Every school leader’s overarching goal is to

Improve Student Learning Outcomes…

According to John Hattie, a leading academic in the field of education the two largest variances affecting student learning outcomes are the innate abilities of the students themselves (50%) and teacher effectiveness which accounts for 30%.

“It is what teachers know, do, and care about which is very powerful in this learning equation.” John Hattie.

We can’t change the innate abilities of our students, but we can influence the way they are taught, helping them to be their best – highly functioning, resilient adults who can think independently and contribute to society in meaningful ways.

This White Paper outlines a program which will help schools in the 21st Century

Improve Their Students’ Learning Outcomes

through creating more effective and engaged teachers

www.gr8education.com
Dear Principal,

In the 21st Century, parents, students and society itself need schools to develop resilient, collaborative and creative young adults who can think and act for themselves and be meaningful contributors to society.

However, the facts are stark!

Australia is lagging behind in vital areas of school education. Recent figures show that student performance has stagnated in maths and fallen sharply in reading. Nearly one third of year nine students have only basic writing skills.

If Australia is to reclaim its position as a leader in the field of education, we must collectively lift our game to produce higher performing students and better learning outcomes.

Conservative estimates suggest that students benefiting from the experience of a highly effective teacher learn twice as much compared to students who are not so fortunate. Therefore, the key to producing higher performing students is through producing more effective teachers.

The obvious question then is, how do you improve teacher appraisal, engagement and effectiveness in the classroom given the current way teaching is conducted in the majority of schools?

My name is John Corrigan from Group 8 Education.

Over the last 11 years I’ve comprehensively researched the field of Education both in Australia and the United Kingdom to find a solution.

Dealing with senior school leaders in over 200 schools, I realised that a major priority of every Principal is to get the best student learning outcomes possible, while managing competing priorities from teachers, students, parents, government regulation and the education system itself.

The question is how to go about it to get the best results...

As a Principal, you know from current research into the field of education that the best way to improve student learning is to build teacher competencies and improve their practice in the classroom.

You want to develop your middle leaders’ ability to lead, generate more openness with staff and a collegial atmosphere where best practices are openly discussed and shared, raising the skill level of the whole teacher body.

And above all, you want greater student and staff engagement in the learning process, which will inevitably lead to improved performance in your school.
However, knowing what you need to do and actually accomplishing it are often very different things.

Why?

As one senior Principal put it...

“Teachers by nature are isolated in their practice and notoriously secretive about their work. Once the classroom door is closed, there is very little oversight as to their practice.

Nor is there a lot of discussion between colleagues about what’s working and what isn’t and how practice could be improved.

And the thought of another teacher or senior leader walking into their classroom to observe, learn and give feedback, fills many with disquiet.

The majority of teachers focus ninety-nine per cent of their energy on delivering the content without any regard to feedback from their students. It’s a rare teacher who takes the time to sit back and reflect on their practice – what’s working, what’s not and how their teaching could be improved.

Add to this the fact that most teachers model their style on the way they were taught – generally a top down, command and control methodology where the teacher believes they need to firmly control the class and get unconditional respect from their students, regardless of the way they themselves treat the students.”

And frankly, it’s not their fault.

The system as it stands is not conducive to helping teachers reflect, collaborate and collectively improve their practice. There is a lot of bureaucracy involved in the profession with ineffective appraisal and feedback exercises not linked to teacher development and improved classroom training.

A recent OECD survey of teachers found that:

- 63% of Australian teachers believe appraisal of their work is largely done to fulfil administrative requirements.
- 61% of them report that this appraisal has little or no impact on the way they teach in the classroom.

Which means the current systems of appraisal and feedback do not identify or recognise innovative teaching in schools.

The survey also found that:
91% of teachers reported that the most effective teachers do not get the greatest recognition.

92% reported that if they improved the quality of their teaching they would not get any recognition in their school.

91% reported that being more innovative would not receive any recognition either.

Sad isn’t it!

We rely on our teachers to develop young people to be able to function as responsible members of society. To be able to think independently and contribute to society as a whole. But we do little to ensure we help teachers be the best they can be, in their ability to deliver great student learning and development outcomes.

Now you might be thinking, “I know all this, but what’s the solution?”

New Zealand academic John Hattie has part of the answer.

In his research and synthesis of over 500,000 studies of the effects of various influences on student achievement and learning, Hattie found teacher effectiveness made the greatest difference to a student’s learning.


In it, Hattie identifies what matters when it comes to student achievement.

The two largest variances are the innate abilities of the students themselves (50%) – so no surprise there. And teacher effectiveness which accounts for 30%. “It is what teachers know, do, and care about which is very powerful in this learning equation.” - John Hattie.

Therefore, it makes absolute sense to enable teachers to become as effective as possible, thus enabling their students to learn and think for themselves.
The question is how do you accomplish this?

Traditionally, the Education System has gone down the appraisal route.

Now, there are lots of assessment tools being deployed in the education sector. Everything from the Student Improvement Framework (SIF), NAPLAN, VCE and HSC results, and other Government mandated assessments.

And while these assessments are effective in telling you what’s wrong and where you’re doing well, they don’t give you a mechanism to improve performance. In essence, they’re diagnostic tools, but lack solutions.

To be truly effective, appraisals must be combined with feedback and improvement methodologies to dramatically improve a teacher’s capability.

Which is where the Group 8 Education Performance Development and Coaching program comes in.

Built around a solid appraisal and cognitive coaching model, the Performance Development and Coaching (PDC) program is based on extremely solid research into what makes educators effective as well as how to transfer the knowledge from effective practitioners to less experienced teachers. The PDC program has been proven to be very effective both here in Australia and the United Kingdom.

Before I get into the guts of the program and how it works, here’s a short case study to demonstrate the long term effectiveness of combining appraisal, feedback and cognitive coaching from a school that started implementing the program in 2008.

Woodham Community Technical College is in County Durham in the UK.

The school is situated in a low socio economic area – effectively a housing commission estate town. There are around 800 students on the roll, almost all white British. Attainment on entry is broadly average, 21% of students are eligible for free school meals and 26% have special educational needs.

Broadly speaking, the school was facing...

- Behavioural problems.
- Low level disruptions.
- Teachers who blamed the children if the outcome wasn’t good enough.
- Teachers who showed no respect and shouted at children.
- Generally the ethos wasn’t as it needed to be to maximise learning.

In January 2006, Ofsted, the official UK body responsible for inspecting and evaluating school performance, judged Woodham to be “Level 3 – Requires improvement; used to be satisfactory” –
putting them at third of four levels, which meant the school urgently needed to improve its standards.

Any UK school at a level 3 or 4 (Unsatisfactory) comes under significant pressure to improve. Pressure that transfers to the leadership team, often causing Principals to resign.

Knowing they needed to radically improve and fast, Christine Forsyth (then deputy head) went on a quest for improvement methodologies that could be implemented. And while the UK Government provided a “recipe book approach” on how to teach lessons, this approach just didn’t feel right, wouldn’t do anything to improve the school, and Christine felt her team wouldn’t buy in.

After much deliberation, Christine realised that the culture in the school needed to change and they needed a radical approach.

**Enter Group 8 Education and the PDC program of appraisal and cognitive coaching.**

**Working with four core beliefs...**

- Students need to engage in meaningful activity
- Students learn by building cognitive capabilities
- Teachers stimulate learning by emergent listening
- Teachers must offer unconditional respect towards their students

...the program got underway.

With any major change comes resistance. It’s just human nature.

Arguably, the hardest change was that unconditional respect had to go both ways. i.e. While teachers had traditionally demanded respect from their pupils by way of their authority, it was now incumbent on teachers to also give unconditional respect regardless of the behaviour the student is exhibiting at the time.

**In other words, separate the person from their behaviour.**

As you can imagine, some teachers embraced this attitude, while others entrenched in the traditional teaching style did not. Many of the latter chose to move on, leaving a core of highly committed individuals committed to change.

**And the results have been nothing short of dramatic.**

Christine Forsyth, Principal from 2010 to today had this to say in January 2013:
Improving Student Learning Outcomes in the 21st Century

- Within the first year, two-way unconditional respect became the norm. You’d never hear a raised voice and everyone who visits the school comments on the strength of the relationships.

- The school is a very happy, very relaxed place with students highly engaged in learning. Behavioural problems are virtually non-existent.

- An organisation specialising in staff relations and staff training judged they’d never come across an organisation where the staff was so together in terms of values that filtered down from senior leaders, teaching staff and even the cleaners who said that they needed to make sure the school was nice and clean so that the children learned well.

- Woodham has very committed staff, very little staff absence, no union problems, even though at this stage there’s a big teacher union problem in the UK.

- Teacher absenteeism is non-existent. As an example, we had snow this January (2013). Here in the UK we just don’t deal with snow very well and it’s often an excuse for people not to turn up for work. Our school had 100% attendance with both teachers and students – something that’s almost unheard of in this country.

- Teachers engage and collaborate openly with each other. They regularly visit each other’s classrooms and cross-department feedback and coaching teams (Maths teachers give feedback to English teachers, etc.) are the norm.

- The whole culture is very positive – the PDC program formed the basis of a different thinking and value model. The results have multiplied over time, because the foundation was set correctly.

- An Ofsted inspection in September 2011, judged that Woodham Community Technology College is now a good school that is improving strongly.

Now, cultural improvements are one thing, but what about hard results?

- In 2012, GCSE 5 A* - C is at 80% up 26% from 2007
- 5 A* - C including English & Maths went from:
  - 49% in 2010
  - 51% 2011
  - 57% 2012
  - Current year 11 (2013) is tracking to 62%  

- A steady decline in persistent absenteeism – 6.2% in 2007, 2.4% in 2011
- A 54% drop in fixed term exclusions over last 2 years
- Reported behaviour incidents declined by 55% over the last 2 years.
A pretty good result in anyone’s language!

Now you might be thinking, that all very well in the UK, but we’re in Australia. So further on I’ll recount some ongoing success stories from schools we’re currently working with in the Catholic Education System in Victoria.

But first…

These are the principles behind the PDC program

At Group 8 Education we firmly articulate four key principles.

- Students need to engage in meaningful activity
- Students learn by building cognitive capabilities
- Teachers stimulate learning by emergent listening
- Teachers must offer unconditional respect towards their students

We came to this realisation through extensive neo-cognitive research into how the brain progresses from a child state of dependence to an adult state of knowledge and independence.

Our educational aim is to move students from a “Child Mind to an “Adult Mind” state and it’s predicated on the following brain development model which I’m sure you’re familiar with.

I’m including it here to ensure we’re all on the same page with our definitions...

While the brain is a massively complex entity, it is useful to think of the brain consisting of three evolutionary components – the reptilian, limbic or mammalian brain and neocortex or “human brain”, each with distinct functions.

The reptilian brain, the oldest of the three, controls the body’s vital functions such as heart rate, breathing, body temperature and balance. Our reptilian brain includes the main structures found in a reptile’s brain: the brainstem and the cerebellum. The reptilian brain is reliable but tends to be somewhat rigid and compulsive.

The limbic brain emerged in the first mammals. It can record memories of behaviours that produced agreeable and disagreeable experiences, so it is responsible for emotions. The limbic brain is the seat of the value judgments that we make, often unconsciously, that exert such a strong influence on our behaviour. The fight/flight/freeze response is also managed here.
Improving Student Learning Outcomes in the 21st Century

The most recent and most advanced brain layer is the neocortex. It gives us the ability for language, abstract thought, imagination, and consciousness. The neocortex is flexible and has almost infinite learning abilities.

This is true for an evolutionary, step-wise layering of capabilities, as well as how our brain grows in the womb and through childhood into adulthood. The growth of the brain is a very long process, not completing until our mid-twenties.

**Introducing two mind states – The Red and Blue Zones**

As our brains develop, they move from supporting the Childhood Mind capacity (persists until about the age of 10), to developing a thinking Adult Mind capacity.

The old saying, “seeing red” very aptly characterises the red zone.

**The red zone** is the mind state that is based on your reptilian and mammalian brains and which emerges, even in adulthood, whenever you feel anxious, attacked, emotionally vulnerable and scared.

While you have the full range of emotional responses available to you, the ones you focus on are based on responding to threat (real or imagined), fear or loss. And if unchecked, in the absence of the higher level awareness and control provided by the neocortex, you could massively increase further negative thoughts, feelings, moods, behaviour and even self-perception.

All in all, not a useful state for higher level thinking and functioning.

**The blue zone** uses the whole brain where everything is in its proper place and the locus of control resides with the neocortex or thinking brain.

As with the red zone, the full range of emotional responses are available. But the critical capacity of the neocortex allows us to think logically about
choices as well as think about our emotions themselves at a meta level.

It is in the blue zone where true learning takes place and the state we should strive to live in.

And most importantly, you cannot be in both zones simultaneously! You are either in control of your emotions and actions or you’re not.

So how does this relate back to the educational system?

The basic model of education should involve leading students from a “Red Zone - Child Mind” state where they:

- Can undertake simple tasks.
- Respond to reward and punishment.
- Have emotions that are overwhelming.
- Are self-centred.
- Are impulsive.
- Cannot imagine a future different from today.
- Cautious in engaging with the world.

To a “Blue Zone - Adult Mind” state where they:

- Are self-aware.
- Can expand awareness through higher order learning.
- Are social and can adapt to changing surroundings and society.
- Have the ability to imagine, plan and achieve a different future.
- Don’t blindly react to emotions, have availability of choice and the ability to put off gratification.

Suffice to say that we are at our best in the Adult Mind state – confident, collaborative and creative.

And while the education system has moved on from the 19th Century “Obedience” methodology where the vast majority of adults were never allowed to leave the childhood mind state (allowing the state to keep the population in control), to the “conformance and control state” where the childhood mind is allowed to persist into adulthood while developing an adult mind, this is not adequate for demands of the 21st Century and beyond.

Why? Because conformance and control through positive reinforcement limits our ability to be resilient and independent thinkers.
Today’s world requires us to quieten down the childhood mind and develop an adult mind with the capacity to think independently and create new knowledge. Fostering independence in thought is the key.

Kyle, a 14 year old in Cardiff, UK, put it very eloquently.

“Why do I come to school? To develop my learning power, of course! They give us interesting things to explore that get harder and harder. In finding out how to grapple with them, we develop the ‘learning muscles’ and learning stamina that will enable us to get better at whatever we want, for the rest of our lives. People like scientists and historians have figured out special-purpose way to learn: as we get older, we practice those, and think about how they might help us in everyday life.

As powerful learners, we will be better able to learn new skills, solve new problems, have new ideas and make new friends. We know that learning itself is the one ability that will never go out of date – guaranteed – (unlike programming your i-Pod!) And learning power is learnable. No matter how so-called ‘bright’ you are, everyone can get better at learning. Even professors sometimes have learning difficulties!

Oh, and by the way, as we learn the tricks of the learning trade, so we naturally do better on examinations too! It’s a no-brainer, really.”

The PDC program is about building this capacity for creativity, collaboration, resilience and independent thinking into our education system by...

a) Helping students develop their blue zone, adult mind and the tools to stay in this state to maximise learning.

b) Helping teachers stay in their blue zone at all times regardless of what is happening in the classroom to avoid sending their students into their red zones where fear, anxiety and shutting down occur so easily.

Russian psychologist Lev Semyonovich Vygotsky provides two major insights as to why teachers should strive to stay in their blue zones.

“First, minds consist largely of internalised habits, strategies and attitudes that are first developed in interaction with other people, and which therefore substantially reflect their habits and values.

Minds are contagious, thus one of the most powerful influences that teachers can have, especially on younger minds, is not so much what they are teaching, but what learning characteristics they are modelling as they do so.
When things go slightly wrong, does the teacher model calm, patient inquisitiveness, or do they model an anxious concern to re-establish control as quickly as they can?

Do they welcome and enjoy challenge and uncertainty, and thus foster a climate in which their students can welcome them too, or do they, inadvertently, reinforce the idea, by their reflex behaviour, that it is knowing we want round here, not finding out, and that ‘not knowing’ is an aversive state to be rid of fast?”

So how do we go about this?

The Group 8 Education Performance Development and Coaching program consists of three major components:

a) Feedback  
b) Teacher Development  
c) Cultural change through cognitive coaching.

Let’s start with Feedback

Various studies have shown that meaningful assessment and feedback which is directly linked to student performance can increase a teacher’s effectiveness by 20% to 30%.

But how the assessment/appraisal and feedback is garnered and delivered are crucial to the open participation of teachers.

Feedback needs to come from multiple sources including students, peers and leaders. And it has to be delivered in a way that allows the recipient to reflect on it in a very safe environment.

Therefore, in the first year we start in a very gentle way with student to teacher feedback which is absolutely confidential to the teacher involved. No peer or leader gets access to it.

This removes any apprehension about the process and allows the teacher to reflect in private and open themselves up to change gently.

In the program’s second year, feedback is confidential to the coach and teacher. And in the third year, confidential to the coach, teacher and their leaders.
Over the years, we’ve discovered this is the best approach as the whole assessment structure can be confronting and behavioural change and acceptance of new ways of interacting can take time.

**Teacher Development Through Cognitive Coaching**

Today, it is more important than ever to establish and support strong leadership at every level in a school. The pace at which education is changing has made it critical for every teacher to be equipped to tackle the challenges facing them as practitioners.

Coaching is defined as a development method rooted in improving performance through the introduction of new knowledge, skills, and behaviours, and is characterised by an individual relationship between a coach and coachee.

As a means of development, coaching is one of the most effective methods to help solve specific problems and build a particular skill set. The ability to customize a coaching engagement and have dedicated one-on-one time to focus on relevant behaviours has made coaching a valuable method to teach individuals the best ways to manage change, improve their processes and behaviours, and prepare themselves for the next obstacles they will face.

As teaching moves from a top down approach of conformance and attentive listening (“I teach and you listen”) to a more inclusive sharing of ideas and helping students to learn, intangible skills like communication and conflict management are the keys to success in this environment, and coaching is an efficient method to address such challenges.

Coaching can be targeted to address any development need or problem solving that is required, and it is this adaptability that makes it particularly effective.

**Modelling and Transferring Knowledge**

At Group 8 Education, our focus has been on studying and modelling what the top 5% of highly effective teachers do and through a process of coaching, help transfer this knowledge to teachers who want to improve their effectiveness.
Highly effective teachers all exhibit some common characteristics.

- They all show unconditional respect towards their students, regardless of what’s happening in the classroom or individual negative behaviour.

- They all listen “emergently” – paying full, non-judgemental attention to their students.

- They are not after “conformance”. Rather they encourage questioning and learning through meaningful activity that stimulates individual thought.

- Above all, they provide a safe environment where learning can take place, free of anxiety and negativity.

**Chances are every school has at least one or two of these types of teachers.**

Our mission at Group 8 is to help your teachers who aren’t in this top echelon start to embody these beliefs and skills, enabling them to consistently improve their teaching practice and achieve better learning outcomes, both for themselves as well as for their students.

This transfer of knowledge and skill comes through the coaching component of our program.

Given this, we start by working with your senior leadership team to train them in our coaching methodology and systems. You then work with middle level leaders to transfer these skills down the line, eventually leading to a place where peer coaching can safely and effectively take place. In a primary environment we start by working with all leaders who then are able to coach classroom (and other staff) directly.

**Now you might be thinking, “That’s fine John, but will your program work in my school and just how much work is involved?”**

We first started researching and developing the program in 2001. After development incorporating the ideas of John Hattie and other key researchers as well as feedback from over 200 Principals here and the United Kingdom, we started formally rolling it out in Australia in January 2011. Over this period since launch, we’ve worked with 24 schools including 3 catholic primary schools in Victoria and 17 catholic secondary schools in Victoria.
These numbers include 8 catholic secondary schools in Victoria starting in 2013.

To date, the program...

a) Has been embraced by senior and middle leaders, as well as their teaching staff and students.

b) It is not onerous and will fit in with your individual requirements and timeframes.

c) Has proven results – both in a cultural improvement in schools as well as academic results.

d) And it will work with schools anywhere on the continuum of...

   a) Your school needs work! You’ve got issues with staff engagement, student learning and behaviour. Various Government assessments such as the School Improvement Framework (SIF), low VCE results etc., have highlighted various deficiencies and areas for improvement. And you’re looking for a framework to undertake the changes necessary for long term improvement.

   b) Your school is already doing well. You’re getting great results and want to do better, but don’t know how to get to the next level.

Regardless of where you sit, our program will work, if you let it.

Earlier I promised some results from schools in Victoria...

Peter Hayes is the Principal at St. Brendan's Primary School in Flemington, Victoria.

This is what he had to say.

*It’s a teacher’s job to excite their students about learning.*

*We’re a school that is always looking to improve teacher practice.*

*Many of our students come from non-English speaking backgrounds – and a few know very little or no English when they start with us.*

*Our students make incredible gains over these very formative years and by year 3 catch up and by year 5 operate at or above the minimum levels set by NAPLAN.*

*Having said that, looking for ways that we can improve our practices so that their gains*
are greater and quicker is really what I’m all about.

The Catholic Education Office approached me in 2011 and spoke very highly of John. His amenable manner, product and approach to how the leadership staff could be coached to support staff in learning and teaching really appealed to me.

I believe having an outsider come in and look at our school to help us improve learning and teaching is a great opportunity. Getting help and support in developing better structures seemed a very good move to me, my team and it would most certainly benefit our students.

We started the program mid 2012. Unfortunately we had a couple of hic-ups around September 2012 when I went on leave and my Deputy Principal, who’d taken over, went on extended sick leave.

We’ve just re-started the program and are looking forward to positive results. I know it’s early days but these are some of the aspects of the program I really like.

Each participant has to set 2 goals for the year in areas they want to improve as teachers. Setting goals helps them focus on what’s important and be held accountable to their goals.

My goals also help me be more focussed and not get side tracked with daily details and forget about the big picture for the school. This keeps my team and myself accountable and on track.

Learning by rote and regurgitation is alive and well in many parts of the education system. Australia is struggling with finding good science and maths teachers and I believe many of them are simply bored out of their minds with the way teaching is currently practiced.

It’s a teacher’s job to excite their students about learning.

It is my belief that education needs to change towards a more “hands on” approach from a learning as well as teaching point of view.

Learning and teaching is becoming more and more about inclusion and collaboration. One way of making a difference is rolling up your sleeves and getting down with groups of children so that they can see you partnering with them, rather than sitting in your ivory tower.

As such, classroom visits of 15 minutes per week per class is one of my goals for 2013. I want become more familiar with the students and their learning as well as supporting my teachers in their quest for improvement.

John Corrigan is an excellent coach and role model.

He has a lovely manner, is in control of the process, but is not controlling. He’s very
Improving Student Learning Outcomes in the 21st Century

articulate and knowledgeable on a number of topics. What I particularly appreciate is that he puts his theory into practice with himself.

John’s heart and soul is in “our corner” which is fantastic. My leadership team enjoys working with him too.

Change in education is inevitable, just as change is a reality in life. The Group 8 Performance Development and Coaching program is not about adding extra work or burdens on our staff. It is about living the change in what it is we’re already doing. Teachers and educators need to sharpen their tools, and John’s program can help us achieve this.

I rate the program at an 8 out of 10, and I give John a 9 out of 10.

Peter Hayes is the Principal at St. Brendan’s Primary School

Christopher Stock is the Principal at Emmanuel College, North Altona/Point Cook, VIC.

John Corrigan articulates a coherent and well-based philosophy

Every school needs to improve and Emanuel College is no exception.

During my time at the College, we have been on an improvement based approach to teaching and learning. We know the issues however gaining improvement is much trickier.

We understand that to improve student learning outcomes we need to support colleagues in the improvement of their learning-teaching practice. Coaching is one strategy for providing this support.

We’d heard about the “Performance Development and Coaching” program that John Corrigan and Group 8 Education had developed from two different sources.

One was that the Catholic Education Office in Melbourne was working with John and the second was that Rosalie Jones had passed on the recommendation of Dr. Mark Merry, the Principal of Yarra Valley Grammar, where PDC was being implemented.

I worked with Mark while he was a Principal in the Catholic system and I respect his recommendations.

Because John was working with CEOM, as well as the positive experience that Mark Merry had in applying PDC, we decided to invite Mark to discuss with the leader team (senior and middle leaders) his experience of PDC, to explain the
program and its benefits.

Mark’s presentation convinced many in the team of the merits of pursuing PDC further. I then contacted John Corrigan and set up a meeting for him to present to the leadership team. We were attracted to the potential power of the approach and were satisfied that John was on the right track. His approach to improving student learning outcomes, through teacher cognitive coaching, aligned strongly with our focus on building teacher capacity with a focus on results.

John’s philosophy of unconditional respect, emergent listening, developing independent learners as well as the coaching process just makes sense.

Knowing that any new program can create initial resistance, I introduced and implemented the program through initial meetings with middle leaders to build core support and then champions who engaged with staff meetings to explain the program and allay concerns.

Change is always difficult and challenging, and to expect 100% agreement is just not realistic. A good result in my view is if you can get 80% to buy into the change ahead.

Some staff were initially reluctant. Some of the suspicions were industrially based - IEU had published articles critical of ‘appraisal’ programs around the same time. Research suggests that many teachers will not form a view regarding a change until they have experienced it. We knew we would need to trial the program to gain an informed view of teachers about it.

I’m happy to report that suspicion and resistance to the program is pretty much non-existent now given experience of a positive year with the program.

With respect to the program, our immediate goal was to get coaches to a reasonably good start up level of skill in how to be a coach under John’s framework; to be able to sit down with coachees to identify genuine improvement goals for the year.

Teachers are really switched on people and they recognise if a program is good and is working, and the PDC program is excellent value. Generally, changes have been well received. This came through quite clearly at the debrief session with staff at the end of the year.

Our school culture has been pretty collaborative for some years now. I can’t really credit Group 8 Education’s PDC program with having increased collaboration - it is an area difficult to measure and assign causal relationship. We are also only one year into the program. However what the program has given us is a another formal process of collaboration that is contributing to a collaborative culture.
A number of our middle leaders have moved from questions like: “How do we do this?” or “What are our priorities?” to

• “How can I generate more feedback?”
• “We want more classroom observations.”
• “We want to get more reliable evidence.”

It seems to me that the program has given our teachers a set of structures and processes to get their teeth into. And for this reason, I think it’s taken the school to the next level of conversation and process.

What I like about John Corrigan is that he articulates a coherent and well-based philosophy. He’s intelligent, wise and authentic. John is an excellent coach, and he uses the cognitive coaching model when engaging with new questions. As someone from another professional area, he brings new eyes/perspectives to the “schoolie” setting, and he is generous in his support of our mission.

Additionally, John is very approachable; he’s a great guy to work with. He’s a man of high integrity and enormous passion about his mission which is helping teachers to improve, thereby improving outcomes for kids. This is in strong alignment with our strategic focus.

John continues to renew his thinking in line with leading thinking in the field of education – for example incorporating John Hattie’s insights - and has pulled this information together beautifully into the coaching model he espouses.

The cognitive coaching model revolves around emergent listening which is a sophisticated process and takes time to learn. I am very happy with the support we’ve received last year, which was our first year on the program.

We’ve learned a lot and I feel comfortable and confident enough to present the program to new staff without John’s involvement. However it is important that we retain a formal connection with John in the first years of implementing the program. I also know he’ll be there to help and support if we need him.

This year senior leaders will have a formal coaching role with middle leaders. Because we’ve got one year’s worth of experience under our belt I would hope that the quality of the middle leader coaching with teachers for 2013 continues to improve. However PDC is a sophisticated process and we have built in refreshers with John over the year.

To conclude, three main reasons that I find the program to be so valuable are:

It is both a good coaching model and a good appraisal system.
The capacity to have a model whereby teachers can be coached by middle leaders is a huge plus for a school to consider.

John Corrigan has a coherent articulated framework around one key strategy for building teacher capacity with a focus on results. I have and will continue to recommend the PDC program to my peers.

Christopher Stock, Principal, Emmanuel College, North Altona/PointCook, VIC
February 2013

In Conclusion

The PDC program has been proven to improve teacher effectiveness and improve student learning outcomes no matter what the starting point.

Schools could be at the bottom of the ladder academically, exist in low socio-economic areas and need to rapidly improve. Or you could already be at the top and looking for ways to further improve.

No matter where you sit on the continuum, there is no staying still. You are either improving or declining.

Schools that have embraced our program are seeing direct benefits with their staff opening up, being more collegial and embracing change, which ultimately has a positive effect on the whole school’s learning culture.

And as students directly model the adults around them, they too form adult blue zone mind sets and are able to live, contribute and thrive in the modern world.

Your Next Steps

This white paper just serves as an introduction to Group 8 Education and the Performance Development and Coaching school improvement program.

I invite you to call me on 0418 432 316 and arrange a confidential, no obligation first meeting where we’ll sit down and discuss your situation.

Should both of us feel there's merit in moving forward, we can discuss options and take appropriate action.

John Corrigan, Group 8 Education.