

NSI Partnerships Case Study: Cardijn College, South Australia

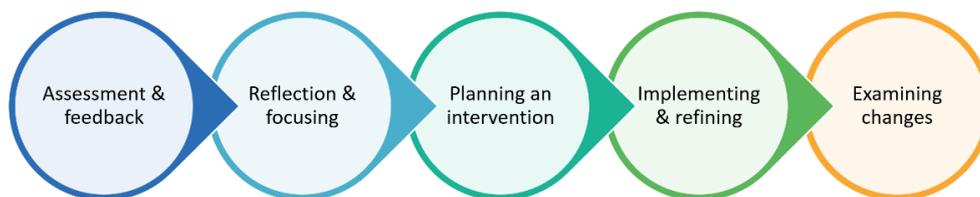


Cardijn College have been working with NSI for seven years, using our award-winning collaborative inquiry process. This case study tells the story of their first three years – what they did, how they generated progress over time, and the changes they achieved.

Year 1: Starting small

Cardijn College decided to start small. Teacher buy-in is essential for effective change management, so **the college decided to seek 'early adopters'** who could then become ambassadors for change. In year 1, 28 teachers volunteered to be involved with NSI and our process of using student feedback to inform collaborative action research.

Each teacher nominated one class to complete NSI's Classroom Climate Questionnaire (CCQ). NSI analysed the survey data (in class lots) and provided a personalised feedback package to each teacher. 12 of the 28 participating teachers then chose to participate in a collaborative inquiry group. The aim was for teachers to intentionally engage with the student feedback and drive their own professional learning, guided by NSI's five-step collaborative inquiry process (shown below).



Experiencing the five-step process

The student feedback on the CCQ provided baseline data for the beginning of the inquiry process. Teachers reflected on their own class's feedback and discussed it within the group in order to each identify **one or two aspects of the learning environment that they would seek to improve**. The group also acknowledged the strengths and successes shown in the data, and demonstrated a shared sense of efficacy – a belief that *together, we can effect change in our classroom environments*.

With the support of the inquiry group, each teacher developed a plan of action. This started with thinking through what might be contributing to the current issue or challenge they were hoping to address. Teachers then reflected on their own knowledge and 'teaching toolkit', and drew on the expertise of others, to identify practical strategies they could use in their classrooms.

Teachers spent 6-10 weeks implementing their plan in their classroom. They fed back on progress to the inquiry group, reflected on what they saw, and refined their strategies as needed. At the end of this period, the same students completed the CCQ again, and NSI presented side-by-side comparisons of the *before* and *after* data. This allowed teachers to see the impacts of their efforts.

The results were pleasing – **students' perceptions of their classroom learning environments had improved, and so had students' self-reported self-efficacy**. Self-efficacy is a person's confidence or

belief that they are capable of doing or achieving something. In the school context, self-efficacy means students' belief that they are capable of learning and succeeding in their studies. The school had chosen to measure students' self-efficacy for two reasons: first, because it is an important outcome that can be influenced by the classroom learning environment (so improvements in the learning environment should lead to improvements in self-efficacy) and, second, because of its known importance for students' learning behaviours, motivation, and achievement. It was great to see improvements in students' self-efficacy starting to be apparent already.

The 12 teachers who had completed the collaborative inquiry process shared their experiences and insights with the wider school staff. These teachers also fed back to the school leadership that time pressures had been a key challenge for them in completing the inquiry process. As a result, **the school developed strategies to address this for Year 2:** Students would be released from school early one day a week to create dedicated time for collaborative inquiry group meetings, and the time teachers spent on the collaborative inquiry process would be counted as professional development hours towards teachers' registration requirements.

Year 2: Building momentum

Encouraged by the school's support and the original teachers' stories of improvements, **the number of volunteers more than doubled in the second year.** 66 teachers chose to participate and were organised into a number of smaller collaborative inquiry groups. Again, NSI provided personalised feedback packages to each teacher based on their students' survey responses.

The school's decisions to provide time for collaboration and planning and to allow this activity to be counted as part of professional development requirements were **key to securing the participation and buy-in of so many teachers.** Providing a forum for teachers to disseminate their findings was also important for raising awareness and encouraging more teachers to participate. These strategies were key ways in which the principal supported the improvement efforts school-wide.

An exciting trend was that **many teachers deliberately chose to have one of their more challenging classes complete the CCQ.** This showed that the school had been successful in separating the CCQ feedback and collaborative inquiry process from performance measurement. If teachers had felt that the data were to be used for performance evaluation, they may have chosen an 'easier' class. Instead, since the process was treated as a professional development and school improvement exercise, teachers were motivated to work on addressing issues in their more challenging classes.

Year 3: A transformed school culture

By year 3, all 77 teachers at the school were participating in the collaborative inquiry process. **An initiative that started small had now become the 'new normal' school-wide,** and teachers had taken on an approach of critical self-reflection and collaborative dialogue.

The school continued to 'up their game' in year 3 through several new strategies:

- Teachers from different subjects were mixed together to form the collaborative inquiry groups. This helped make sure the conversations focused on aspects of the learning environment and not on particular subject content.
- Teacher-leaders were identified for the collaborative inquiry groups. NSI provided professional development to help these teacher-leaders effectively facilitate their groups and engage teachers in reflective discussions.

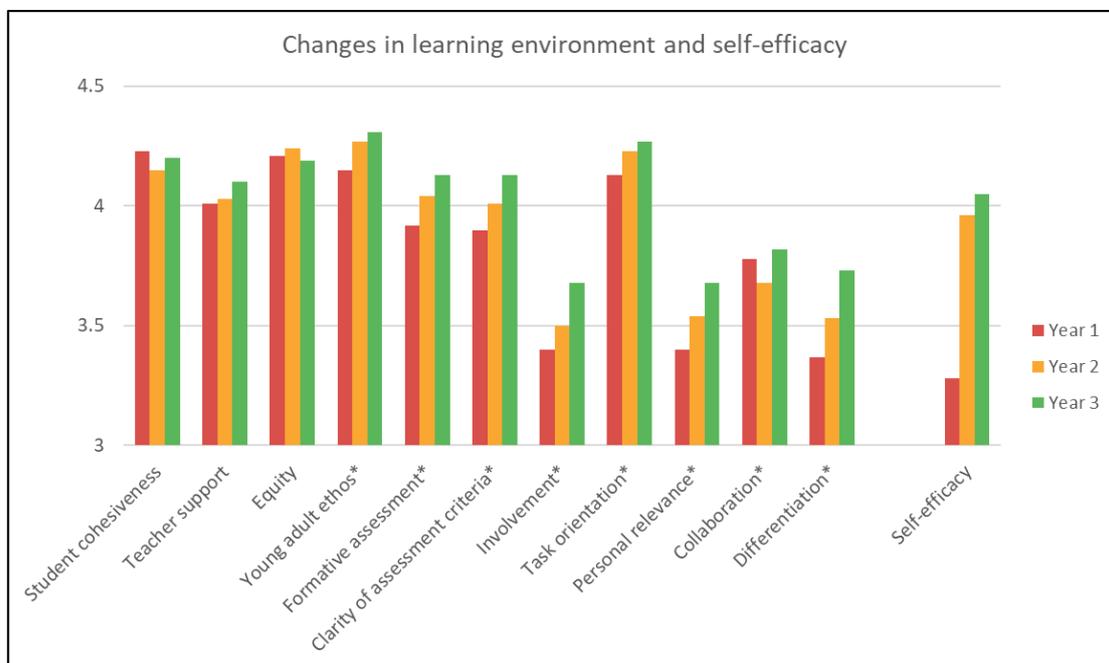
- Lesson observation formats were developed through whole-staff collaboration. Every teacher was then observed and given constructive feedback during their 6-10 week intervention period.
- Teachers were asked to give short workshops for their colleagues focusing on specific aspects of the learning environment that they had worked on.
- School-wide decision making and planning around professional development was informed by the student survey data (using school-wide analysis summaries provided by NSI) and the results of the lesson observations.

Measurable improvements over time

Over Cardijn College’s first three years working with NSI, marked improvements were seen in both the classroom learning environments and students’ self-efficacy.

Of the 11 aspects of the classroom environment measured in the CCQ, school-wide improvements were seen in 9 aspects. The improvements in 8 aspects were confirmed (through NSI’s analyses) to be statistically significant; these 8 aspects are marked with asterisks (*) in the graph below. It is important to note that **these are school-wide improvements**; improvements in the other aspects may have occurred in individual teachers’ classrooms through their inquiry efforts, but for 8 aspects the changes became sufficiently widespread across the school that they were reflected in statistically significant improvements in whole-school survey data.

Dramatic improvements were also observed in students’ self-efficacy. Between years 1 and 3, students’ self-efficacy improved by an average of 0.85 standard deviations (a large effect size according to standard statistical benchmarks).



Overall, the staff and leadership of Cardijn College were delighted with their first three years with NSI. The learning environments within their school had improved in measurable and sustainable ways, and new norms for teacher self-reflection, collaboration and inquiry had been embedded. The College continued to work with NSI in subsequent years, achieving ongoing school improvements.