagogy that embody the change to a co-teaching instruction model. The creation of these dynamic, award-winning learning spaces has made Claremont a talking point for others interested in this aspect of school improvement. But it is the co-teaching model that Claremont forecast to be the most efficacious in improving student learning. The school aims to measure the effect of quality teaching through a co-teaching model on student learning and other outcomes. It will be the first school to quantify the impact of the co-teaching model on student learning.

The research team

The research team is being led by Janelle Ford, Deputy Principal. The team is being supported by academic mentor Brenda Dalheim (Melbourne University) and critical friends Dr John DeCourcy (Catholic Education Diocese of Parramatta), Peter Kaldor (New River Consulting), and Dr Margaret Varady (University of New South Wales).

Project design

This project utilises a mixed methods approach, tapping into a broad range of research methods in order to provide a multifaceted view of the impact of co-teaching at the school. The research team has

capitalised on extant qualitative and quantitative data as a foundational starting point for its data collection including:

- NAPLAN and PAT test results
- Student exit surveys
- Staff voice surveys
- Enrolment data
- Student behaviour data.

Additional data continues to be gathered through:

- Classroom walk throughs
- Observations
- Visits to other schools engaged in similar processes for professional development
- Student and parent surveys focusing on classroom and pedagogical changes
- Staff appraisal meetings.

Although the research project is primarily framed within a student outcomes improvement orientation, Claremont has a number of other key considerations that guide its research approach. These include the wellbeing of staff, the reputation of the school, and ensuring that the school is meeting the needs of students and parents well. This constitutes a broad whole-of-school focus and change agenda.

Progress to date

Now at the half-way point of the project, the Claremont research team is beginning to see impacts from its teacher professional development interventions. These interventions focused on increasing teacher skill and capacity in the areas of co-teaching, visible learning, learning intentions and dispositions, and creating space for student voice.



Teachers have also undertaken visits to other schools in Australia and New Zealand to observe and reflect on their practices and learn from others.

Within this professional development environment is the provision of time for educators to properly adopt and engage with the new co-teaching paradigm. The research team and school management are cognisant of the necessity for their teachers to have the time needed to work together to understand and effectively use the co-teaching models in class, to have courageous and professional conversations, and to reflect upon their practices.

An important element of supporting positive change in the teaching staff was engaging in an effective change management process. The research team contracted New River Leadership — consultants in change management support for organisations and schools — to assist them in their whole school shift to co-teaching. New River ran a number of workshops for staff, helping them through both school cultural and structural change, accelerating and smoothing what can sometimes be a challenging process.

This combination of change management support, professional development, and time provided — and continues to provide — space for staff to learn and grow professionally. They now “own their co-teaching.” As a result of this approach, the research team are beginning to see impacts in student outcomes, particularly in the areas of student engagement and resilience.

The school and research team has also increased its stakeholder engagement, communicating about the change process to parents, other schools and school visitors, as well as at conferences.

Of particular positive note for the school is the change in orientation to research and research-driven change. When the research project began it was primarily driven by the research lead, Janelle Ford — now it is a whole school project with a great many stakeholders contributing, having a sense of

ownership over the process, and investment in the outcomes.

Where to next?

This year will see the research team refining its professional development approach and co-teaching model, informed by the results that continue to come from data gathering and analysis. Identifying specific impacts on student outcomes of pedagogical change will be a challenge, but this presents another opportunity for staff to learn more about the effective use of data to improve student educational experiences. This particular aspect of the project continues to be supported by Dr John DeCourcy. As part of this refinement process, Claremont will seek to become a BOSTES-approved provider for internal and external professional development in the co-teaching model.

“We now need to ensure our journey helps us to better understand how we can learn from our mistakes and continue to improve, and how our journey can help others who are opening up their single stream classrooms to enable flexible and collaborative learning practices.”



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