

How to achieve continual improvement in teaching outcomes through structured feedback

Bill Minnis on the value of well designed feedback



'If you do not know where you come from, then you don't know where you are, and if you don't know where you are, then you don't know where you're going. And if you don't know where you're going, you're probably going wrong.'
Terry Pratchett, Author

Educator Impact (EI) CEO and co-founder Ken Wallace comes from a family of educators "It's in my bones ... my grandfather was a principal, mum is a teacher, my wife is an academic, my brother and my sister-in-law are teachers, and my brother-in-law Dom Thurbon is a founder of growth strategy consultants the Karrisins Group."

In the education space, Karrisins runs high-level workshops on financial literacy, cyber safety, health other topics, using a framework for best practice tool to give feedback to workshop facilitators that helps them to improve their presentation skills.

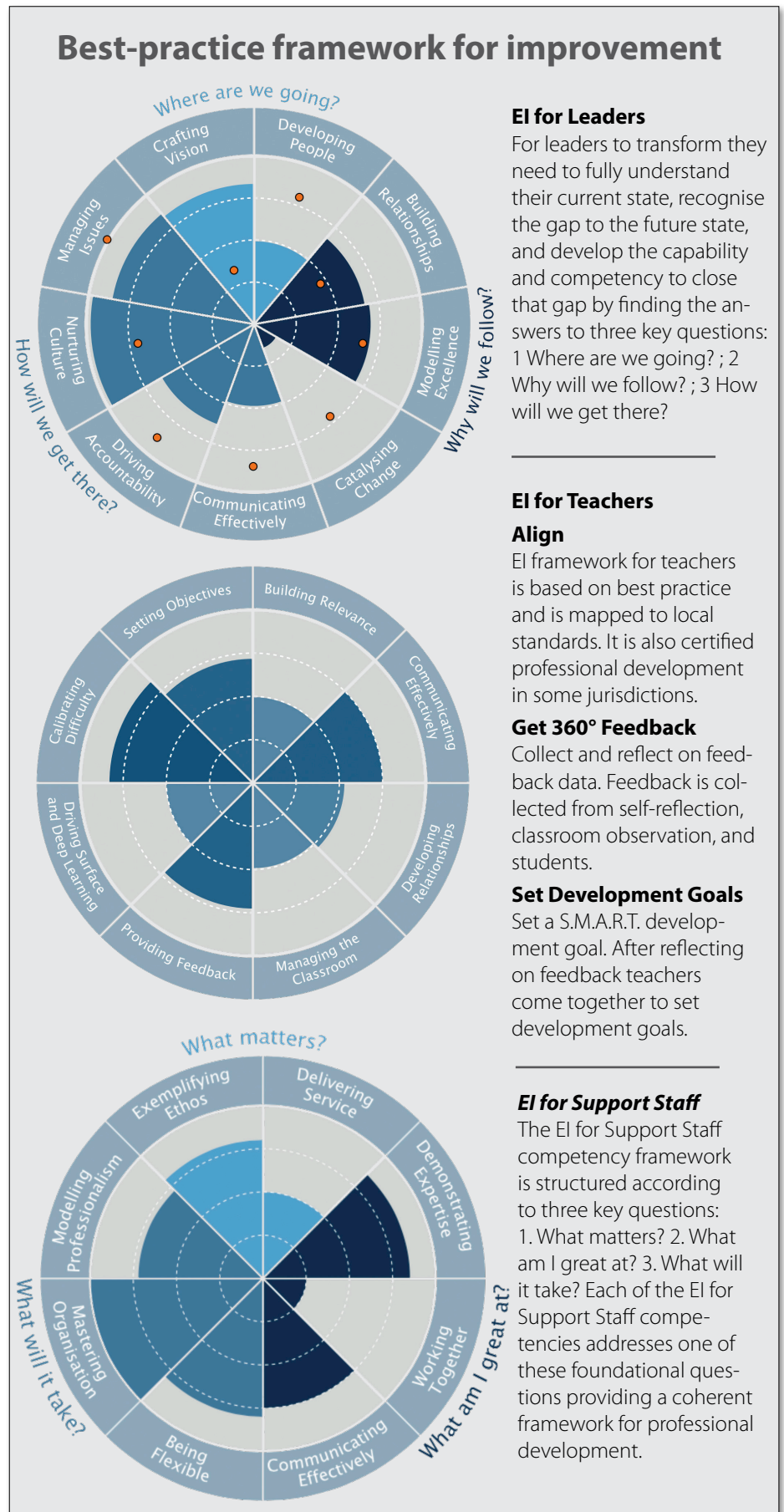
Wallace says: "In 2012 in the United States, there was a lot of discussion about the measures that affected the quality and effectiveness of teaching – student voice, student feedback and classroom relations – and how these all fitted together.

"About the same time principals, attending Karrisins' workshops started to ask whether the framework for best practice tool could be adapted for the school context, but it wasn't really suitable, so we thought 'Why don't we take our expertise around behaviour change and see if it would work in the teaching context'? We asked ourselves 'If you were to give teachers feedback to help them improve their practice, what would you give feedback on ... and what are the important competencies?'

"We did a lot of research and pilot testing during 2012 and this led to the creation of our 360° Feedback tool. Our first school signed up at the end of 2013 and we haven't looked back since."

Fast forward to 2019, when Wallace expects that the number of schools working with EI will pass 500, with roughly one-third in each of the Government, Independent and Catholic sectors.

"One of the first schools to use EI is still with us six years later and the Principal says that is has been a transformative experience for him and his leadership



EI for Leaders

For leaders to transform they need to fully understand their current state, recognise the gap to the future state, and develop the capability and competency to close that gap by finding the answers to three key questions: 1 Where are we going? ; 2 Why will we follow? ; 3 How will we get there?

EI for Teachers

Align

EI framework for teachers is based on best practice and is mapped to local standards. It is also certified professional development in some jurisdictions.

Get 360° Feedback

Collect and reflect on feedback data. Feedback is collected from self-reflection, classroom observation, and students.

Set Development Goals

Set a S.M.A.R.T. development goal. After reflecting on feedback teachers come together to set development goals.

EI for Support Staff

The EI for Support Staff competency framework is structured according to three key questions: 1. What matters? 2. What am I great at? 3. What will it take? Each of the EI for Support Staff competencies addresses one of these foundational questions providing a coherent framework for professional development.

team and his staff, “Wallace says. “The kind of environment that they work in is super effective ... everyone works together to achieve Improvement.” [https://www.educatorimpact.com/free-casestudy-download-school-improvement]

The beauty of EI, he says, lies in its accessibility and affordability. It can be done entirely online and it's infinitely scalable to make participating as easy for a rural school with two teachers as it is for a city school with hundreds of teaching staff.

“What I love about technology is you can make things available to people who wouldn't normally get access. Leaders and teachers in government schools or small schools that don't have the budget, or can't access quality professional education because they are too remote, can use the same tools as their peers in the city.”

The first step to becoming an EI school is a structured online conversation with an EI Customer Success Team member. The aim is to find out if the school is ready for the journey, what the school has done before, and what it wants to achieve. Using these data, EI uses this information to customise the experience and make sure that it's right for the school.

For schools using EI, many will kick off with the *EI for Leaders* program before moving on to teachers and later to support staff.

The leaders program is used to get 360° feedback from peers, supervisors, other staff and through self-assessment. The data are collected through the EI platform where individual feedback summaries give each participant an insight into their practice and identifies development opportunities through easy-to-interpret graphs and digestible data.

After reflecting on the feedback, the leaders come together to set development goals and progress towards achievement is tracked in the EI Portal where they can also access development resources that can be shared and rated. The portal is also a secure place to record learning achievement and development conversations.

With the current position established and the school's goals defined, the next step is to launch *EI for Teachers*. The basic 360° Feedback process is the same, with introduction packs and videos added to explain what it's all about and how the teachers will benefit personally and professionally.

At every stage of the process teachers are supported online

with helpful prompts and suggestions. Wallace emphasises that it's not about 'judging', 'scoring' or 'ranking', where a teacher who comes out with a less than perfect score might panic about how that may affect their end-of-year sit-down with their head of department or the principal.

He says: “EI is about formative development and building relationships, it's not about judgment. If you want to build a culture of continuing improvement in the school, teachers must feel that they can give feedback and receive it from people within the culture, not from some external consultant ... to build this capability in your school you must have the people in it, doing it.

“At schools where there might be a culture of apprehension about how the data will be used, we recommend that the consent arrangement is that the teacher will have their own confidential feedback and they can choose to share it, or not ... their feedback is their data and they will not be held accountable to that feedback.”

Moving on, structured classroom observations establish the starting point for the teacher. Choosing who will do the observations is the teacher's decision. Most start by asking a close colleague to sit in and fill out a survey, so they know that the environment will be supportive and constructive.

However, as time goes on and teachers come to understand the value of observations in their own professional development, they tend to seek out observers from a different department, or leaders or managers ... even the principal to get a range of perspectives and ideas.

At first glance some might think that asking students to give feedback on their teacher's classroom skills is asking for trouble, but Wallace asserts that this doesn't happen. “Students don't say 'teachers are rubbish' in their survey, they provide really good quality data, they don't muck around. In fact, 65% of teachers in Australia will set a development goal in the area that students have identified as an area of improvement opportunity.”

He stresses that it's an ongoing process of goal setting, evaluation, gathering data, assessing the data and going around again.

“The idea that 'we'll just give feedback to you once this year and never again' is absurd ... it takes time to change a culture; It's a process of continual improvement because teachers want to know 'how am I going now, what do I work on now?’

“Done properly it is transformative.”

“Students don't say 'teachers are rubbish' in their survey, they provide really good quality data, they don't muck around. In fact, 65% of teachers in Australia will set a development goal in the area that students have identified as an area of **improvement opportunity”**



Education Today's News Digest

Know it all!
The week's education news,
views and thinking in your
mailbox every Monday

Subscribe at www.educationtoday.com.au