

## COLLEGE ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING PROGRAM (CALP)

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### Abstract

The College Assessment for Learning Program (CALP) was initiated in order to improve student learning outcomes and to strengthen professional conversations across three campuses. It was based on a backward mapping process developed earlier at one of the junior campuses with successful outcomes.

Analysis of NAPLAN, School Certificate and Higher School Certificate found that students in the middle and upper bands of academic achievement were not progressing at the same level as those in the lower bands. Teachers on all campuses had concerns about student non-completion of assessment tasks, quality of submitted work, level of engagement and understanding of the task requirements.

Staff were introduced to the CALP model. They then critiqued and modified their current assessment tasks against this. Evaluation based upon task completion and student improvement occurred once students had submitted the task and feedback had been given. Further refinement of the teaching programs then occurred.

CALP has been a successful initiative. Student assignment submission rates, individual improvement, explicit teaching of criteria and smoother academic transition from the junior to the senior campus has been observed. Conversations across campuses are of a highly professional and collaborative nature. The clear focus on assessment has strengthened the College ethos.

Callaghan College is a multi-campus New South Wales Department of Education and Communities (NSWDEC) secondary college located in the northwest corridor of Newcastle. The College consists of Wallsend and Waratah Technology Campuses for Years 7-10 and Jesmond Senior College Campus for Years 11-12. The College has approximately 2400 students and over 300 staff (160 teachers) spread over the three campuses. The principals of Callaghan College initiated the **College Assessment for Learning Program (CALP)**, in partnership with Macquarie University, in order to:

- Improve the learning outcomes for students in the middle and upper bands of achievement in external examinations. Data analysis had found that these students were not progressing as academically successfully as those students in the lower bands. Furthermore, teachers had reported concerns about the student completion of assessment tasks, the quality of submitted work and the level of engagement and understanding of the task requirements. This was a common theme across campuses.
- Strengthen professional conversations between teachers on the three campuses as a vehicle for embedding change processes in assessment across the College.
- Improve the transition processes and curriculum continuum between campuses for students and staff.

Over \$70,000 was provided by the College to support this eighteen month commitment to CALP

which became the focus for all College professional learning programs (executive conferences, Key Learning Area teacher conferences and School Development Days). A CALP Co ordinator was appointed to work one day per week on this program.

This professional learning initiative was based on the **Backward Mapping Process** that was developed and trialled at Waratah Technology Campus with successful student outcomes. This process was led by Judy Adnum, the then Hunter/ Central Coast Secondary Literacy Consultant.

## Leadership of CALP

The philosophy underpinning CALP was parallel leadership, teacher leadership and substantive teacher conversations (Crowther et al 2002).

Strategic and management decisions were made by the College principals, the campus executive members and the *CALP Brains' Trust*. The *Trust* was composed of the College Principal, teacher leaders from each campus, the CALP Co ordinator, the academic partner (Judy Adnum), two Highly Accomplished Teachers (one from a partner primary school) and the Hunter Central Coast Regional Literacy Consultant. The membership of the Brains' Trust grew throughout the program as more teacher leaders took ownership of the program.

These three groups worked collaboratively to refine the Backward Mapping Model and to determine the method of implementation. After each implementation phase teachers' feedback was analysed and formed the basis of the next phase of CALP delivery.

## Backward Mapping in Ten Steps Model

This model was further developed by the *CALP Brains' Trust* and was continually refined throughout the program as teacher feedback was received. It is based on the NSW DEC's documents 'Curriculum Planning, Programming, Assessing and Reporting to Parents K-12'(2008), 'Policy and implementation strategies for the education of gifted and talented students: Support package: Curriculum differentiation (2004)' and the NSW Quality Teaching Framework(2003).

Extensive professional learning was delivered to familiarise staff with every step of the Model. This formed the framework for teacher conversations around the development of assessment tasks. College resources were developed to support the implementation of CALP. This included teacher checklists, professional readings and student feedback surveys, which were available for teachers on the College SharePoint site. Teachers were encouraged to post all of their work on this site to improve communication across the College.

The current Model is summarised below.

Table 1

*Backward Mapping in 10 Steps Model*

	Steps	Checklist
1.	Highlight the BOS Key Words as they appear in “the learn” to statements. Take note of the level of difficulty of each Key Word.	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.	With deep understanding, or Key Concepts in mind, revisit the syllabus outcomes, specifically the “learn to” and the accompanying “learn about” statements for the chosen topic.	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.	Compare the existing assessment task for the chosen topic in terms of how tightly it currently matches the syllabus requirements and how it progresses in terms of Bloom’s and Frangenheim’s hierarchy e.g. lower order thinking to higher order thinking.	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.	Rewrite the assessment task so that students can demonstrate their understanding of the key concepts(s) or deep understanding(s). This task should match exactly with the New South Wales syllabus requirements in terms of the “learn to” and “learn about” statements for the topic. Through using the “learn to” and “learn about” statements, teachers will have ensured that they have created differentiated tasks and that there is continuum of academic rigour from Stage 5 to Stage 6.	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.	Create a marking criteria using the same language as the task in order to provide clarity for students.	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.	Teachers create a best practice work sample including the suggested layout (scaffold). These will highlight teachers’ expectations for the task and provide a model of best practice for students.	<input type="checkbox"/>
7.	Revise existing topic teaching and learning programs and include the focus questions of “What opportunities will there be to experience and explore key ideas? “How will the work be organised for maximum engagement and effectiveness?”	<input type="checkbox"/>
8.	Teachers distribute assessment task to students at the beginning of the topic, with the work sample, explicit marking criteria and the scaffold. This will ensure that assessment is an integral component of teaching and learning practices throughout the topic.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	During the marking of the assessment task teachers will gather diagnostic data on individual students’ strengths and weaknesses <b>based on the identified criteria</b> . This will include the engagement of students in the task and the quality of the students’ responses including demonstration of the key concept of big ideas and “learn to” and “learn about” statements of the teaching.	<input type="checkbox"/>
10.	Teachers will further refine the assessment task and the teaching and learning program. They will also develop learning materials to meet students’ deficits and these materials will be added to the teaching programs.	<input type="checkbox"/>

## CALP Implementation Strategies

There were three implementation strands

### 1. Learning innovation Teams (LITs)

These Teams were composed of three teachers from the same Key Learning area, one from each campus. In order to improve student transition processes and the curriculum continuum LITs worked on assessment tasks for students in Years 10 and 11. The CALP Co ordinator worked with the Teams to implement a structured, common approach to assessment based on the **Backward Mapping in Ten Steps Model**. The teachers in LITs met at least three times to work collaboratively through each stage of the Model to refine assessment tasks, deliver them to students, evaluate student performance and then further refine the task and the teaching and learning programs. Members of LITs made regular reports to their College Key Learning Area teams at their **College Teacher Conferences** and School Development Days about their progress.

At this stage 80 teachers have participated in LITs.

### 2. School Development Days

Two School Development Days were dedicated to identify teacher professional learning needs to support the **Backward Mapping in Ten Steps Model**. Showcasing the work of the LITs was a fundamental component of each Day. External and NSW DEC consultants were employed to deliver targeted training in identified areas.

### 3. College Key Learning Area Teacher Conferences

Teachers met for approximately ninety minutes in Key Learning Area groups after school once a term. Discussions were led by the head teacher and the LITs and focused on progress with the **Backward Mapping in Ten Steps Model** on specific assessment tasks and future directions.

## Findings

Formal teacher feedback was obtained through evaluation surveys at each CALP professional learning program and LIT meeting. A summary of the findings is provided below.

Table 2

Professional Learning Activity	Teacher's Satisfaction Rating for the Event			
	Excellent	Good	Satisfactory	Poor
Learning Innovation Team meetings	44%	43%	12%	1%
KLA Conferences	23%	46%	27%	4%
School Development Days (2 days)	27%	53%	18%	2%

Throughout the duration of CALP there was a continual increase in the satisfaction ratings over time as teachers took more ownership and became more familiar with the **Backward Mapping in Ten Steps Model**.

Fifty-five teachers were also randomly surveyed after the thirteen months of implementation, to further evaluate perceptions of CALP. The survey tool was developed by the CALP Brains' Trust. In summary

- 86% felt CALP had a positive impact on quality assessment tasks.
- 76% felt CALP had a positive impact on aligned marking criteria.
- 84% felt CALP had a positive impact on demonstrating best practice work samples.
- 88% felt CALP had a positive impact on clear communication of task expectations.
- 86% felt CALP had a positive impact on effective and relevant feedback with task return.
- 84% felt CALP had a positive impact on further refinement of other tasks.

## Improvements in Student Learning Outcomes

William et al (2004) have reported that improvements in student learning in terms of enhanced results in external examinations are a very slow process. Some assessment tasks have been refined but will not be given to students until next year. Consequently, it was not expected that we would see improved student results in external examinations in the first year of implementation and this was generally the case. The teacher random survey data demonstrates, however, that there has been a significant improvement in the completion rates and quality of student responses to the improved assessment tasks. In summary teachers reported an:

- 88% improvement was noticed in students' achievement level.
- 83% improvement was noticed in students' task completion.
- 81% improvement was noticed in students' task submission.
- 88% improvement was noticed in students' engagement.

## Some Teacher Comments from LIT Evaluations and the Random Teacher Survey

“Our faculty will now be writing a new program and creating new and improved quality tasks based on our results and discussions from the CALP project.”

“It was found that the assessment of some tasks did not directly relate to the syllabus outcomes. We have already begun delivery of the updated unit and noticed a difference in the students understanding, relevance and confidence in completing the assessment tasks.”

“I gave the students the updated version of my task and we discussed the ‘before and after’ dimensions of it which had been changed. The students certainly are expecting meaningful rubrics and clear instructions and do appreciate the changes.”

“The 2010 task had a high non-submission rate. In 2011 100% of students submitted the task.”

“Increased completion rate from 80 to 90% due to the CALP modifications. The same class as a previous task had a completion of 50%.”

“From participating in the CALP learning I learnt the importance of explicit quality criteria and not assuming students know higher order verb instructions in tasks.”

The professional dialogue between staff, the continuity of programming and learning from more experienced staff has been strength of this program.”

“CALP is a fantastic way to prepare students for curriculum continuum and transition and an excellent way to network with College staff.”

## Conclusion

The CALP initiative has been a highly successful model for professional learning. The level of teacher substantive teacher conversations across campuses is of a highly professional and collaborative nature. Faculties are working towards a smoother transition for students and ensuring a continuum of skills and content. The clear strategic focus on assessment and the **Backward Mapping in Ten Steps Model** has strengthened the College ethos.

While more than half of the teachers have participated in the LIT phase, others are motivated to be involved in LITs in the future.

Assessment tasks and teaching and learning programs have collaboratively been improved in terms of academic rigour, enhanced student engagement and student understanding of task expectations. The **Backward Mapping in Ten Steps Model** has been adopted across the College as a framework for the delivery of assessment tasks.

Most importantly, the expectations around assessment for learning are much clearer across the College. This has resulted in improved student completion rates for assessment tasks, greater student engagement in the teaching and learning process and an improvement in the quality of students' responses to assessment tasks.

## Future Directions

- The LITs continue until all teachers have participated.
- The consistent adoption of student feedback on assessment tasks.
- Digital student portfolio
- Linking CALP more closely to reporting and the Australian Curriculum.

## References

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