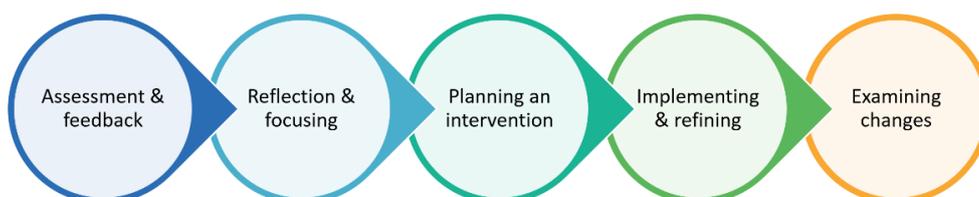


## NSI Partnerships Case Study: Anne, Year 11 English



Anne<sup>1</sup> is a high school English teacher who had been teaching for over 30 years by the time her school began working with NSI. This case study tells the story of Anne's experience using our five-step collaborative inquiry process (shown below) to examine and improve her classroom climate.



### **Step 1: Assessment and feedback**

Of the several classes that she taught, Anne decided she would like to focus on her Year 11 English class. The students in this class completed NSI's online Classroom Climate Questionnaire (CCQ), and NSI provided Anne with a personalised feedback package based on her students' responses.

When Anne examined the survey feedback, she was struck by the big gaps between the levels of differentiation, involvement and formative assessment that her students *wanted*, and the levels that they felt they *currently experienced* in Anne's class.

### **Step 2: Reflection and focusing**

Anne thought about these aspects of her teaching and recognised that, in this mixed ability class, there was indeed a group of students who were often unmotivated or disengaged, suggesting that their learning needs may not have been met effectively.

Anne reflected:

*My students would prefer a greater level of differentiation and are not engaging with set tasks as much as they would like. There was also a gap in the area of formative assessment. This highlighted for me a number of challenges – How can I manage different tasks and programs in one class? How to motivate and engage students of vastly different abilities and interests? How can I offer a sufficient range of assessment tools and at the same time maintain equity?*

Anne then set a specific goal for her inquiry efforts, based on her reflections on the survey feedback:

*[To] motivate students so that they would take responsibility for their own learning and use their time more productively, to engage with their learning and, as a result, improve their skills.*

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<sup>1</sup> Pseudonym.

### Step 3: Planning an intervention

NSI had provided professional development to the teachers at Anne's school to support them in the inquiry process. One of the key messages of this professional development was around the importance of not 'rushing in' with a quick fix once an issue or target area had been identified. It was important for teachers to take time to reflect thoughtfully on the survey data as well as to read, research, talk to others, seek out new ideas, and review one's own 'teaching toolkit' in order to find suitable and promising strategies.

As part of this reflecting and researching, Anne asked some of the students in her target class to tell her more about what they thought contributed to the survey results in these areas. Anne's students told her that many members of the class did not find the topics covered to be interesting. This was a helpful insight for Anne and one that could only have been provided by the students themselves. Anne went on to ask her students to tell her more about the kinds of things that they were interested in, so that she could consider these in her planning.

Anne then remembered a professional development event she had participated in that had provided practical ideas for differentiation. She decided that this would be her way forward, and planned three parallel teaching programmes that individual students could choose between. Each program involved a choice of English texts and topics, and allowed students to decide whether they wanted to work individually or in small groups. As Anne planned this programme, she wrote:

*While my teaching strategies for all three programs will be directed towards small group instruction and individual mentoring, learning will be highly individual but would hopefully result in greater group cooperation. The three strategies will include: developing a number of different learning programs and allowing students to select from a range of options within each program; basing the programs on student interests after discussing ideas with them; and ensuring that the assessment items for the different programs are equitable.*

### Step 4: Implementing and refining

Like the other teachers in her school, Anne selected a 6-10 week block in which to intentionally implement and refine her chosen intervention. She began by presenting her three programmes to the class and asking the students to select which one they would follow.

Over the intervention period, Anne kept a reflective journal of her observations and thoughts. She noticed that, over time, she had begun to spend more class time with her less able students. Anne felt that this was because her more able students were enjoying the new opportunities to work independently and direct their own learning.

As the intervention period drew to an end, Anne reflected:

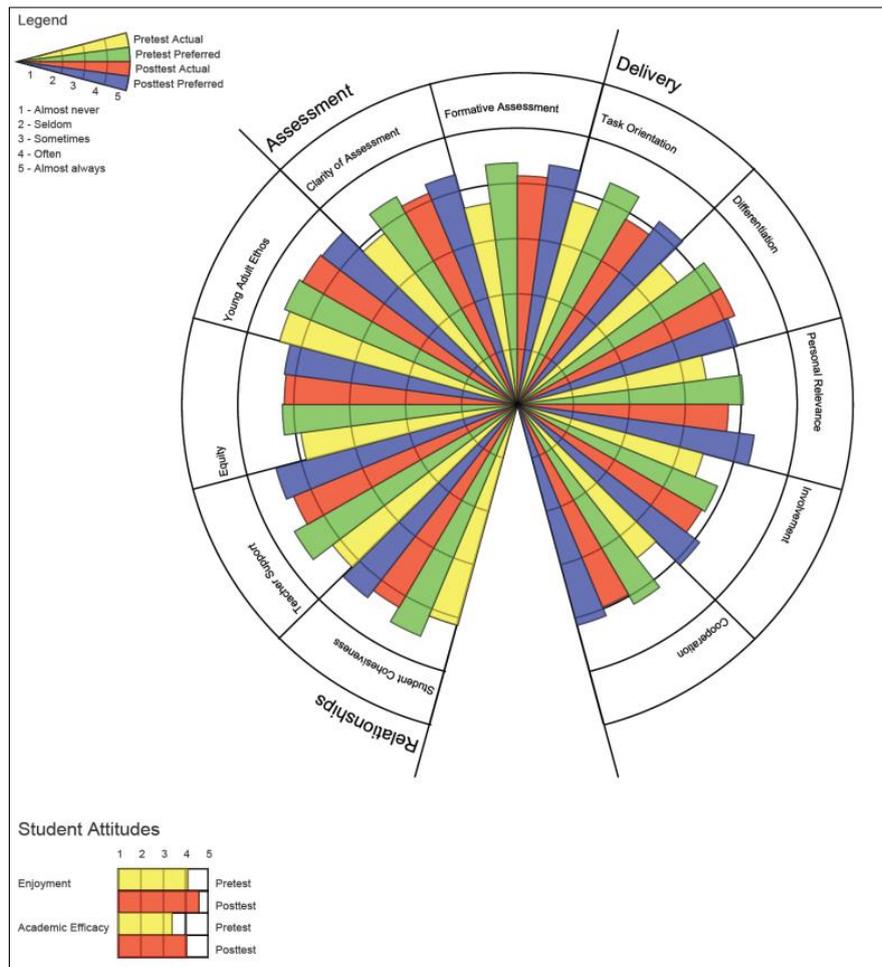
*Within the much broader range of topics and texts, students appeared to be managing their own time within the scope of the overall task. There was also more interaction and sharing of resources and I was able to assist individual students. Student feedback was positive, students were more engaged and the classroom environment seemed more dynamic.*

Anecdotally, it seemed to Anne that her goals of increasing student motivation, self-management, and engagement had been achieved.

### Step 5: Examining the changes

The final stage of the collaborative inquiry process involves re-administering the same survey to allow before and after data to be compared. NSI provided Anne with an expanded feedback profile that showed her students' original reports of the actual and preferred classroom environment alongside their updated perceptions.

Comparing the students' perceptions of the *actual* learning environment before (yellow) and after (red) the intervention, Anne saw marked improvements in a number of scales including differentiation, formative assessment, personal relevance, and interest.



Anne reflected:

*The level of response for both the actual and preferred responses shifted outward. I suppose this tells me that students actually liked the ability to choose a learning program which suited their learning style. Students reported that they enjoyed this environment and that they understood themselves as learners more. Lessons were more student-centred and catered for individual interests.*

The school had also chosen to include measures of students' self-reported enjoyment of their learning and their academic efficacy in the survey. (Academic self-efficacy refers to students' belief that they are capable of meeting learning goals and being successful in their studies.) Anne was pleased to find that these measures had also improved over the period of the intervention (as shown in the small bar chart at the bottom left of the figure above).

Overall, Anne was pleased with the results of her intervention. Even as someone with extensive teaching experience, through working with NSI Anne was able to explore new directions in her teaching practice and make measurable improvements in her learning environment. She had 'test-driven' new teaching approaches that were quite different to her normal practices and had found that her students responded well. Going forward, Anne's next focus was to consider how the experience with this one Year 11 class could inform her practice in other classes.

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