

Pathways to whole school improvement through an explicit, language-based pedagogy

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

About this summary

This executive summary is intended for educators and policy makers interested in evidence-based pedagogical interventions that have the potential for whole school improvement. The summary synthesises a more extensive report *Pathways to whole school improvement through an explicit, language-based pedagogy* and draws out some of the key findings.

Whole school intervention

The implementation of an explicit, language-based pedagogy has been evaluated in order to determine the value of such pedagogy as a whole school intervention. The evaluation was conducted in three schools in Victoria which set out to implement this pedagogy across all subject areas. The focus of the evaluation was on the improvement in student's results as well as the broader impact of the pedagogical shift on teachers and students.

The interventions were based on the Lexis Education training materials, which are underpinned by the systemic functional linguistic model of language. The model emphasises the centrality of language to all educational activities and affirms that, in order to promote educational success for students, explicit understandings about language should be made available to teachers and students.

Improved results

The data collected as a part of the evaluation comes from national (*NAPLAN*) and state (*Victorian Certificate of Education*) testing as well as internal assessments based on the South Australian *Language and Literacy Levels*. Analysis of the data shows significant improvement in students' results in all three schools as a result of this intervention.

The first example (**Figure 1**) comes from *NAPLAN* results for school #1. This school was located in a low socio-economic area. The results show a marked improvement in growth data, two years into the implementation. Here, the mean students' growth for all literacy components improved significantly. It was the first time in the history of this school that the results showed improvement well above the state levels.

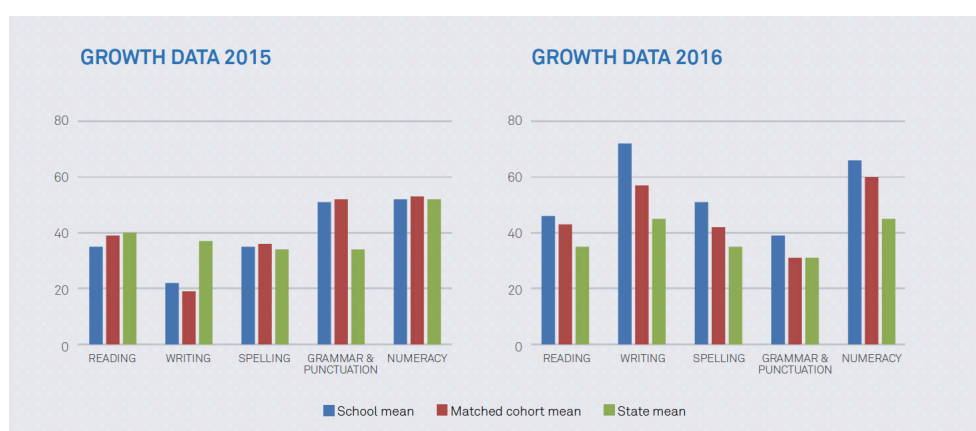


Figure 1: Naplan mean growth

The second example (**Figure 2**) comes from school #2, a large college with a high population of students from language backgrounds other than English. The data shows improved *VCE* scores (the *VCE* score is a median Study Score for all of the Year 12 students in a school). Here, the implementation began in 2017 and the *VCE* results improved significantly a year later, and, despite the pressures of extensive lockdowns in 2020, the higher score has been maintained.

Year	VCE result
2015	24
2016	24
2017	23
2018	26
2019	26
2020	26

Figure 2: Summary of VCE results between 2015 and 2020

The final example comes from an intensive English language school. This school was not subject to any of the national or state assessments. The graph below shows the results of the internal assessments using the

Language and Literacy Levels, a reporting and assessment tool underpinned by a functional model of language. As measured by this tool, mainstream students would be expected to advance one level per year.

Figure 3 maps out the average growth for secondary students in Terms 2, 3 and 4 for 2017 and Terms 1 and 2 for 2018. The first two columns indicate that students were able to show growth of just over 1.2 levels in a single term in the early stage of the intervention. With increased familiarity with the pedagogy, this growth increased to over 1.4 levels per term and, thus, improving close to 6 levels per year. While students beginning English tend to make quicker progress through the lower levels, the outcomes reported exceeded all such expectations.

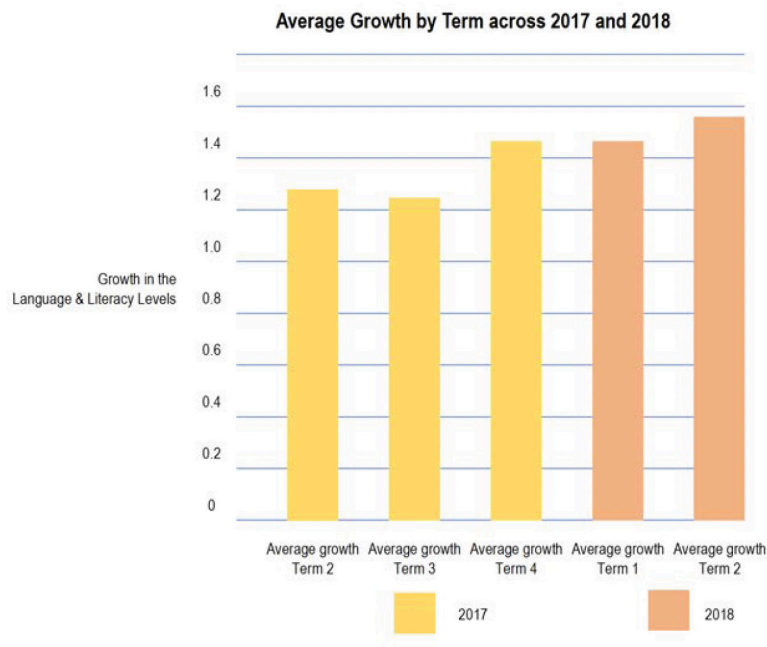


Figure 3: Average growth by terms across 2017 and 2018

Broader impact of pedagogical shift

There was a range of positive effects on teachers and students resulting from the interventions. The following points were consistently reported in the data.

Impact on teachers

- Teachers experienced greater effectiveness in providing feedback to students struggling with academic writing.
- They felt better equipped to assist students to comprehend requirements and produce texts that met the required educational standards.
- Teachers were able to involve all students in activities; both weaker and more advanced students improved in the process.
- They experienced more structure and consistency in classroom

practices, which greatly helped students to learn and to comprehend tasks.

- Teachers also reported increased clarity about what they needed to do in the classroom, why they needed to do it and how to do it.
- Teachers' confidence in their own pedagogical efforts increased.

Impact on students

- Students writing improved significantly, in particular writing academic texts.
- Their command of academic language improved.
- Teachers reported that students, even weaker and literacy support students, took up the new pedagogy with great enthusiasm.
- Students were better able to comprehend questions and tasks.
- Students' engagement improved markedly.
- Their confidence increased and they felt more capable of doing the assignments.
- Students' behaviour in classrooms improved as well; they were more easily absorbed in the tasks at hand.
- Non-attendance was somewhat decreased; students were more interested in the tasks and confident in their own ability to complete them and thus more willing to attend classes.

Impact on the schools

- Collaboration of staff within the faculties and within the whole school increased in all schools, together with a sense of partnership and teamwork.
- The schools generated high levels of expertise, internal capacity and know-how. The reliance on external consultancy for future professional development decreased significantly.
- The schools created a collection of materials, documents, units of work and model texts that continue to support teachers and reflect schools' pedagogical shift.

Final comments

The results of the evaluation showed significant, whole school improvement in student learning outcomes, which, in worldwide literature, is considered to be a rare and noteworthy change to result from a teacher professional development program. Apart from the improvements in students' assessment scores, the shift in pedagogy has had a positive impact on a number of teaching and learning practices within the schools, including students' behaviour and engagement. The schools became more collaborative and increased their internal expertise and know-how.