

Edmonton School, Auckland 2016



Edmonton School Case Study: Priority Learners Profiling Pilot

Margaret Samson, Principal of Edmonton School in Te Atatu launched a pilot project to test alternative approaches to achieving a significant shift in the learning outcomes for priority learners, with support from Springboard Trust.

The pilot project objectives were:

- To develop an effective priority learner assessment (profiling) tool
- To identify and develop appropriate monitoring tools and processes
- To examine and document the identified adjustments to teaching and learning practice

The expected outcomes were:

- Enhanced student engagement
- Positive shifts in student achievement
- Improved teacher's sense of efficacy with students who need to accelerate their writing performance.

The pilot project

Eleven students in years 5 & 6 were identified as significantly under-achieving relative to Edmonton school's national standards achievement data. The starting point of this project was a realisation that the current approach to supporting under-achieving children was not working:

"Analysis of data and identifying learners into "At Risk groups" did not work as there was no established system to address the needs of these learners. The data driven practices in place did not move learners in a direction that accelerated their learning and the school identified that they needed to address it differently. The current project was driven from this observation."

The principal designed an extended student profile tool to supplement traditional data with in depth information about each child's personal history and preferences. It was intended that a deep understanding of students' backgrounds would help to identify their specific learning needs which could be acted on immediately. It took time to develop sufficient trust for this information to be captured but this meant that each child's learning could be aligned to activities or interests for which they had a genuine passion. The time taken with each of the children increased their sense of self-worth and self-confidence.

This approach included increased dialogue, deeper analysis, and ongoing tracking of teaching, and learning.

Regular reflection and adjustments to the teaching and learning programmes changed teaching practice and enabled earlier intervention to improve both student engagement and their learning outcomes.

The principal worked with two teachers to coach them in using the profiling tool and adapt their teaching practice. She also coached these teachers to enhance their belief in the process and in their own ability to make a difference to student learning outcomes. Together they designed and improved learning interventions bespoke to each child and monitored their effectiveness and impact. This involved 3-4 sessions a week of intensive coaching for each child which made expectations clear and provided tools, guidelines and motivation.

They also engaged with parents and whanau wherever possible to gain their support for the programme and to create a reinforcing environment at home. This enabled the children to start writing at home for pleasure. Funds were raised in the local community to support some of the passion projects (such as going on a train for the first time).

“We deliberately set out to link interest and purpose. We made explicit the skills required to enable the writing and they started to self-evaluate their writing. They became more and more confident to write in the classroom and as they felt more motivated - like they are writers. They began to help others in the classroom and started to transfer the skills. They also began writing at home for a purpose and pleasure. Development of vocabulary was evident from fairly early on and their ability to write and qualify writing improved” says the principal in reflection.

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In the process the principal was able to reflect on her own leadership practice and what it took to be a catalyst for change amongst the teachers, the learners and their parents. It has been a comprehensive change process and this is most evidently reflected in her growing effectiveness as the school leader.

The Outcomes

The participating students were interviewed about the process they had experienced. One group agreed that Miss F’s work over the last 15 weeks helped them with their writing. Her knowledge about them has increased and their writing has improved as they developed a genuine interest in writing. They liked the new techniques the teacher had introduced such as use of puppets and they were more confident and independent, and their vocabulary has improved.

The approach of the Group 2 teacher was different and involved off-site visits and interactive sessions to improve their writing skills. Visiting the city, travelling in a train and writing and posting letters to parents were activities cited by the learners who really liked the programme. They all unanimously agreed that their skills were improved after the intervention. One learner said: “We went deeper and deeper with our writing. Like you keep walking and don’t stop when you are in a forest.”

**“We went deeper and deeper with our writing. Like you keep walking and don’t stop when you are in a forest.”
Student, Edmonton School**

The positive learning outcomes emerged unexpectedly rapidly. In one term 7 out of the 11 students moved a whole level in writing proficiency (from well below to below or from below to at standard) and one moved 2 levels. In addition, many of the students recorded corresponding improvements in reading and maths.

The positive results also flowed through to school wide data for writing as illustrated in the following table:

National Standards achieved

Edmonton School	2013	2014	2015	2016
All Students	71	65	67	61%
Boys	63	51	57	57%
Māori Students	72	68	64	68%
Pasifika Students	56	57	60	66%

Springboard Trust provided a sounding board for the principal to test her thinking as she iteratively developed the tools and techniques for profiling and changing teaching practice. An evaluation specialist from the Trust designed an evaluation framework which helped to structure her approach and ensure that outcomes would be measurable. The next step is to scale this pilot to support priority learners across the whole school and involve all teachers.

Principals can now access a set of services that connect them with best practice in change leadership and strategy implementation. These services can help to accelerate implementation and continue the professional development of school leaders.

To register your interest in Alumni Services please contact Judy Newcombe at judy@springboardtrust.org.nz