

Teacher

THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY FOR EDUCATORS

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**Count me in –
really teaching
every student**

**Teaching secrets
to achieving
excellence**

**Technology for
learning**

**Why do we set
homework?**

**Collaboration
to improve
teaching**



The last word Small steps

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION CAN SEEM LIKE A JOURNEY WHERE WE MAKE LITTLE PROGRESS, BUT SMALL STEPS CAN HELP US TO SET, AND REACH, ACHIEVABLE STRETCH TARGETS. KAVITA SANGHVI EXPLAINS.

As educators, we are all deeply concerned about the quality of education extended to our students and therefore every year we aim big.

Our goals are well defined, our objectives clear, our practices structured and our monitoring regular but still at the end of the year the results we desire are not always the same as the results we achieve. So we review and restructure. This is what we have been doing the past few years in my school, but this year we have come closer to our goals by making them an integral part of our journey.

In essence, we have set our goals as always, but we've changed the transactions by which we are trying to achieve those goals so that all staff own the goals and the way they reach them.

Meetings

Meetings are a learning environment. If we hold a meeting of 30 people for one hour, we have either invested or wasted 30 working hours of our institution. With this mindset, we've made sure meetings are monitored and time driven with a clear agenda to ensure productive contributions to decision making. The agenda is determined through brainstorming with respective heads and dis-

tributed well in advance so all attendees are prepared. We use a template from *Meeting Wise: Making the most of collaborative time for educators* by Kathryn Parker Boudett and Elizabeth City available at http://datawise.gse.harvard.edu/files/datawise/files/meetingwise_agenda_template.pdf

Trust and safety

To ensure staff feel safe, ready to contribute and able to take risks in meetings we use 'circle of trust touchstones'. These touchstones ensure that all feel welcome, heard and respected, and that the purpose of the meeting is to investigate honestly and collaboratively without rushing to judgement.

You can find out more about the circle of trust touchstones at www.couragerenewal.org/wpccr/wp-content/uploads/AustralasiaeNews-2016-1.pdf

This approach means that staff can be present with all their certainties and uncertainties, understandings and assumptions, answers and questions. By emphasising the idea that all in the meeting speak a truth in ways that respect others' truth, our meetings are now truly participatory. The trust generated in our meetings is also enhancing our working relationships generally.

Equity

Guided by Janice Jackson and Monette Melver's incredibly useful 'Using equity-centered capacity building to advance school system improvement' – available at <https://capacitybuildingnetwork.org/article2> – we now assess every practice in terms of equity. For example, one of our practices is to ensure English is the language of instruction.

A focus on equity raises a variety of questions: who is benefitting; who is ignored; who is harmed? Our goal is to ensure that this practice enables positive outcomes for all students and does not perpetuate unequal outcomes for students for whom English is a second language or even third language.

Ongoing data gathering

We wanted to know what our students know and can do, their knowledge and skill gaps and misconceptions, and how they learn so that we could plan the best next steps in our teaching. To do this, we needed to measure their, and our, progress to understand the impact of our practices on our students, so as to weed out our ineffective and strengthen our effective practices.

We collect and analyse data on students' home background, academic reports, and interviews with students and teachers to better understand the learning identity of our students and the typical paths they take on their learning journey. This is also helping us to understand the impact of our school environment on students, particularly on the way they – and their parents – connect with and commit to our school practices.

Small steps like these have been informed by the targeted professional learning I've undertaken through the Harvard 'Advanced Course in Educational Leadership' to interrogate and improve our practices and policies. **T**

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