“When tempest-tossed, embrace chaos”: Navigating strategic school change
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I’m not afraid of storms, for I’m learning how to sail my ship. Louisa May Alcott

Objectives or purpose
This paper is grounded in the empirical work of one independent Australian school. Wesley College Perth is presented as a case study of leading capacity for change intended to positively impact students.

From the collective development of student-centred strategic impacts to the piloting and implementation of a whole-school model of professional growth, this paper shares one school’s ongoing iterative journey to develop the collective capacity of everyone from the classroom to the boardroom.

Perspective(s) or theoretical framework
Emerging from a social constructionist view of learning, this case study shows a school’s iterative engagement with inductive and deductive methods in order to continuously improve within the possibilities and limitations of its own context. We view schools as dynamical, adaptive systems (Garmston & Wellman, 2013) in which seemingly minor moments can have substantial impacts on the school, its individuals, and their practices.

Methods, techniques or modes of inquiry
Drawing on literature and ongoing cycles of organisational action research in one Australian school, this paper knits together a web of interrelated interventions designed to build capacity for change, including strategic planning, a coaching model, leadership development, academic intervention, co-curricular opportunities and data measures.

Data sources/evidence
This paper shares data and data mechanisms that Wesley College Perth has generated and used in order to make strategic decisions, structure resourcing provisions, build teacher capacity and improve student achievement.

Results and conclusions/points of view
The case study reveals the challenges associated with a student-centred strategic plan versus a traditional organisational approach to school planning. It recognises the dilemmas schools face when given the choice of strategic impact over program initiatives. It highlights the associated complexities of meeting the desires of teachers, students, and parents, demonstrating the importance of accepting past failures, building pathways for successful change, being open to stakeholder feedback, and valuing differences between staff capacity building, engagement, and accountability.

Educational importance of this study for theory, practice, and/or policy
This case study argues for changes in strategic planning approaches to enact long-lasting and meaningful change to build student engagement, improve student performance, and prepare students for successful futures. It identifies the need for schools to develop meaningful and manageable evidence gathering techniques to measure progress towards strategic goals and implement effective communication strategies with stakeholder groups to develop a shared meaning of success.
Connection to the conference theme: Deepening school change for scaling: Principles, pathways and partnerships
While change in any one school is dependent on context, this paper highlights the deliberate principles, pathways, and partnerships that can be leveraged to enact change to strategic planning and capacity building within one school. This paper serves as a stimulus to other education institutions wishing to re-conceptualise their approach to strategic planning with a focus on the learner within a traditional organisational frame. It also identifies a suite of complementary capacity building initiatives, bringing to life the strategic goals of the school.

References