## VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

# Yarram SECONDARY COLLEGE

Principal David Mowbray explores the challenge of building a culture of trust in which teachers can challenge and support each other to improve classroom practice.

#### David Mowbray (Principal)

*Putting students at the centre*

We use the professional learning communities to put the students at the heart of everything that we do. We think its fundamental to what schools are about, and the professional learning community's approach really allows us to dig deep and really focus on the students, where they're at, how they're going, and what we can do to make impactful changes on their learning journey.

*Overcoming barriers to implementation*

Barriers to the implementation of the PLC were primarily a mindset that staff held about how they should work, how they can work. And overcoming that was one of the biggest obstacles because we undertook a very intimate approach of their PLCs through a triad structure and process, which really exposed teachers to knowing their craft, and to be able to collaborate and communicate with peers in an effective manner.

To overcoming these barriers we have undertaken a long process, over 18 months to 2 years, of informing teachers about what a PLC is, how it works. But then also up scaling them, building their capacity to work together, but also to focus on the right work, and that is students and their learning.

We've reached out to different resources, experts in the field – Peter Senge, Tracy Izod, Simon Sinek. We also then tapped into some ongoing feedback to monitor how staff were coping with the work, and for us to identify what support was needed to allow us to continue the journey.

*Building trust*

Trust is core to relationships. And student-teacher relationships as well are built on trust and respect. And for us we identified that the professional trust that existed here a few years ago was a barrier to how we wanted to do our work. We had to be open and honest, and recognise that we had lacked the professional trust. Fully supportive as friends and colleagues on a superficial level. If you needed help, you got help. But when we delved into the student work, started to share data, that was a “no go” zone, because that trust wasn't there. We've had to build that over the last couple of years. And it's been a really interesting journey, but a key part of our journey into how we're going.

We built trust through a long process, and very strategic process, of first of all acknowledging where we were in the level of trust that we had. We looked at the staff opinion survey and found that trust was low. And when we spoke with people, and just hearing their conversations, the dialogue about how they referred to their colleagues, we found that the level of professional trust was not anywhere near what it should be to do this work. So that was the first thing we had to address and overcome.

We also modelled vulnerability. And we're open and honest about where we were as leaders in this programme, whether it's myself or the AP (Assistant Principal] Lynn or team leaders. We often didn't have the answers. And we operate on the motto that "all of us is better than one of us". But we also live it and model it, and invite people to share in the solutions to some of our issues or the work that we're doing.

One of the key parts of building trust was to make sure that all teams have norms or protocols that they operate in and under. We call it, not a “critical friend”, but a “reflective person” at our leadership meetings. That's modelling a behaviour, around how to use those norms and protocols to develop trust and create the safe space where people, if they don't know, can speak up and say that they don't know, because that's important to us as well.