A model for a professional learning community

Queensland College of Teachers Connection

Issue 1 – April 2008

Page 6

Dr Kay Kimber, Director of the Centre for Professional Practice at Brisbane Girls Grammar School, tells us about the model of professional learning successfully used at her school.

All schools value the role of the ongoing professional learning of their academic staff in providing a quality education for their students. Traditionally, committed teachers undertake curriculum updates and post-graduate study to ensure their currency of knowledge and skills, frequently off-campus and in their own time. Brisbane Girls Grammar School has instituted its own model of professional learning, one that involves dedicated time and space for staff reflection, on-campus delivery and university partnerships.

Teaching Australia contends that any worthwhile professional learning should be aligned to the school’s vision and supported by school leaders (Zammitt et al., 2007). This held true for the genesis of the Centre for Professional Practice in 2005 from the School’s Strategic Design. The School aims to promote the professional growth and contribution of its staff to teacher education, envisioning a Centre that would provide exemplary practicum experiences for pre-service teachers and promote mentorship as an avenue for staff professional development.

First steps entailed reviewing School practicum processes, initiating a partnership with Queensland university of Technology and constituting a Learning Innovation Group who undertook a course of seminars with credit options towards a postgraduate degree. A recent evaluation of the three groups (2005-2007) showed conclusively that the time provided by the School for reflection and debate in a collegial, cross-faculty atmosphere had been most successful. “I think this kind of forum is extremely important to revitalise professional practice and to gain updates in educational thinking,” wrote one participant. Each group also generated its own distinctive initiative for improving the School’s learning community.

Growth in the last three years has included the appointment of a Director, a dedicated space for pre-service teachers and series of professional discussion forums (Provocations, Passions and Pathways) across the year. Griffith University, the School’s newest collaborative partner, has challenged participants to engage with practical applications of new technologies. Both the Passions and Pathways Series showcase the specialist interests and expertise of staff members. Whether pre-service teacher, mentor, new-to-the-school or beginning teacher, all are drawn into the widening spiral of their professional journey.
This concept and model could be tailored to suit individual school cultures with positive leadership, creative licence and financial commitment. Given such support, teachers at all stages of their careers can add an extra vitality and drive to a learning community that can only be a positive influence on its students.

REFERENCE