



Education &  
Communities

# EQUITY PROGRAMS

## North Coast Region

### Case Study

### Bowraville Central School



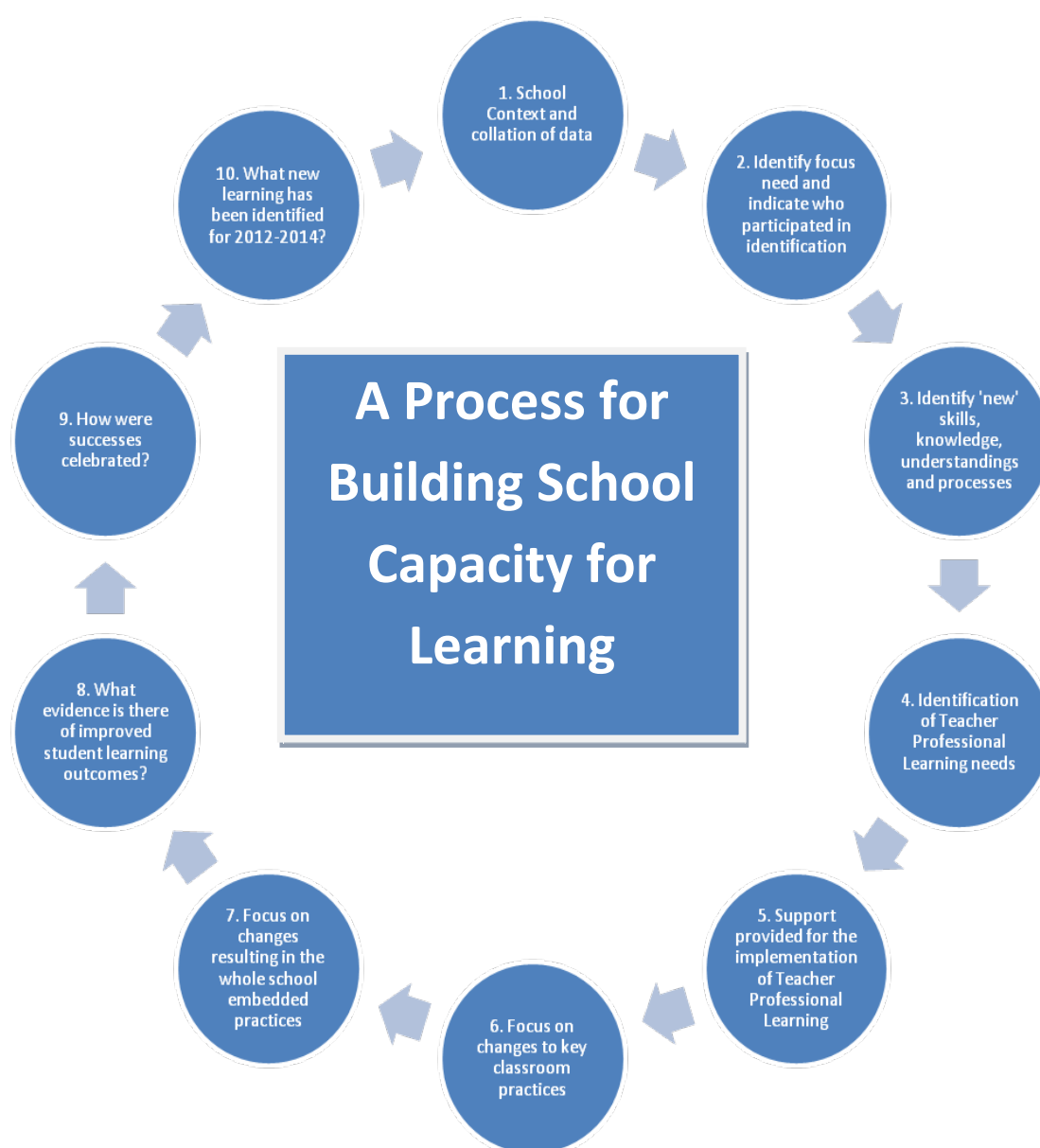
#### Our Vision:

The North Coast Region provides strategic leadership and support to enable schools to deliver high quality education for all students

## Case Study

The Case Study, through the description of the focus area and planned outcomes of the initiative will state the target outcome and this is described as a 'product'. However, the precise intent of the case studies is to articulate, comment and reflect deeply about **the processes leading to success** and the building of the school's capacity to improve student learning outcomes.

An important central theme within the case study is the **successful engagement of stakeholders** in processes, enabling embedded practice to build school capacity for improvement.



## **Bowraville Central School**

### **SCHOOL CONTEXT**

#### **Information about the school and the community it serves.**

Bowraville Central School (BCS) is a K-12 campus serving a diverse community within the Nambucca Valley, Mid-North Coast, NSW. The school is a recipient of Priority Schools Program funding: resources that enable staff and community to work together to create innovative programs to both support and extend students, regardless of their background, within a caring and supportive environment.

The school has a total school population of 245 students, many of whom are from low Socio Economic Status (SES) circumstances. Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) enrolments have increased from 15% historically to 25% in recent years. The school's endeavours in Aboriginal Education have been recognised with it becoming a Stronger Smarter Learning Community Hub School in 2010.

### **INITIATIVE TITLE**

#### **The Transformative Learning Space**

**Building a culture of inclusivity and connectedness among students, staff and community by supporting students through transition to school and re-entry from suspension initiatives.**

#### **What was the main focus of the initiative and what did it aim to achieve?**

The main focus of the initiative was to build a culture of inclusivity and connectedness by:

- building bridges between school and the community through working in partnership with identified families and children who require additional support to transition into kindergarten for the following year; and
- supportive re-entry from suspension to ensure changes in behaviour and retention in the school.

The aims of the initiatives were:

- the creation of a learning environment that is welcoming, respectful, yet one of high expectations from day one of Kindergarten;

- developing meaningful, collaborative relationships with families prior to commencement in Kindergarten;
- ongoing and planned collaboration with parents and carers to enable the co-creation of a strengths-based learning environment;
- empowering staff with the knowledge and understanding of the strengths and unique qualities that children and families bring to Bowraville Central School; and
- enabling the school to both better engage with and cater for the needs of all families and their children within the Bowraville Central School community.

### **What information was used to show the need for the initiative?**

Analysis of data was taken from:

- Suspension data showed that over 600 days were lost for students through suspensions in 2008/2009 with the crisis continuing with over 100 days lost in Term 1 of 2010.
- Pattern of results in BST, NAPLAN, & Best Start demonstrated poor outcomes with the year three cohorts, historically. Consequently students have to play 'catch up' for the following school years because of the increasing gap in educational outcomes.
- Decline in enrolments – particularly K-6 showed a drop in enrolments of 20% from 2007 to 2010.
- STLA and Executive staff time and expertise was being substantially absorbed in reactive procedures: the most problematic students' behaviours were not altering.
- School community forums, initiated by the school indicated that there was support amongst parents and carers for more proactive approaches in regard to the perceived increase in problematic behaviours.

Through the analysis of data, the school identified the need to develop two initiatives:

- Bridges Program, focusing on supporting students and families through a comprehensive transition program to kindergarten.
- Resus, (return from suspension) program, focus and support for students and family during re-entry into school and classroom after suspension.

### **What was the initiative about? Who made this decision?**

The initiative was to facilitate the creation of a whole school environment within which it was possible to better engage with and support all students and their families. Strategies were put in place to identify students of greatest need and to create environments where they could find greater success.

The decision to steer the school in this direction was taken by executive after several consultative sessions with different groups within the school community.

- Staff participated in a focused after school staff forum which addresses the need for more successful behaviour management strategies to be implemented within the school.

- A meeting was held at the medical centre at the 'Mish' (Bowraville Local Aboriginal Land Council Housing Area) in term 3 2009. This was hosted by the Principal and Aboriginal Education Officer (AEO) in order to gauge the feelings of Aboriginal parents in regard to the school's ability to meet the needs of their children.
- Two evening parent forums were held at school in early 2009 to focus on school tone, the school's programs and future directions.
- The Student Representative Council (SRC) met with the Principal early in 2010 to discuss possible improvements in the manner discipline was undertaken in the school.

### **What new learning in the classroom did the teachers focus on?**

#### **New learning for the teachers in the Bridges initiative**

Coordinators of the Bridges initiative engaged in the learning of the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) and the philosophy of play based learning used by early childhood centres. This professional development was supported by the Department of Education and Communities Early Childhood Consultant within the North Coast Region.

#### **New learning for the teachers in the Resus initiative**

With support from School Learning Support Team (SLST) member and coordinator, focus centred on positive behaviour modification, strength based discipline, positive parent contact, teaching appropriate social behaviours, nutrition, fitness and wellbeing. Through the Support Teacher Learning Assistance (STLA) support the introduction of the red beast box and book (an Autism spectrum tool) was implemented successfully into the initiative.

Teachers focused on the School Behaviour Plan - an explicit and consistent plan using colour coded rules, from Kindergarten to Year 6. By focusing on and supporting students understanding of the School Behaviour Plan, classroom expectations were more explicit and therefore empowered students in making positive behavioural choices.

### **What new learning did teachers need to undertake?**

New learning for teachers in the Bridges initiative included:

- building stronger partnership with preschool – Working together in partnership on Individual Student and Family Portfolios;
- understanding of the Early Years Learning Framework document;
- preschool network meetings, training – EYLF, Nutrition and Safe Food Handling; and
- supporting Kindergarten teacher – Ongoing communication and planning to support families and children for successful transition to school.

New learning for teacher in the Resus initiative included:

- workshops on behaviour modification techniques including circle time;
- the introduction of a quiet area;
- working on enhancing relationships, in particular building acceptance and tolerance with parents and carers, students and teachers;
- understanding nutrition and its effects on students – in line with the PDHPE syllabus; and
- a focus on strength-based teaching to create a positive classroom environment with class learning not individual behaviour as the focus.

The new learning for all teachers involved understanding of explicit and consistent colour coded Behaviour Plan implemented from Kindergarten to Year 6 and using this consistently throughout the school.

### **How were teachers supported with their new learning?**

The Bridges Coordinator and the Bridges Aboriginal Support Assistant have been supported in new learning through:

- Preschool Network Meetings;
- ongoing training from North Coast Early Childhood Consultant;
- ongoing consultation and collaborative planning with Bowraville Preschool Director; and
- ongoing consultation and meetings with Bowraville inter-agencies including North Coast Health, Brighter Futures, DoCS.

RESUS staff have been supported in their new learning by:

- STLA support through the red beast box and book; and
- The Stronger Smarter Initiative.

The teaching staff were involved in after school workshops and meetings on the behaviour plan which was implemented by the Bridges and Resus Coordinators. This included ongoing consultation and feedback from teachers regarding behaviour plans.

### **What changes happened in the classrooms?**

In the Kindergarten classroom the change has been dramatic. Following the commencement of the Bridges Transition, Preschool to School Program in 2010, and after only one semester of operation, the 2011 Kindergarten students' learning space is a very different environment to that of any Kindergarten at BCS in recent years. Suspensions have been reduced from eight kindergarten students collectively in 2009 and 2010 to zero in 2011. It should be acknowledged that the commencement of the initiative coincided with the appointment of a new director at the Bowraville Community Pre-School, who also saw the benefit of concerted collaboration.

Through the implementation of the RESUS Program the primary classrooms have similarly developed an atmosphere where the focus is on teaching and learning. Suspensions have



decreased – close to a 50% reduction from Term 2, 2010 to Term 4, 2010. Length of suspensions has been reduced because of the existence of the program, and for repeat offenders, the frequency of suspension has been reduced.

Students and staff alike reported that there has been a positive change within the classroom setting. Students indicated that the classroom is now more focused on teaching and learning rather than the teacher reacting to problem behaviours.

**What were some of the difficulties encountered when undertaking this new learning?  
How were the difficulties overcome?**

Physical spaces needed to be found and created in order for the proposed changes to occur. This was time consuming and frustrating within the confines of the school's resourcing, but it was achieved. It was proposed that as the program would have impact across the whole school community, resourcing could come from a range of sources within the school budget.

The initiative could not have been possible without significant funding from other agencies as a start-up. DoCS were the key partner in 2010 and 2011. In addition, the school advocated for SLST support and has received this in 2010 and 2011.

Managing staff perceptions in relation to the quite different change in work practices and the focus of some key individuals has been a delicate matter that needed consideration. The initiative demanded almost 100% time commitment on the part of the STLA and significant reprioritising of the Assistant Principal's responsibilities. Executive had to be united in advocating for the change and supporting the program on a trial basis.

**What changes occurred across the school?**

Through these initiatives, staff are demonstrating an increased understanding of individual students and their needs. Teaching staff are more informed about students and the strategies used to support them as a result of closer parent and community partnerships. Hence, school and community communication has increased.

Discussions with staff and students have indicated there is a much greater sense of calm across the school. Focus group meetings with parents and community members showed that they have also noticed this calming change across the school environment. Parents spoke about how they have observed the change in how teachers manage student behaviour from previously. They can see that teachers now have options available and support structures in place for dealing with challenging behaviours.

When inappropriate behaviours occur, the students involved are invariably in a more supportive and manageable context. Incidents are much less likely to cause distress to others. There is a much greater chance of the behaviour being contained with appropriate intervention at hand.

## **How do we know that students improved their learning?**

In first semester 2011, days lost through long suspension have been reduced by one third compared to the first semester in 2010. This indicates the behavioural improvements and support for students who have been involved in either the Bridges or Resus initiatives since their onset.

Anecdotal data from the Kindergarten teacher shows a very successful transition for students into Kindergarten for 2011. The teacher noted that the school readiness of the participants of the program could be gauged by the ease and speed that she could initiate curriculum focussed learning experiences rather than spending large amounts of time on social aspects of school.

Best Start data shows that those students who attended the Bridges Program in 2010 were starting Kindergarten on the same and at sometimes higher levels in the Literacy and Numeracy Analysis than with students who did not attend the Bridges Program.

## **What celebrations resulted from the improvements?**

Within the Bridges program there are fortnightly meetings with parents and teachers discussing all of the successes that have occurred at school with their child during that time.

Similarly, celebrations in the RESUS program happen very frequently. Any and all opportunities to report on success of a child in RESUS are shared with the family on a daily basis.

Successes are also shared with staff through time in whole staff meetings and classes celebrate successes at individuals and class milestones.

## **FUTURE PLANNING**

### **How can the improvements resulting from this initiative be built upon for the future?**

Time needs to be built into the program to continue to better enable the transference of strategies to more staff. This may be feasible through National Partnership funding. This has been possible to date mostly through staff interest and generosity.

The program is to be closely linked to another important whole community initiative based at the school: The Bowraville Community Garden. There is enormous potential for project-based activities to occur through this inter-agency model. Greater opportunities for mentoring will also eventuate as well as connecting to Aboriginal perspectives.

There is acknowledgement among the school community, which is evident through parent forums, that BCS is taking a strategic, long term view. Staff surveys showed that BCS as a whole school have a proactive plan to address issues and behaviours that go beyond the school gate.