

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

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This report is an evaluation of the implementation of an explicit, language-based pedagogy across three schools in Victoria, Australia, who set out to implement this pedagogy across all subject areas. The data was collected between 2016 and 2021 and includes both quantitative and qualitative data in the form of students' results on national, state and school-driven assessments as well as formal interviews, document perusal and informal conversations. The analysis of the data showed that significant improvement in students' results across the whole school is possible with this type of pedagogy. Furthermore, the evaluation examined and documented the impact of the new skills and understandings on teaching and learning practices in these schools and on students' engagement and attitudes.

INTRODUCTION

Over the last twenty years, there has been a growing number of pedagogical programs, tools and strategies that aim to help teachers and schools to improve students' learning outcomes. From simplistic, quick-fix strategies to more comprehensive pedagogical programs, it has become increasingly easy for a school to become lost in a glut of these offerings. With the current wealth of such programs, it would seem logical for educators to expect some reliable evidence of what they can expect from each one of them.

Unfortunately, for many programs, there has been very little evidence, beyond anecdotal, as to how well they work and whether or not the time and effort invested in them by schools and educators would pay off (Guskey 2014, 2021). In fact, a few years ago a synthesis of research on professional learning concluded that most professional development for teachers has no effect on students' learning, nor does it have any impact on teaching practices (Gulamhussein 2013). And yet, a growing emphasis on accountability calls for a more reliable verification of what a program can do, how it could do it and in what context, based on thorough evaluations rather than hopeful thinking or anecdotes.

Such evidence is not only vital in order for schools to find their way through an oversupply of interventions, advice and strategies, but even more so in order to guide educators towards the best solutions for their particular schools (Gusky 2002). The need for such targeted and effective solutions is clear as evidenced by the declining students' results in many countries including Australia (PISA 2018).

Examining, in a comprehensive way, the likely impact of any given program not only helps educational institutions to make decisions about what programs are best suited for their particular school, it also helps to unclutter teachers' increasingly busy schedules, which are often burdened with many potentially inadequate professional development programs. Presented with clear evidence, instead of applying a mishmash of strategies and tools in the hope that some of the benefits would stick, educators can devise a more comprehensive approach to investing in the most suitable programs for their students' needs, and direct school resources towards worthy improvements.

It is clear that an extensive evaluation needs to be a part of any well-intentioned teacher development program. However, in order to thoroughly examine a program that claims to 'improve' things, one needs to define what the 'improvement' actually means and how to examine the program's effectiveness in a specific context. Clearly, an effective professional development program in education is not merely one that provides some good ideas to attending teachers but one that has a noticeable and sustainable impact on students' learning and results.

Paradoxically, while the improved students' results are a holy grail of educational institutions, many educators contend that expecting a teacher development program to deliver measurable student improvement is not feasible for most programs (Guskey 2014). In his essay on planning of educational intervention, Guskey reports that many educational administrators believe their accountability ends with improving teachers' skills rather than student outcomes (Guskey 2014). And yet, it would be difficult to reject the author's assertion that, unless there is a measurable improvement in student learning and engagement, it is difficult to perceive value in any such program.

Consequently, the evaluation presented in this report was designed to consider students' improvement as a verification of the effectiveness of the explicit, language-based pedagogy delivered across a whole school. The statistical data collected from whole school testing, at the national

and state levels as well as teachers' accounts of improvement and in-class testing are considered as a gauge of the whole school students' improvement. The improvement in the national and state assessments for a whole school are, according to educators, the hardest to achieve and as such provide substantial confirmation of the value of any educational program.

The investigation into the value of the explicit, language-based pedagogy considered more than students' numerical improvement alone. Keeping in mind that a truly successful professional development program delivered across a whole school is likely to affect a range of outcomes (Darling-Hammond et al. 2017), the evaluation aimed to examine several changes in teaching and learning practices, students' attendance and engagement and the way the implementations affected staff and leadership in the schools.

The multifaceted and in-depth evaluation was made possible by engaging with a small number of schools and adopting a range of data collection instruments. In using both quantitative and qualitative data, the evaluation examined the results and the context in which these results arose. Through the analysis of the interviews, perusal of documents and conducting of many informal and semi-formal conversations, the evaluation was able to engage with the staff and their accounts of how the pedagogy and the processes of implementing it affected them and their students and how it impacted classroom performance and behaviours.

Because of the whole school focus in the implementation, the evaluation examined not only a range of potential improvements but also considered teachers' experiences, critical decisions made by school leaders as well as supportive structures developed in the process. In doing so, the examination set out to demonstrate a range of improvement across many aspects of teaching and learning practices while reflecting on the specific efforts that underpinned these complex implementations.

Investigating these efforts helped to better understand the factors which contributed to the successes achieved by the schools. The qualitative component of the data, with the focus on teachers' spoken accounts, experiences and reports as well as the details of the time lines and steps taken, opened the door to exploration of the know-how of these projects. Since the interventions evaluated here aimed at the whole school improvement rather than the upskilling of a few individual teachers, details of the know-how were of importance. The content analysis of the qualitative data helped to better understand the factors which enhanced or hindered the effectiveness of these endeavours. These results will hopefully serve as a road map for educators willing to embrace this pedagogy at a whole school level.

The report below begins with a glimpse into the pedagogy that underpinned the implementation, including the structure of the training and what it aims to do. What follows is a description of the context in which the implementation took place, namely the three schools that undertook the pedagogy and participated in the evaluation. This includes a summary of challenges or other factors that motivated these schools to undertake such a complex program.

Parts 2 and 3 of this report look at the results in the context of these challenges and expectations. This includes numerical results, taken from the state and national testing as well as internal assessments done within schools (Part 2) . Following this, the qualitative results are discussed in terms of the impact on teachers and their practice as well as students' engagement, behaviour and attitudes (Part 3). Part 4 summarises the steps taken by the schools and the factors that best support such implementations.

PART 1

Pedagogy

The pedagogical model that underpinned the implementation was based on an explicit, language-based pedagogy. This pedagogy draws on the systemic functional linguistic model as developed by MAK Halliday (Halliday and Matthiessen 2014) as well as a number of practical and theoretical tools, including an explicit Teaching and Learning Cycle and genre theory developed by J Martin (2008).

This approach to teaching has been consistently advocated by educational consultants, Brian Dare and John Polias (currently working under the banner of Lexis Education. Their efforts to engage with the functional model of language, and an explicit teaching and learning cycle, and to make such challenging but well scaffolded pedagogy available to teachers worldwide, have spanned more than three decades. In that time, they have focused on 'translating' the theoretical model into practical ways for teachers to engage with the functional model of language in the classroom. Over these three decades, they focused on developing teachers' understandings about language and its structure. The courses developed by Lexis Education provide a theoretical but also a practical basis for teachers to take up this pedagogical model and apply it in the classroom.

The pedagogy embraced by Dare and Polias assumes the centrality of language to every schooling activity and that students' ability to use language, to comprehend and compose texts at all levels of schooling is a foundation of their academic success. In this model, language underpins all learning and is the means through which students communicate their knowledge. And while communicating one's knowledge may seem like a straightforward skill, reading, speaking and writing about the content of different subject areas requires language that is not always easily accessible to students. Such communication requires more formal, abstract language that enables students to reflect, critique and generalise what they learn and, most importantly, convey their knowledge. This approach is said to provide theoretical and practical skills for teachers to address students' literacy in the most comprehensive way.

The model of training contains two levels: tutor and teacher training. Under this model, a selected group of teachers trained as tutors later deliver the course to their colleagues. This is considered the most efficient way to engage with the pedagogy. Taken within the whole school context,

the benefits of the two-tier training are greatly enhanced allowing the school to undertake a comprehensive training program. And while some external consultancy is recommended during the implementation to assure the fidelity of the model and optimal progression, this model minimises the reliance on the external consultancy over time.

The whole-school approach is said to have many benefits that go beyond self-sufficiency and maintaining the pedagogical expertise by a school. These benefits have been confirmed in the evaluation and are summarised later in this report. Some of these benefits include an increased engagement of all teachers with this pedagogy and greater collaboration among staff. Although, this comes with a layer of complexity and demand for resources, the evaluation here confirms that with careful management, planning and extensive support to all staff, a whole school uptake of this pedagogy can lead to improved results across the whole school and greatly enriched teaching and learning practices.

Case studies

Case study 1: Southern Secondary College

Southern Secondary College is a medium-size high school situated in the outer suburbs of Melbourne about a 75-minute drive from the city. The school employs about 60-70 teachers and provides publicly funded education for students from year 7 to 12. With a growing number of private schools in the area, the school receives a disproportionate number of students from families with the lowest socio-economic profile. The students at the school reflect the diverse community of this area and come from a variety of ethnic and racial backgrounds. Currently, 12% of students are classified as English as an Additional Language, and 2% are Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islanders.

Implementation

Following the appointment of the current principal, the goal of improving the literacy and numeracy of the students in the Southern Secondary College became a priority. After trialling a few smaller programs with no clear benefits, the school began a search for a more comprehensive pedagogical upskilling that could hopefully help students to achieve better results.

In 2014, following teachers' recommendations, the principal considered the possibility of adopting an explicit, language-based pedagogy. After a brief period of discussion and planning, a decision was made to trial this pedagogy with a group of 20 of the most enthusiastic teachers. These teachers then undertook the Literacy for learning (LfL) teacher training course (Dare & Polias 2013) and were asked to trial the pedagogy in their classrooms. Based on their positive, and often quite enthusiastic reports, a decision was made to implement this pedagogy across the whole school and all subject areas.

From this initial group a number of potential tutors were identified from

this initial group and subsequently undertook the LfL tutor training course. Once trained, these tutors proceeded to train all remaining staff and they were given ample time to teach and model this pedagogy in the school. All training and further support was delivered during school hours to stress the importance of the undertaking; it was to be recognised as an important initiative at the centre of all the schools' activities. For the same reason, the principal also undertook the training and participated in some of the follow-up activities.

Furthermore, the principal made the teacher training and coaching compulsory for all teachers, thus assuring the optimal uptake of this pedagogy. Teachers, generously supported by coaches and mentors, were expected to use this pedagogy and assess their students' improvement accordingly. The assessment consisted of pre- and post-evaluations, wherein teachers collected two sets of the students' work, one prior to the delivery of a unit of work and one post-delivery. This measure helped teachers see the students' progress and the impact of the new pedagogy on the effectiveness of their teaching practices. The results also helped to assign coaching hours to teachers who struggled.

Due to this ongoing assessment, the positive impact of the new pedagogy became obvious to the staff and principal. Witnessing these changes further motivated teachers, especially those who were reluctant, to engage with such explicit, language-based practices. Once the improvement in the whole school results was officially confirmed by the state and national assessment tests, the school became something of a beacon to teachers from similar schools, who were trying to understand the reasons behind such a marked improvement.

While it proved itself successful, this approach was also resource demanding. Allowing time for training and mentoring during school hours was costly. However, this approach ensured that all teachers were generously supported and thus were able to effectively and accurately apply the new pedagogy in the classroom.

A consultant, Brian Dare, was involved with the school in all stages of implementation, which was important to the staff and the principal. He provided support, advised on the best steps forward and expanded the staff's understanding of the model and its applications. Moreover, it assured the fidelity of the work done by the teachers, and thus enabled the school to become, eventually, self-sufficient, cutting the cost of the professional development in the long term.

Data collection

The data was collected in October 2018. Numerical data consisted of the results of the national (NAPLAN¹) and state (VCE²) assessment in the years 2014-2018. Qualitative data consisted of interviews with teachers and the

1 NAPLAN is a National Assessment Program in Australia that annually assesses students in years 3,5,7 and 9.

2 VCE is Victorian Certificate of Education with the results collected from the year 12 exams.

principal, perusal of documents and informal conversations. Because the evaluation was conducted four years after the implementation began, it relied on retrospective reflection on the challenges that the school faced prior to adopting the new pedagogy.

Challenges

The biggest challenges for the Southern Secondary College had to do with the low socio-economic location of the school and having to cater for the most disadvantaged in the area. The challenges faced by the teachers had to do with the students' difficulty in expressing themselves in writing; in more general terms, their literacy and numeracy levels.

Indeed, many teachers reflected that, prior to the implementation, it was the written component of their subjects that posed the biggest challenge. Written communication, using formal, academic language as well as comprehension of questions and textbooks were the biggest barriers to the students' success. In the interviews, teachers recalled how difficult it was for them to provide effective feedback or to support students in becoming successful in their academic writing. Interestingly, while written language was a barrier in all subjects, it was an Art and Technology teacher who spoke to the principal asking for help in learning how to help her students write better. She later told us that her students could do art work really well, but they lacked the skills to speak and write about it.

At the time of the evaluation, many of the challenges to do with low socio-economic location were still present. However, the data showed that the way these were managed within each classroom in a more effective way.

Case study 2: Intensive English Language School (WELS)

The Western English Language School (WELS) is a government school for primary and secondary students newly arrived in Australia. The school is located on six campuses in the outer suburbs of Melbourne. Having little or no English, the students typically spend 6-12 months in this school until they are ready to enter mainstream schooling. The length of their stay depends on the students' age and previous education. The focus of their attendance is intensive learning of English as well as learning about Australian culture. English is taught through reading and writing across a range of curriculum areas, including Mathematics, Science, Art, and Humanities.

Implementation

Being an intensive English school, language has always been a focus and teachers across all subjects are well aware of the value of understanding linguistic patterns and structures. In this way, the transition towards an explicit, language-based pedagogy was the next logical step taken up by a small group of dedicated staff.

After attending a professional development course exploring the linguistic

patterns in science and delivered by John Polias, a small group of WELS teachers introduced the functional model of language explicitly in their classrooms. The positive results they began to witness generated excitement and positive expectation about “what could be possible” for them and their colleagues.

In the interviews, one of these teachers reflected on this experience as a “paradigm shift”, changing the way he thought about teaching and greatly impacting on his teaching practices. He also told us that trialling the pedagogy in his classroom made him realise how much the students “loved having the otherwise hidden workings of language made explicit to them.” Together with other enthusiastic teachers and the principal, they began exploring the possibility of bringing this pedagogy to other teachers in the school.

Unlike the other two case studies evaluated here, the motivation in WELS for the whole school implementation did not come from dissatisfaction with their results. Rather, it came from this early recognition that their pedagogy could be further enhanced. So, while there was no pressing need for a pedagogical makeover, the enthusiasm of staff for the new pedagogy created an impetus that resulted in exploring the practicalities of the whole school implementation of the model.

An important part of this exploration was a visit to a sister-centre in South Australia, a similar intensive English language school located in Adelaide, which, years earlier, introduced the explicit, language-based pedagogy across the whole school. In the interview, the principal reflected back on this visit: “The staff came back absolutely glowing. It was working!” In the face of the evidence and the enthusiasm of teachers, a whole school implementation was given the green light.

The school visit provided WELS with more than a final push towards this pedagogy. While in South Australia, the staff was able to inquire about the ‘hows’ of such a large undertaking and what exactly can be done to make it work. As a consequence, the visit gave leaders and teachers a clearer vision of what was possible but also how it could be achieved and what steps needed to be taken for the most effective implementation.

Following this advice, the staff focused not only on the training and implementation but also on resourcing the centre with new documents and materials that would reflect the new pedagogy. The new documentation included a comprehensive curriculum, new assessment tool and a wealth of other materials addressing primary and secondary settings.

All training was done in less than a year and was followed by a well-structured coaching program. Both training and coaching was compulsory for all teachers and was done during school hours. The most intensive one-to-one coaching and modelling was done directly after the training and was followed by peer-to-peer support. The downside of this ‘intensive’ upskill was that a few exceptional teachers were taken out of the classroom to train and coach other teachers. However, in the long term, the school benefited from this focused approach. Within a relatively brief time, all teachers were engaging with the new pedagogy, or at least some aspects of

it that were relevant to their subject.

Data collection

The data was collected three years after the training began. Quantitative data was based on internal assessment using the newly developed assessment tool. This tool was able to measure with much greater accuracy the intricacies of the students' use of relevant linguistic features and their progress over time. Qualitative data consisted of interviews, written documents and conversations with staff and the principal and was collected three years after the implementation began.

Challenges

The main challenge for this school was the ever-changing cohort of students. Newly arrived students enrolled throughout the year. These students attended the language school for a limited time, from 6 to 12 months, which made it harder to plan and deliver continuous learning.

The school enrolls students from Reception to Year 12 and many of the students, apart from limited comprehension of English, have no or minimal writing skills in their first language. This was not limited to the youngest of students; for many refugee students of all ages, this was their first opportunity to receive formal education.

Case study 3: Hume Central (NT)

School profile

Hume Central Secondary College employs about 120 teachers and is located across three separate campuses with two Years 7-9 Junior Campuses and one Senior campus for Years 10-12. This school boasts an enrolment of 1200 students and growing. Positioned on the outskirts of Melbourne, the college serves a diverse community of predominantly low-income households with a high ratio of non-English speaking residents. 2016 census data showed a third of the population had resided in Australia for less than five years and almost three quarters of the households were non-English speaking.

Implementation

In 2016 a decision was made to engage, at a whole school level, with the explicit, language-based pedagogy to address many concerns pertaining to students' literacy and numeracy results. The tutor training of a small group of teachers began at the end of 2016 and, within a year, almost all of the long-term staff had been trained. Considering the size of the school and the fact that it operates across three different campuses, it was a major undertaking. The staff was trained after school hours, but a financial incentive was offered for the extra time required. The teacher training was delivered one module a fortnight, allowing time for the teachers to trial what they learned. In the first year, teachers received no coaching but were

encouraged to trial the aspects of the pedagogy they deemed relevant or interesting.

The coaching began in 2018, when a small group of coaches began supporting those who most needed or requested help. The understanding of the new pedagogy was to be developed through regular 20 minute 'mini PDs' that took place in staff meetings every two to three weeks. These PDs were to help teachers share their knowledge about different aspects and applications of the pedagogy.

In 2019, the school began more structured coaching with a focus on genre-based activities across all learning areas. The teachers within each subject worked together on writing model texts, outlining specific language features of several subject-specific genres. Sadly, the momentum was interrupted with the extensive pandemic lockdowns of 2020, which made it harder to move forward with coaching and collaboration.

The external consultancy was employed in the first few years, supporting teachers in classroom applications of the model. Brian Dare presented to senior teachers, assisting them with subject-specific applications of the model and, later on, assisting them with a genre audit across subjects. Another independent consultant, who previously worked with the school on a different project, helped junior campus teachers in applications of this pedagogy.

There were several challenging factors that placed additional demands on the management of the implementation. The size and location of the school across different campuses was the biggest one, especially concerning practicalities of training and coaching. The staff was trained quickly, within one school year, but a small pool of coaches meant that mentoring was not available to staff at that time and did not start until a year later.

The mini-PDs helped teachers engage with the pedagogy, but a lack of in-class mentoring and compulsory coaching meant that teachers were free to engage with or, alternatively, disregard the pedagogy in their classrooms. The teacher-driven approach and subsequent pause in implementation due to the pandemic meant that, even today, the leaders are unsure about the exact levels of engagement with this pedagogy in the classrooms. Consequently, a different approach to coaching may be employed in the future.

Data collection

Both quantitative and qualitative data were used in this evaluation. The statistical results included in this report come from the VCE³ scores for the whole school. Qualitative data consisted of interviews, informal conversation and perusal of written documentation. The interviews were conducted in stages, with the first set of data collected a week before the tutor training began in late 2016. This was followed by interviews

3 VCE is Victorian Certificate of Education with the results collected from the year 12 exams.

conducted in late 2017 (December) and then early 2019 (March). The final interview was conducted in 2021.

Challenges

The qualitative data collected for this school provides more detailed information about the challenges faced by teachers before the implementation because the evaluation was conducted when this school was in the early planning stages of implementation. Consequently, the first set of interviews were collected in 2016, a week or so before the training of tutors began and in these interviews teachers focused primarily on the existing challenges.

Many of these challenges had to do with the students' ability to write in a formal way as well as their ability to understand academic texts, including comprehension of questions. Furthermore, teachers talked about problems with students' attitudes to learning. They seemed discouraged, unmotivated, and tended to give up before even considering the task in front of them. These 'defeatist attitudes' and lack of engagement were generating further problems for students.

Teachers reflected on their own limitations in helping students break through these barriers and, in particular, teaching them to use 'more formal' language. A big part of it was providing explicit suggestions to students about the structure of such language. Even the best of teachers struggled to provide feedback which could help students to learn in a more autonomous way. An English teacher spoke about her dissatisfaction with these limitations and felt that, lacking understanding of how language works, teachers tend to 'spoon feed' the students in order to help those who struggled most. And while not all students required this type of help, teachers talked about difficulties in catering for a spectrum of abilities; because of the number of weaker students, better students were not always appropriately challenged.

PART 2

Quantitative Results

The following results are a sample of the statistical results gathered for each of the sites. For more expansive overview, please refer to individual reports [here](#) and [here](#).

Case study 1: Southern Secondary College

Back in 2013 our kids weren't even in the game, they weren't competing. Now, they are matching the state. (Literacy leader)

The implementation in this school began in late 2013. For the simplicity of comparing with another school, Hume Central Secondary College (Case study 3), the first results presented below are from the school's VCE results. The results indicate the performance against all other students with the maximum score of 50, with a mean of 30 and standard deviation of 7. The study score of about 40 is considered a very good result, as only 8% of the students across the whole state are able to achieve this score. It is considered very difficult for this score to be changed in a significant and consistent way across the whole school. While the increase in VCE scores was not as dramatic as in Hume Central Secondary College, there is a slight but consistent improvement since 2014 that, once again, seems to continue despite the lockdowns and online schooling.

Year	Median Study Score*	40+ (as % of cohort)**
2012	24	0.4%
2013	25	2.7%
2014	26	0.4%
2015	26	1.6%
2016	26	1.0%
2017	27	1.8%
2018	27	1.9%

Table 1: Summary of VCE results for Southern Secondary College between 2012 and 2018

* A school's Median Study Score is the middle or 'typical' Study Score for all of the students in that school.

** 40+ indicates that a student has achieved a better Study Score in a given subject than 91% of students in Victoria who took that subject. The average score across the State is 30. Very few Study Scores below 20 are awarded so the lowest VCE ranking must be above 20. The lowest Median Study Score ever achieved is 21.

*** VCE Rank is a comparison with all other secondary schools in Victoria.

The NAPLAN data for this school stood out in the analysis and showed outstanding improvements in all measures. Table 2 below shows the results of the writing growth data over five years for the school and for the whole state. In 2013, prior to the implementation, students of this college scored 48 points below the state average. Over time, the students' growth data shows great improvement and since 2016 students in this college

performed better than the state average. The full analysis of the data can be found [here](#).

Year	School mean	Matched cohort mean	State mean
2013	-18	+8	+30
2014	+12	+22	+33
2015	+21	+18	+37
2016	+72	+58	+43
2017	+32	+42	+38
2018	+30	+35	+21

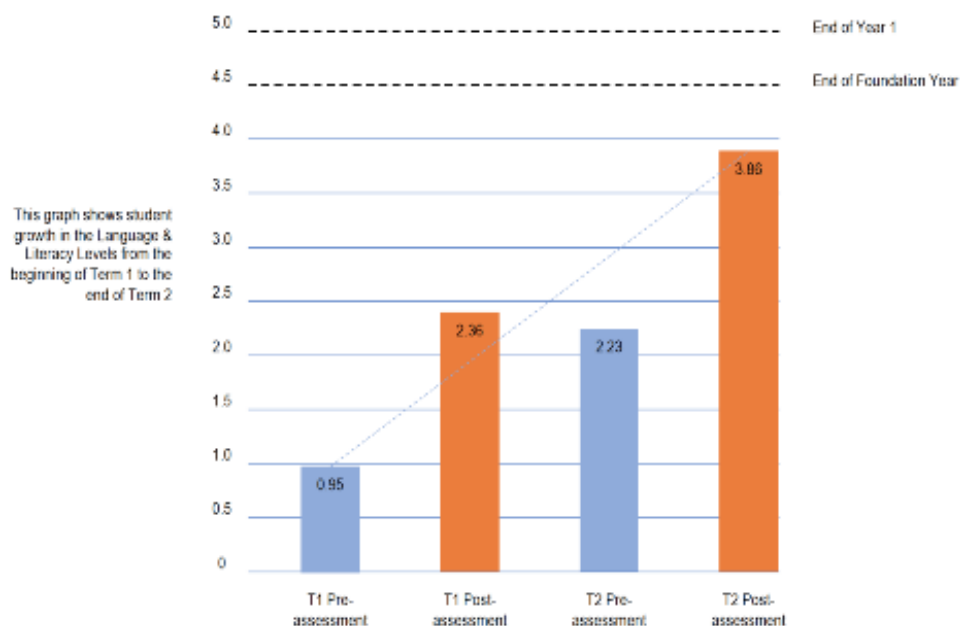
Table 2: NAPLAN mean growth between Year 7 and Year 9

Case study 2: WELS

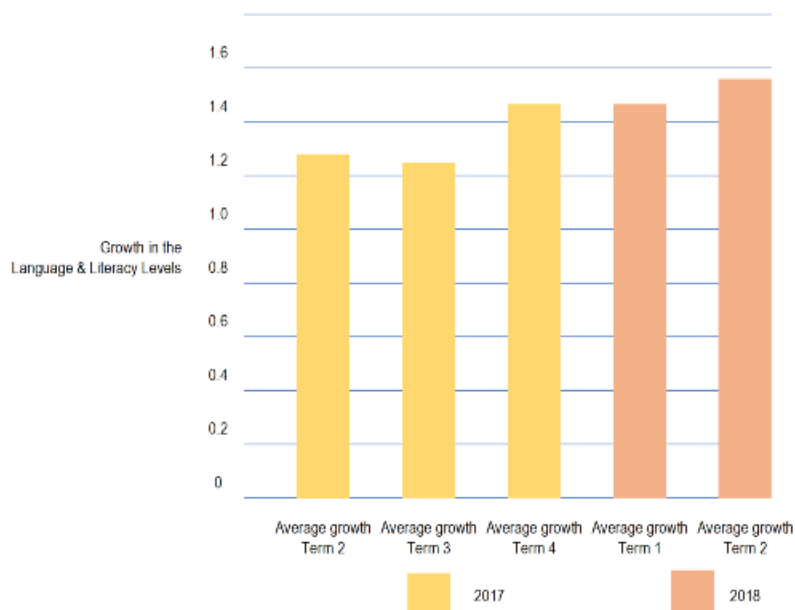
We have been able to, for the first time, to actually capture true progress. Which we haven't been able to do before. And the fact that the progress ended up being quite good is fantastic. (Secondary Teacher)

As an intensive English school, WELS is not subject to state (VCE) or national (NAPLAN) assessment. The data here relies on the internal assessment done by the school. This assessment was done with a tool developed as part of the implementation and based on Language and Literacy Levels Against Australian Curriculum: ESL/D Students (ref). The data, collected by the school since 2015, shows significant improvement for all school children, including those with no, or heavily interrupted, prior schooling. A full report can be found [here](#).

Primary students (Years 3-6) Mean written language and literacy levels



Average Growth by Term across 2017 and 2018



Case study 3: Hume Central Secondary College

Not only did their writing improve, they actually had some fun with it. (Humanities teacher)

The implementation here began in 2017, after a group of tutors was trained at the end of 2016. The table below shows the consistent result of 26 for the school VCE scores since 2018 and it shows the improved score for the percentage of students who achieved results of 40% and more. Sadly, in 2020, due to extensive lockdowns and the challenges of online schooling, any further improvement was hindered. Nonetheless, it is a credit to the work done earlier in the implementation that the VCE score of 26 was upheld even under such extreme circumstances.

Year	VCE result	40+ (as % of cohort)**
2015	24	1.8%
2016	24	1.5%
2017	23	1.9%
2018	26	3.6%
2019	26	2.1%
2020	26	3.1%

Table 3: Summary of VCE results for Hume Central between 2012 and 2020

* A school's Median Study Score is the middle or 'typical' Study Score for all of the students in that school.

** 40+ indicates that a student has achieved a better Study Score in a given subject than 91% of students in Victoria who took that subject. The average score across the State is 30. Very few Study Scores below 20 are awarded so the lowest VCE ranking must be above 20. The lowest Median Study Score ever achieved is 21.

*** VCE Rank is a comparison with all other secondary schools in Victoria.

PART 3

Qualitative Results

The qualitative data collected for each of the case studies was analysed and is summarised below. The summary aims to show the main areas of impact of the pedagogy on teachers and students. While the quantitative analysis showed the statistical improvements in students' results, the qualitative data in this section focuses on a range of improvements and changes that affected teaching and learning, including classroom practices, collaboration among staff and students' attitudes and behaviour.

Case study 1: Southern Secondary College

Impact on teachers

And so now there is a level of sustainability that relies on the expert for some advice but not so much for direct implementation. We are self-sufficient, which is a nice thing. But we have become self-sufficient essentially over the period of four years. (Principal)

The data for this analysis was collected four years after the implementation began. By then, the great majority of the staff was not only on board with the new pedagogy but showed a level of enthusiasm for it. And, while it had taken some time and many challenges to get to this point, the new pedagogy seemed to have become an integral part of the school's practices.

In the interviews, the teachers reflected on many changes that happened in their teaching practice. Previously, one of the greatest concerns for teachers was students' writing skills, in particular their ability to use appropriate academic, technical and formal modes of communicating. Now, the teachers felt more confident in their own skills to help students achieve that.

*There is greater understanding of how you teach them to write better.
(Literacy leader)*

These skills included an ability to explicitly teach language and its subject relevant features and patterns to help students in the written component of all subjects. In the extracts below, a Science teacher and a Mathematics teacher talk about the impact this pedagogy had on their own practice.

Ever since then, it's completely changed the way that I teach. Now, when I am introducing a concept for the first time, there is a really structured modelling [of] the steps, and the steps are very explicit and they are really cut down and it's, like, it's very scaffolded in the way the kids have to work through a problem now. So it is modelled in every stage. (Science teacher)

But, just those little changes of being more explicit and making each step actually meaningful was really important and I guess that's how it changed my own teaching practice. (Mathematics teacher)

From English to Science, from Mathematics to Woodwork, the teachers talked about being able to model the language-based components of their work in a more structured, step by step way. They felt more confident in explicitly assisting students and they reflected on the ease of providing

effective feedback that aided students' progress. In the quotes below, two of the teachers reflect on this ability.

I remember this amazing English teacher saying to me 'you need to extend your vocabulary' but never actually taught me how to do that. [Now] we're actually teaching them how to do those things. Instead of saying what not to do, it's actually showing people what to do. (English teacher)

Previously, the language would be around 'the kids've got to write more formally'. And that was about it. Full stop. And now the kids have got to write more formally by doing X, Y and Z. (Art teacher)

Science teachers had become more aware of the linguistic features prominent in their own discipline. While some of the teachers might have been reluctant to take on language as an important part of their teaching, they were now able to understand why and how this approach benefited the students.

...for us in Science, we know what good scientific writing looks like, we knew obviously how to write well... but we didn't know the principles of it. Now that we can teach it, there's definitely an improvement in the writing ... I was never taught writing explicitly ... but now I can identify and say 'yes, it was good writing because you used these elements'. (Mathematics and Science teacher)

While new pedagogy provided a shared knowledge and shared metalanguage to all staff, the whole school implementation drove much greater collaboration between teachers. Mutual support and peer-to-peer mentoring, sharing ideas and units of work acted to the teachers' advantage but also to the advantage of the whole school. Four years after the initial training began, the professional development efforts were primarily relying on the internal expertise. The extracts below capture this phenomenon.

And because we have now got people in the school that are really good at this stuff, lots of teachers are visiting other classrooms and acting as an expert voice. (Science teacher)

And so now there is a level of sustainability that relies on the expert for some advice but not so much for direct implementation. We are self-sufficient, which is a nice thing. But we have become self-sufficient essentially over the period of four years. (Principal)

Interestingly, the changes across the school seemed to include often marginalised, literacy support classes. Instead of doing the usual rudimentary work, the teachers were able to enhance the learning in those students, with remarkable results.

The literacy support teachers now are teaching the curriculum to the students! These are the kids who normally would not produce any work. But now they are producing good level work, they are writing essays. It used to be the teacher would write an essay and the kid would basically be filling in the word here and there. Now the kids are writing. (Literacy leader)

The texts that the students are producing have significantly improved. (English teacher)

New teaching practices had a marked impact on the attitudes and learning of students. Sharing the same pedagogy across different subjects not only helped teachers to be more effective but it also helped their students. As the students moved from classroom to classroom, uniformity of teaching practices and the consistent engagement with linguistic features across all subjects meant that students' learning improved.

When I teach a new concept, I feel like the kids can grasp it a lot quicker because it's very consistent. (English teacher)

The improvement in students' writing skills, an area that was previously the greatest challenge for teachers and students, was now evident and not just to school staff. The excerpt below talks about an independent VCE examiner noticing this positive change.

The NAPLAN results showed a clear growth in two of the three years, and in particular in writing, but one of the things that the Year 12 examiner said [was] that the kids were writing differently. So there is a general understanding that the kids are writing differently. (Literacy leader)

The improvements in students' writing came hand in hand with improved comprehension of complex texts. Whether it was Science, Mathematics or Humanities, students were able to better understand textbooks and questions and use the linguistic understanding to learn more autonomously.

Because they can reference it, they are much more confident, because they know every single question even if the question has changed; they can relate it back to what's in their book so that's really good. That's that additional consistency that we didn't have before. (Science teacher)

Not surprisingly, with the improved learning came the improvements in engagement, confidence and, finally, behaviour. The two final extracts illustrate such attitude shifts in students.

The way we do the teaching and learning cycle and the deconstruction, the modelling, that has definitely improved student behaviour in the Maths classroom. (Mathematics teacher)

The kids are so much more confident, they know exactly what is expected of them because we deconstructed the multiple texts they can see yes this paragraph is definitely about this element or principle (Art teacher, interview)

A somewhat challenging educational environment has now become a more capable organization; a school where literacy challenges are dealt with effectively and where students engage in learning with greater confidence. This change was reflected in improved results. The pride in these achievements were noticeable in the interviews and conversations with the staff. The final extract exemplifies this sense of pride.

I have never though we would get there. I had this little dream that.. it was national average that I was hoping we would one day hit, because it is lower than state average, so I wasn't even thinking of the state, I was trying them to get to national average... back in 2013 our kids weren't even in the game, they weren't competing. Now, they are matching the state. (Art teacher)

Case study 2: WELS⁴

Impact on the school

I love when you get presented with something that just makes so much sense, and then my role is to just figure out how to make it happen. (Principal)

Three years after the commencement of the implementation, the great majority of the teaching staff in WELS were now on board with the new pedagogy. In the interviews conducted at that time, most teachers agreed that the effort exerted was well worth it because of the positive impact this pedagogy had not only on teaching and learning practices but also on the school as an organisation.

A shared metalanguage greatly enhanced staff collaboration as well as tea room conversations. Not only were the teachers involved in building something together for the future of the school, they also shared understanding about language which created a sense of camaraderie and support.

So basically now we are all on the same page, we all have that baseline knowledge, which is amazing! And it led to the most interesting conversations, you know, like when you go to the staff room now and you hear people talking, you know exactly what they are talking about and you could potentially just jump into that conversation straight away, because we have that joint metalanguage. (Secondary teacher)

The shared pedagogy meant that teachers were able to work together creating and perfecting units of work and model texts that were based

⁴ The full report can be found [here](#).

on this pedagogy. Testing the resources, sharing the feedback, and further improving the model texts resulted in a wide collection of highly sophisticated classroom resources. These were to be used by teachers now and in the future to assist and guide them in engaging with this pedagogy in an effective and accurate way. Moreover, creating these resources was an opportunity for teachers to better understand and embrace the nuances of a language-based pedagogy.

We were talking yesterday about our own units that we tried writing right at the start, as model units of work, and how bad they were. Because people who have built on them have just improved them so much. When we go back and contrast them, ours were very minimal, they didn't have many resources to go with them. That's how things developed, built on the shoulders of others (Secondary teacher)

The wealth of the resources was one of the outstanding features of the implementation in WELS. They comprised of more than model texts and units of work. They included three large, comprehensive documents wherein the new pedagogic profile of the school was made evident. These documents were: the new curriculum, the assessment tool, and, in the secondary school, the Genre Unit Starter Pack (GUSP). The new curriculum was an extensive document, mapping out the content, methods, activities and expectations. The new assessment tool gave teachers a consistent and thorough way to assess the progress of the students. Finally, the GUSP helped unify the teaching practices across the whole school.

The Genre Unit Starter Pack was really key because it brought together all the learnings that people have done over the last two years and came with an expectation that teachers would create this GUSP with lot of guidance from the curriculum coordinators. Having to do that made people accountable [and] it was an opportunity for them to show how much they had learned and also contribute to resourcing. (Secondary teacher)

The implementation and, in particular, the extensive resourcing created a level of expertise in the school which, in the long run, cut down the need for any external resources or expertise. It was now possible for most of the professional development to happen within the school, relying on their literacy leaders and peer-to-peer collaborations.

We very rarely now have anyone coming in. [...] there is enormous amount of expertise in the school. (Principal)

Despite all the positive changes and enhanced learning and students' results, there is an awareness that more is possible. In the extract below, the principal talks about interviewing a new teacher who worked with this pedagogical model for many years. Her level of proficiency served as an inspiration to future directions for the school.

And just listening to her talking about stuff that she's been doing for a few more years. 'Yeah. And that's how you do it. Right. Yeah.' I would love for our staff to, I mean all of them, to get from that emerging to proficient, where all the stuff that they're finding a bit gruelling is just like water

off a duck's back. So I think we have to take the school from that level to proficient. (Principal)

Impact on teachers

Before I was just doing things, but now I am doing things with a purpose, I really know why I am doing the things that I am doing. And how to do them.
(Secondary teacher)

The planning stage and especially visiting the sister centre in South Australia created much enthusiasm in the teachers. Yet, it wasn't until they were able to experience some of the changes in their own school that their appreciation for this model spread.

People, in general, really appreciate the professional learning that they have been given. Some may object to it on a theoretical level in some instances, but I think overall with all the successes that people have seen, as time goes on, I think people understand it more and I would go so far as to say that in secondary the majority of people are for everything that we have done. (Secondary teacher)

By the time evaluation took place, there were many signs of positive changes. Teachers spoke of feeling more in control of the process of teaching and much more confident that they can guide students to learn what they need to learn. The two extracts below illustrate what teachers had to say about it.

I feel so confident with just about every aspect of my teaching. (Secondary teacher)

One of the points made by the teachers was about the transferable skills they were able to offer students. While the content they taught was important, now they were able to teach the students in a way that helped them become more independent learners.

...prior to all of this, four years ago, it was all topic driven. Which means I am going to go from this content to this content to this content. But you know, you can teach all the content you want but at the end of the day it is the grammar of the language, that's what is going to be the most transferable thing. It is the language that's going to have the most impact on the overall learning. (Secondary teacher)

The extract below, while a bit longer, summarises the way some of the teaching was transformed in the process. Here, a Mathematics and Science teacher spoke about aspects of his teaching that improved; he became

more intentional, more explicit in his lesson planning but also clearer about what students can and cannot do. The structure of his teaching changed as a result, enabling more satisfying interactions with students and an increased confidence in what could be achieved and how he, and the students, could achieve it.

I have looked at some of my old stuff, (...) I was like 'what was I doing?', 'what was the point of this activity?'. There wasn't any organizing structure to it. I was just doing things because I thought that they needed to be done. And a lot of it, now I think, it was too advanced for the level that I was trying to pitch it at [] When I plan now it is like, okay, I am going to figure out where do I need to go, what the success looks like for me, in terms of that genre, and then I am going to figure out where are my students, look at curriculum documents and I can plan a pathway that I am quite sure is going to get them to where they need to be. (Secondary teacher)

Students' learning

You can see that [the students] are absolutely engaged with what is going on, and [name of a teacher] is being quite technical with her explanations and they are just eating it up. The more challenging it is, the more they eat it up. (Principal)

Interestingly, while some teachers might have been hesitant to take on this pedagogy, there was no resistance from the students. They seemed to be greatly benefiting from the structure of explicit teaching. Even though at times challenging, the new pedagogy was readily embraced by the students who welcomed such challenges within a well scaffolded teaching.

These kids were just so articulate and talking about linguistic concepts that it's just quite extraordinary and they are doing it with such confidence. And they are using technical language. (Principal)

Predictably, the engagement of students and classroom participation improved as a result of becoming more autonomous in their learning.

The [students'] engagement increased so much more because they were starting to understand — not just reproduce what you are teaching them and trying to get it right — but understand why it is that way. (Secondary teacher)

Case study 3: Hume Central Secondary College

Early impact

We are seeing some significant improvements. Our Year 9 NAPLAN [in our campus] writing has significantly jumped above the state. (English teacher)

The interviews were collected on four occasions over five years. The summary below breaks down the impact, beginning with a discussion of the early impact, barely one year into the project. This was a rare opportunity to discuss with the teachers the progression and the challenges of each period.

In the first year of implementation, all the resources were focused on training the staff. As there was no coaching or modelling available at the time due to limited resources, trialling the new knowledge in the classrooms was left to the teachers' discretion. In the interviews, the teachers seemed to appreciate such an approach.

I think the school's attitude was really good because they said to us, look, we are doing it now but we are not going to expect you to have it in your class now. (Teacher)

This approach seemed to work for those teachers who were willing to engage with the new pedagogy on their own. However, in the long term, this approach might have been detrimental by ultimately slowing down the uptake across all classrooms and all subjects. In fact, trialling the model with minimal support seemed to suit English and EAL teachers more than others. This created subject-related gaps in the uptake of the pedagogy and some of these differences seem to remain to this day.

It was clear from the interviews that, despite a lot of enthusiasm for the new pedagogy, some teachers were opting out of including it in their classroom practice. This further demonstrated that some form of mentoring is an essential part of the whole school delivery.

A lot of teachers need that support and certainly a lot of teachers are already asking for that support. (English teacher)

On a positive side, there was a small number of teachers, who were not subject English teachers, readily embracing the language-based pedagogy from the beginning and incorporating many aspects in their teaching. During the interviews, it became evident that these teachers were also seeing many positive results in their teaching practice and students' learning.

Students had to write [about] photosynthesis and in the past I'd have just given them the activity and [now I show them] how we can actually change it to make it more formal. I guess, explicitly teaching a language is a way that I wouldn't have done previously... (Science teacher)

In Maths, most of them can actually do the maths, but the tripping spot is understanding what maths do they actually have to do. (Mathematics teacher)

The Mathematics teacher quoted above later described how she was applying the model in her class as she showed students how to unpack the meanings in questions. And while she noticed some positive changes in students' ability to understand questions better, she noted that it also had some impact on her practice and her future teaching in Science, where there will be even more complexity of language.

I am looking forward to the next year, because next year I've got Maths and Science, so getting back into a context of actually having the students produce writing. (Mathematics teacher)

In this set of interviews, teachers were outlining the challenges of applying this model to their subject-specific context but talked about how they use it in their disciplines in a way that is most meaningful to them. For these teachers the whole school approach made sense as they could see the students were beginning to benefit from the explicit teaching of language components, provided they were not responsible for teaching the entirety of the model to students.

Despite many challenges, the interviews revealed signs of changes in teaching practices and students' engagement. For example, back in 2016, an English teacher talked about her lessons with Romeo and Juliet. That day most students were given a task of cloze exercises, wherein students fill in missing words in a provided text, and engage with character monologues. The most capable students were asked to work with metaphors. Sadly, even the capable students settled for the easier tasks. And while the teacher managed to introduce some level of differentiation, no students seemed motivated to take on the additional challenge.

In 2017, after spending some time working with the new pedagogy, this English teacher's experience of the same lesson (working with Romeo and Juliet) was very different. A year later, all of her students were doing significantly more elaborate tasks. Their understanding of language and structure of a written text was quite impressive. In the extract below, she explains what happened.

So putting an example up on the board of a couple of these sentences that, as teachers, we would probably say were pretty average, the students wouldn't bear it! So I sked them 'how could we change it?'. They become very competitive with each other about who could improve it the most and exactly what they had to do to improve it [laughing]. (English teacher)

A noticeable change in the first year had to do with re-evaluating the crowded curriculum; teachers began giving priority to developing language

skills in students above content.

...we should be cutting fifty percent of the content and enhancing the skills like this because, at the end of the day, this is much more successful and beneficial for their future. (Humanities teacher)

A year later

And the kids love it! (Principal)

The following year, coaching had become a focus for the school. Due to a small number of coaches available, the coaching targeted teachers who asked for help or who were struggling. Coaches worked with groups of teachers as well, developing model texts. External coaches focused on applications across subject areas. The regular mini PDs, conducted at the staff meetings, continued to engage teachers with this pedagogy. However, the engagement remained uneven among teachers.

It's a slow process. There's lots of people who are really engaged in it, doing lots of really great things, and there are people who are still not doing very much. (Literacy leader)

Despite this gap, there were many signs of improvement across the whole school. The VCE results were a part of the evidence but, importantly, teachers talked in the interviews about positive effects in their classrooms. Many reflected on the skills they gained in the process of developing the new pedagogy.

It continues to evolve. When I think of myself in 2016 and now, I don't know what I was doing before. Now I notice things I would have never noticed before ... (English teacher)

It continues to evolve. When I think about myself back in 2016 versus now, I don't know what I was doing before, I would always start now with a model text... (Literacy consultant)

Talking about her work with 'scary stories', the teacher reflected on the depth of her understanding of how suspense was built linguistically. She was able to unpack and clearly map out the linguistic patterns in these stories.

I am certainly able to pick out language features that I wouldn't've been able to pick out before. It's nice to be... I feel I have skills to do pick [the story] apart. (English teacher)

A Mathematics teacher reflected on changes in his understanding that enabled him to work with other teachers examining the language that underpins their subject and how to effectively teach it to students.

As Mathematics teachers, historically, we always expected kids to know how to write something about something mathematical. Our job just doesn't finish with exercises in the textbook, it's got to do with the students describing the mathematics they are using or writing a mathematical

report. A lot of the work that students do is actually writing, and we need to provide students a structure to do that. (Mathematics teacher)

The focus on language was making an impact on students' writing. This is how the principal reflected on these changes.

Teachers now show them ways to make paragraphs more sophisticated; they are actually giving them skills. [] Kids go back and re-draft and they are all lapping it up because they are learning. And teachers are taken aback that the kids had actually taken to it, and they say, 'I can't believe it!'. (Principal)

A specific example of such improvement comes from Psychology, where the patterns and linguistic features of a Psychology Report were explained to students.

The work they produced [as a result] was noticeably better, in the end, because they had that focus on these things... (Learning specialist)

The final excerpt below is an anecdote describing a student's appreciation for a more 'educated' education they are exposed to.

[I asked a new student], 'How are you finding it in the new school?' [and he answered] 'Oh yeah it's good, it's hard but it's good. At this school it's more educated than where I was... In class, it's more educated'. (Learning specialist)

Years 2019/2021

In the third year, the school continued with the effort to coach teachers and help them integrate the new pedagogy. 2019 saw more structured coaching being put in place, including peer coaching. Furthermore, there had been work done on mapping out subject specific genres as well as deepening teachers' understanding of language pertaining to each of the genres. The external experts were also involved in genre mapping and further applications of the model.

The English and EAL teachers were further upskilled in the functional model of language through the How Language Works (HLW) tutor training course (Custance, Dare & Polias 2011) and were now equipped to further assist their colleagues. There was a growing sense that teachers and students needed to build a shared metalanguage.

So when we'd say, for example, 'register continuum', all students will be able to understand what we are talking about and they would be able to move up and down the register continuum. (Learning specialist)

Unfortunately, the implementation was disrupted by the extensive lockdowns in Victoria. While the VCE results remained at 26, the teachers' focus turned towards fostering remote learning.

Understandably, the lockdown put a hold on collaborative efforts, and made mentoring and coaching difficult. This slowed down the further

uptake of the pedagogy. As a result, in 2021, there was still a marked disparity between teachers in how well they understood and applied it. The final interview revealed that it is still unclear how many teachers were genuinely engaging with this pedagogy. On a positive note, the upheld VCE results demonstrate that the previous efforts have led to some fundamental changes in teaching and learning practices.

PART 4

The know-how

Wehavetriedothermodelsbuttheydidn'tquitehold, they didn't stick. This one stuck. (Principal)

This evaluation report examines the impact of the explicit, language-based pedagogy on teachers' ability to effectively engage students into more autonomous, and ultimately, more productive and successful way of learning. The analysis of the data presented earlier shows this pedagogical model to be effective in improving students' results across the whole school. This is a noteworthy achievement as it is rare for educational interventions to be consistently effective in improving students' learning (Jacob, A. & McGovern, K. 2015).

Yet, the improvement was not limited to numerical results. As discussed in the previous section, there were many positive changes in teachers' practices and students' engagement and comprehension that happened as a result of implementing an explicit, language-based pedagogy.

Achieving significant changes across the whole school does not happen without many supportive structures and decisions enabling optimal uptake of the new pedagogy in the classroom. In fact, even the best pedagogy does not guarantee a whole school improvement unless teachers embrace and use it in the classroom to a point that it becomes habitual and integral to their practices in classrooms (Guskey, 2021). Thus, a question worth asking is, 'What are the necessary supportive structures and steps that generally help schools to achieve significant positive change?' In other words, 'What is a route to broad and effective uptake of a pedagogical knowledge and practice?'

In his discussion of what is involved in achieving multifaceted impact, Gusky (2021) outlines the factors that, in his view, are necessary for an educational intervention to succeed. First of all, a support of the organization and leaders is necessary for any such complex endeavour to succeed. This includes well structured support for teachers in their quest to take on the new pedagogy, in order to ward off professional anxiety that a change in practice may induce. This support needs to continue, in

some form, until the use of the new knowledge becomes a part of teachers' classroom repertoire.

Many steps and factors that led to the successful uptake of the explicit, language-based pedagogy in the three case studies echoed the claims made by Gusky. A comprehensive pedagogy was taken up and the challenges buffered by supporting the staff. All three school leaders embraced the pedagogy and provided supportive environments to their staff. While the schools' profiles are different and their approach differed in specifics, many of the factors discussed here are shared by all three schools.

Leadership

Role of the school principals

I love when you get presented with something that just makes so much sense, and then my role is to just figure out how to make it happen. (Principal)

Full-hearted leadership support is at the core of any effective change within any institution, including a school. There is no question from the data that, without a strong and decisive leadership, none of these implementations would progress as quickly and as effectively as they did. Decisions about the conditions of training, coaching or any follow up steps were not always popular among staff, but a firm commitment by the principals and their ability to manage the complexities resulted in consistent, positive impact. An important part of the success was the principals' willingness to make the involvement compulsory for all staff. Requiring all teachers to participate was not always an easy decision, but it established a resolve among staff and an understanding of the importance of this project. This was matched by many commitments made by the principals, including generous resourcing of the implementations or their personal willingness to engage, hands on, with the training.

Such engagement was not only a morale-building exercise, but highlighted, once again, the important message of the implementation and its centrality to all school activities.

Because if I was going to ask people to do that then I had to do it, too. It highlights the importance of it, it's a bit of leading from the front, it's the active involvement of the principal in the professional learning opportunity ... just the symbolic nature of it, that I have done it and I did it first. I was in that first group. That was really, really important.
(Principal)

Someone has got to be passionate about it, in order for it to work... and for me, any English teacher with any self-respect would look at it and say, this is great stuff, this is fantastic. And you can see within the school, different teachers take it up and become passionate about it. And it starts to filter in. (Literacy leader)

The principals didn't act alone. The enthusiastic teachers who later took up the roles of trainers, literacy leaders, coaches and mentors were also an informal advisory committee to the principals. The data showed that without their enthusiasm, without their hands-on engagement with staff, without their advice to principals as well as dedication and efforts to bring teachers together and to assure the uptake of the pedagogy is happening across the whole school, then the uptake would have been slower, if at all possible.

[The Literacy leader] ... has been a big influence in the school, it has a lot to do with her enthusiasm and passion for the course. And that's given staff the confidence to get onboard. (Arts teacher)

The literacy leaders were not always English teachers. In fact, it was important to engage leaders from different faculties in training and coaching their colleagues. This helped to better build the capacity of teachers across the whole school and create understanding regarding subject-specific applications or resourcing.

Building the capacity, building the understanding of how that can be applied to Maths or Science or the Humanities. And that worked really, really well. The follow-up with the faculties was really, really important. (Principal)

It is clear from the data collected that without such strong, committed and keen leadership from the principals and literacy leaders, the changes in these schools would not have been possible on such a scale. The enthusiasm of many involved was matched by their hard work and willingness to make firm decisions. Yet, most importantly, these leaders' ability to see value in undertaking something comprehensive, if not challenging, in order to provide a good education to students, many of whom were heavily disadvantaged, was the most important factor in generating a positive change.

Compulsory involvement

They don't have an option. It's not an option. But I think also, it never has been... it's one of the weird things. But I think it hasn't really been an issue. (Principal)

All three principals made the same decision in the planning phase of the implementation; the whole school meant the whole school. The involvement, therefore, was not optional and all teachers were to be trained in the new pedagogy. There was a clear understanding that the new pedagogy was the way forward for the school. And, while the impact was carefully assessed from the beginning, a firm commitment was made to create optimal circumstances for this project to work. And this meant including all teachers in individual and collaborative efforts to engage with it.

These collaborative efforts meant that all faculties needed to be engaged equally. This created a challenge, as language had been typically perceived as a domain of English and EAL teachers. It was evidenced in WELS and Southern Secondary College that, with careful and strategic management, such perceptions can be effectively changed, benefiting teachers and students. Hume Central Secondary College is still working towards shifting the imbalance, highlighting the importance of and the need for early planning around this topic.

People that came first, it was more about cross-faculty, the challenge became more around how you built pockets of teams, so they can support each other in the implementation. (Principal)

The training

By doing it slowly, we were able to build in sustainability, give people the opportunity to try. And that in the end also created a level of momentum that I didn't expect. Because people were saying that it was good. And by people saying it's good, well, 'when am I getting my go?' (Principal)

The training began with a group of teachers being trained as tutors. These teachers were already familiar with the pedagogy as they attended teacher training, or similar professional development activities embedded in this pedagogy. Later, this group provided training to all staff and to take on the role of mentors and coaches.

In Southern Secondary College and WELS, the training was delivered over two years. Such relatively drawn-out delivery allowed the training to be done in school hours and for freshly trained teachers to be sufficiently supported during and, importantly, directly after the training. This made teachers more likely to engage with the pedagogy.

Training teachers slowly and providing ample support helped to soften any resistance. The most willing teachers were trained first, leaving the more hesitant to come on board the following year. Seeing many positive results their colleagues were achieving, these teachers eventually began asking for their turn and actively wanting to engage.

You needed a three-hour session to do a module. You can't expect teachers to do it after school, to sit from four to seven or three thirty till six thirty, that's just too much. By giving them the internal time, we raised the importance of it, I am sure. (Principal)

Hume Central Secondary College took a different approach. A relatively large pool of permanent teachers was trained within one single year and all teachers were trained after school but reimbursed for the extra time. Such intensive training enabled the whole staff to be trained quickly and, thus, to engage with the new pedagogy within a brief period of time. Doing the training after hours minimised any disruption and simplified the overseeing of the upskill.

However, the support for the staff was limited during that year and coaching didn't begin until the following year. Instead, teachers were asked to trial what they learned during the first year. The self-guided approach best suited English and EAL and they were more willing to take up the language-based pedagogy with limited support. To this day, English and EAL teachers are well ahead of the rest of the staff in their uptake and understanding of the language-based pedagogy. Moreover, this self-guided approach created an opening for some teachers to opt out of engaging the new pedagogy in the classroom, and even today it is not clear how many teachers are genuinely engaging with the model.

Coaching and support

In all case studies, the training of the staff, while demanding, was relatively straightforward as it was well planned and made compulsory for all teachers. However, the structure of post-training coaching and support differed significantly between schools and for that reason it will be discussed separately.

[The teachers] had extraordinary amounts of support. No one has had to go into this on their own. (Principal)

This school followed a plan, devised together with an external consultant, to provide extensive support directly following the training. All teachers were required to be a part of the mentoring and coaching program and the coaching followed a schedule and was initiated by the coaches across all subjects. The external mentoring was used to support teachers across different faculties accurately adopt the model.

From the very beginning, teachers were to assess the progress of their students. This was done for two reasons. Firstly, it provided feedback to the principal as to whether the new pedagogy was making a difference. Secondly, the feedback was used by coaches to further mentor teachers who needed more support.

There was a recognition in this school of the role of the literacy leaders, and, in particular, one of the leaders who, at the time of the evaluation, took up a role of sole tutor and coach, training and supporting new teachers and offering assistance when needed. This recognition is summed up in the excerpt below.

[The Literacy leader] has been a big influence in the school and I think it has a lot to do with her enthusiasm and passion for the course. And that's given staff the confidence to get onboard. I think it's really important for the program to be successful. (Art teacher)

WELS

Four years ago, people would come to this job with all different kinds of experience and they still do. But with the three-term support model, ... we gave everybody the same level of knowledge, the same pedagogical understandings. So basically now we are all on the same page, we all have that baseline knowledge, which is amazing! (Principal)

This school also relied on compulsory coaching that was delivered immediately after the training. The parameters of post-training support were devised in planning stages as a three-tier model with a semester of training, a semester of intense coaching and mentoring, followed by a semester of peer-to-peer support. Another part of staff development was collaboration between teachers in producing materials and resources to be used in the school.

There were many opportunities for the teachers to provide feedback during the process and their thoughts were considered and shaped the implementation, including further mentoring. Regular surveys done by the literacy leaders confirmed the model of post-course support to be useful in all phases, including the peer-to-peer coaching.

The peer-to-peer observations enabled me to view how [the model] was implemented from other perspectives. I was also given the opportunity to observe more senior colleagues in similar and lower year level classes. (Teacher's written comment, post peer-to-peer support survey)

The external coaching was a big part of this unfolding, including planning stages as well as resourcing of the school, working on genre mapping and much more.

Hume Central Secondary College

The school attitude was really good, because they said to us, look, we are doing it now (training) but we are not going to expect you to have it in your class now ... and I think that's really good because I don't need people to put pressure on me at this stage. It's only because I didn't have that [pressure], that I have stepped up and put in as good as I could do. (Art and Technology teacher).

Hume Central Secondary College took a different approach to coaching. Because the training was delivered in a relatively short time to a large number of teachers, there were limited resources left for the immediate coaching. The coaching began in the following year. Some teachers really appreciated this relaxed approach and felt more motivated by not having the extra pressure.

As mentioned earlier, this model suited English and EAL teachers most.

However, there were some teachers of other subjects, from Mathematics to Biology to Art and Technology, willing to trial and find ways to engage with the pedagogy in the classroom. To these teachers, taking up this pedagogy unsupported was, at times, a challenge. To their credit, many did some great work and, with more support later, they managed to embrace language-based teaching well.

Coaching began a year later with the literacy leaders focusing on those teachers who asked for help or needed it most. The coaching was still somewhat limited, in comparison with the other schools, and possibly slowed down the uptake. Also, this support didn't include classroom modelling, which in other schools helped to break through any resistance of applying the pedagogy in a classroom. A more structured coaching was delivered in the following years, including peer-to-peer coaching.

A big part of the implementation was regular mini PDs, delivered to teachers in staff meetings every two or three weeks. These included teachers showing their units of work or sharing what they did in the classroom, to help teachers in applying this pedagogy in their subject. Teachers were also involved in producing some resources and materials, such as model texts.

The school relied on two external experts to help broaden the teachers' understanding of the functional model of language and how to apply it in classrooms across the whole curriculum.

Summary of coaching

The different approaches to coaching and support could provide an opportunity to compare and draw conclusions about the best way to approach the post-training support. It was clear that different models suited different teachers. The more relaxed model suited English and EAL teachers more, as they were more confident in applying the model in the classroom without much support. However, a compulsory and firmly structured model as opposed to teacher-driven model seemed to be more beneficial. It enabled all teachers to become more evenly engaged with the new pedagogy, producing more collaboration and greater consistence across the schools.

To this day, the Hume Central Secondary College leaders are unsure of who engages with the pedagogy and to what extent. Unlike the other two schools, the bulk of responsibility for language-based pedagogy still rests on the shoulders of English and EAL teachers. A new principal who took the position in 2019, is aware of it and plans to initiate more equal engagement in the future.

In terms of value added based on students' achievement, English and EAL are our highest performance. And I think there is some excellent practice occurring there and the students in these EAL and English classes will get a study score that is at least proportionate to what the Gap would indicate and in most cases more than that. (Principal)

That said, even with uneven take-up in Hume Central Secondary College,

all schools achieved a whole school improvement in students' results. This further provides a support for the explicit, language-based pedagogy as a foundation for a whole school improvement.

Resourcing and collaboration

We are building this common core of vocabulary and teaching practice that we can all pull from and that enables us to have a lot more targeted discussions about not only the teaching but also the learning, how are the students learning everything that we are teaching them. (Secondary teacher)

Developing new resources and documents was an important part of the implementation, as these reflected the new approach to teaching and learning. There were a number of resources that schools created that had to do with in-class activities and assignments, such as model texts or units of work based on the Teaching and Learning Cycle. Other documents, including curriculum or genre maps, were developed to serve as a guide for the whole school on how the pedagogy was to be used. These focused on what language features teachers were to take up across subjects and content of these subjects.

The type of resources created depended on the needs of the school. WELS, possibly inspired by the sister-centre and resources developed there, took on an ambitious undertaking and, within the first few years, created a wide suite of resources. These included a new curriculum, a new assessment tool, a genre unit pack and a range of model texts and units of work. Building this resource base was a gesture of formally embracing the pedagogy as an underpinning teaching philosophy for the school.

A range of resources was also developed in two other schools, with the primary focus on model texts, units of work and genre mapping. Explicit assessment routines were developed in Southern Secondary College, to gauge the progress internally and to feedback coaches about required support. In all cases, the new resources helped pedagogical consistency and fidelity. It also helped teachers, including new teachers, by providing guidance and many materials to use in classrooms.

External expertise

So our tutors were working parallel with Brian to broaden their skill set and that worked really, really well. (Literacy leader)

All three schools engaged the services of external consultants to help in planning and delivery of the implantation. While the level of engagement was determined by each school, the benefits of such engagement were, to some extent, obvious in all three case studies. The data suggests that there are a number of possible benefits of working with an expert who is also experienced in whole school implementation of this pedagogy.

First of all, collaboration with an experienced consultant helped in planning and mapping out the implementation. This is not an easy task and requires understanding of the model as well as the dynamic of the school where the implementation is to happen. As such, the best planning happened when both the school and the external consultant were involved.

Second, the literacy leaders are challenged and need to understand the model and its applications really well. Working with a consultant can help to further upskill and support these leaders as they, in turn, help and support their colleagues. This helps to assure the fidelity of the model and can help in optimising the coaching and mentoring efforts within the school.

Third, the consultant proved to be of value in helping literacy leaders across different faculties to apply the model to their subjects. Working with a group of teachers from a specific faculty, such as Mathematics or Art or Humanities, can further their understanding of the applications of this pedagogy beyond what they learn in the initial training. As the quote below suggests, these sessions were very inspiring and highly valued.

After we worked more closely with Brian in Maths, we developed all these ways where it was clearer the way the program could lead into Maths. Ever since then, it's completely changed the way that I teach. (Mathematics teacher)

Finally, the consultant was able to assist schools in developing larger documents and resources; for example, genre mapping or working on a new, comprehensive curriculum, as was the case in WELS.

Final comments

The implementation of the new pedagogy, especially such a complex and multifaceted implementation as the one undertaken in these three case

studies does not happen by chance. Long hours of planning, discussions and preparation preceded training and coaching activities. It was not surprising to find that detailed planning and firm decisions were the basis of the most seamless and effective implementations.

Many challenges needed to be identified a long time before they were to become a problem. Managing the nay-sayers and those who may, for whatever reason, resist the upskill was one of such challenges to consider. Another one was achieving consistency across the whole school and engaging teachers equally across different faculties. And then there were practical challenges, like location of a college across different campuses or taking the more experienced teachers out of the classroom to train and coach their colleagues.

Firm decisions and extending the necessary resources helped to overcome these and many other challenges. Soon after the initial training, teachers began to see some positive results for their efforts. And then the improved results across the whole school became visible within a few years. After an initial tough year or two, the schools were transformed into more coherent and more collaborative environments, a change that was valued by many teachers.

The most important factor in all cases were people. Those in the leading roles who took up the weighty task of supporting their colleagues in the upskill. The principals who were willing to listen to their literacy leaders and to make tough decisions that later impacted the results and shaped the new teaching practices. The teachers, each and every one of these who showed the courage to enthusiastically engage with a language-based approach even though they couldn't always see how it was relevant to their discipline.

Conclusion

This report has summarised the evaluation of the whole school implementation of an explicit, language-based pedagogy across three schools in Victoria, Australia. The evaluation was conducted using a range of data and data analysis tools in order to gauge the impact that the implementation of the new pedagogy had on these three schools. The evaluation also provides an analysis of the know how; the steps and factors that contributed to or hindered the success of these projects.

In conclusion, there has been a significant improvement in student learning outcomes across the whole school, which, in worldwide literature, is considered to be a rare and noteworthy change resulting from a teacher professional development program. Apart from the improvements in students' assessment scores, the pedagogy has had an impact on a number of teaching and learning practices within the schools, including students' behaviour and engagement.

There is no doubt that the implementation was demanding and challenging to the schools. However, there was no remorse evident in any of the accounts, and discussions collected in the evaluation. In fact, the opposite was true; the principals, teachers and leaders seemed proud of

the achievement and satisfied with the changes that happened as a result.

Two of the case studies in particular were exemplars of seamless, effective and successful pedagogical upskill across the whole school. Despite having to navigate through challenges and manage the logistics of such a large undertaking, both Southern Secondary College and WELS demonstrated not only the value of the pedagogy involved but also the value of leadership and support structures necessary to ensure the optimal uptake of the pedagogy.

The third case study, Hume Central Secondary College, was not as seamless in the unfolding as the other two schools. A hindering part here was certainly the timing; the state where the school was located experienced lengthy periods of lockdowns in the fourth year of the implementation, making it more difficult to continue with the program during that time. Moreover, because of the absence of mentoring and coaching in the second year of the implementation, some teachers might have been reluctant to embrace this pedagogy. Consequently, it was primarily English and EAL teachers that incorporated the new pedagogy in their practices. However, since the implementation there began later than in the other two schools, it is possible that these will be rectified in the future with satisfying results.

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