USING THE PRACTICE PRINCIPLES TO GUIDE LITERACY LEARNING

"The Practice Principles provide a reference point, they provide a conversation. We know that we're striving for excellence, using the Practice Principles as our mechanism."

Paul Wallace, Acting Principal, Fairfield Primary School

OVERVIEW

This professional practice note provides advice to support school leaders and teachers in understanding how the Practice Principles for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (the Practice Principles) facilitate effective literacy learning across all areas of the Victorian Curriculum F–10.

In addition, this professional practice note includes examples of how schools can approach the use of the Practice Principles to support literacy learning, and useful resources.

See: *Practice Principles for Excellence in Learning and Teaching.*

THE PRACTICE PRINCIPLES

The Practice Principles provide evidence-based support for teaching practice, at a whole-school and classroom level, drawing the focus into every classroom, and to the learning needs of every student.

They are a part of the Victorian Teaching and Learning Model, which also includes the Vision for Learning, the Pedagogical Model and the High Impact Teaching Strategies (HITS).

The Practice Principles support teachers as they weave a literacy focus into all of their work – guided by the core teaching practice of curriculum development, pedagogy and assessment.

For teachers, the Practice Principles are a valuable reflection tool that allow them to understand the effectiveness of their practice, and identify instructional practices that can be enacted through the Pedagogical Model.

For school leaders, the Practice Principles articulate a cohesive view of effective teaching and learning which integrates all aspects of teaching, and supports effective delivery of the Victorian Curriculum F–10.

ADVICE FOR SCHOOL LEADERS AND LITERACY LEADERS

School-wide implementation of key improvement strategies requires a reflection on current practice

The Practice Principles provide an opportunity for school leaders and literacy leaders to deeply review teaching practice, and enable a whole-school, group and individual focus on literacy instruction.

School leaders and literacy leaders can use the Practice Principles to guide conversations. Suggested steps include:

1. evaluate and diagnose student data, to establish and test hypotheses about the impact of teaching on literacy learning outcomes:

    - explore and identify patterns in data

    - identify three questions that engage different levels of the school (whole-school, key learning area, classroom practice).

2. prioritise and set goals for literacy learning and achievement:

    - use the Practice Principles to prioritise the focus of activities at whole-school, Professional Learning Community (PLC) and classroom levels.

3. use the Practice Principles to undertake a reflection and determine the approaches to achieving literacy program goals. See: *Practice Principles for Excellence in Teaching and Learning reflection tools*

    - reflect on whole-school, PLC or individual practice

4. guide teachers in designing and delivering the literacy learning program:

    - select a range of resources that can be used to provide guidance for teachers in establishing teaching and learning plans, as well as assist with implementing the focus actions for teaching and learning in literacy

    - identify the ways in which these resources can be used in a complementary fashion to support improving practice at each level.

5. monitor the teaching and learning program, including student engagement and performance:

    - establish the monitoring and data collection practices that teachers will put in place to ensure effective implementation of the identified actions.

Practice Principles diagnostic tool

The Practice Principles include a diagnostic tool to support collaborative practice improvement. This tool can help school leadership teams and teachers to determine how effectively the Practice Principle(s) are embedded in the school.

For more information see: *Practice Principles for Excellence in Teaching and Learning reflection tools*.

Reflective Practice

School leaders model and lead improvement through prioritising whole-school, collaborative and individual reflective practice. The Practice Principles and the accompanying reflection tools support facilitated opportunities for teachers to identify focus areas for their teaching and build their instructional leadership.

Below is one strategy that schools can use alongside the Practice Principles to identify areas of focus.

Anthony Shaddock and John Hattie, in *Using data to improve learning: a practical guide for busy teachers* speak to the process of teachers identifying the focus of their classroom interventions. They suggest that teachers can keep a diary of their reflections about student learning and teaching practice, to help in choosing 'what to do'.

Shaddock and Hattie also provide a series of sentence starters, for teachers to consider their response:

- I think our students would show more interest in…if we…
- I wonder if the students would do better in… if we…
- what would be the effects on our students' engagement or learning or behaviour if we…?[1]

ADVICE FOR TEACHERS

Inherent in teaching is a cycle of reflection and refinement to ensure that students are constantly being challenged in their knowledge and skill development. This process should occur at many levels – from the activities within a lesson to whole units, as well as throughout the teaching and learning sequence.

Understanding how the Practice Principles can support your areas of focus, guided by data

The Practice Principles reflection tools enable school staff, as a collective, to identify the next areas of focus for the school.

The tools include a scale for each of the nine Practice Principles, against which teachers can assess their level of proficiency. The information that is collected as part of this process will inform the intervention activities at the school, and should be aligned to the school's strategic direction and the Annual Implementation Plan. For more information see: *Practice Principles for Excellence in Teaching and Learning reflection tools*.

Using the Practice Principles to guide literacy learning interventions in the classroom

Whether an explicit focus of the school, or implicit in the teaching and learning cycle, effective literacy learning is central to student success, and occurs when schools embed a literacy focus in their instruction across all areas of the curriculum.

The Practice Principles make explicit the everyday practice of most teachers, and bring together this work to guide conversations about what and how they teach. The Practice Principles can be used to guide conversations about what could work in the context of literacy learning.

The experience in each classroom will look different, as it is guided by the learning needs of students. Each teacher with each group of students brings the Practice Principles to life, and contributes to the whole-school improvement journey.

EXAMPLE IN PRACTICE: SECONDARY SCHOOL

Teachers at a large regional secondary school agreed that their Term 2 professional practice days would be taken in Professional Learning Community (PLC) teams so that teachers could focus on their planning and curriculum development for the year.

Focusing on curriculum development

In their PLCs, teachers spent time unpacking the Literacy Teaching Toolkit. The expert literacy videos initiated a conversation among teachers about current practices in language instruction, 'the register of schooling – the specific use of language in school', [2] and discipline-specific vocabulary. See: *expert literacy videos*.

The Humanities PLC team agreed on the need to focus on expressive and receptive oral language (speaking and listening within History, Geography and Civics and Citizenship).

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[1] Shaddock, A & Hattie, J, 2014, *Using data to improve learning: a practical guide for busy teachers,* ACER Press, Camberwell

[2] La Bianco, J., video, Department of Education and Training, http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/discipline/english/literacy/Pages/expertvideos.aspx

As part of this, teachers undertook a reflection on the school's performance using *Practice Principle 4: Curriculum planning and implementation engages and challenges all students*, building on earlier conversations about current practices in curriculum development.

This approach aligned with the Framework for Improving Student Outcomes Dimension of *Curriculum Planning and Assessment* and the school's strategic direction, which is to *advance learning growth in all curriculum learning areas with a particular focus on literacy.*

Implementing the literacy learning intervention

The functions of language, as outlined in the Literacy Teaching Toolkit, provided a list of areas of focus that were to form part of the instruction in all Humanities units. See: *functions of language.*

Teachers developed unit plans that included opportunities for students to convey and receive understanding through formal and informal means, and a focus on explicit instruction and multiple exposures, sourced from the Department's HITS resource. This included key vocabulary of each of the disciplines in the Humanities, with each teacher identifying five discipline-specific words for each lesson. The literacy leader within the PLC supported colleagues in building student ability to use metalanguage to express opinions, feelings and identity, and language for learning, within this context.

This literacy focus was underpinned by the school's broader focus on note-taking skills, which has been identified as an area of attention in the junior years. As students applied their new language, the teachers used the opportunity to reinforce the Cornell note-taking method[3].

Evaluating the intervention

As the units of work were introduced, teachers within the PLC scheduled peer observation sessions to gain a deeper understanding of how each teacher approached instruction in their classroom, and with their students. The teaching strategies (explicit instruction and multiple exposures) used by the teacher were the focus of the observation.

At the end of the units, the Humanities PLC reflected on the speaking and listening instruction, and used the 'functions of language' to guide classroom activities. Part of this process included revisiting the Practice Principles reflection tool for

Practice Principle 4 and re-assessing the school's level of proficiency.

The Practice Principles allowed teachers to have clarity and consensus about the strategies that work in the school, and provided a focus on specific teaching strategies.

EXAMPLE IN PRACTICE: SPECIALIST SCHOOL

A specialist school in metropolitan Melbourne identified a need for a strong focus on Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) processes, as reflected in the school's Annual Implementation Plan. *Practice Principle 7: Evidence-based strategies to drive professional practice improvement* provided the school with an opportunity to reflect on their pedagogical practices related to the use of AAC methods. Teachers and Education Support Staff undertook a self-reflection of their practice against each of the four actions. This included identifying which indictors they believed they were demonstrating and which ones they believed should be areas of focus.

After the self-reflection, staff discussed their findings and identified a particular area of focus around the use of AAC processes. To build knowledge and skills in using these areas of focus, the group agreed to implement the following strategies:

- structuring learning sequences to include a designated time in which students engage with their AAC devices
- modelling the use of AAC devices
- providing students with multiple opportunities to access their AAC devices.

Peer observation was a key strategy in driving consistency across this practice, and included each staff member being observed over the course of the week with a focus on one or more of the above strategies.

After the observations took place, the staff met again, shared reflections from the observation, and identified future areas of improvement.

At the end of the meeting, staff agreed on their individual and the collective focus for future observations related to AAC. The use of the Practice Principles in this process allowed teachers and Education Support staff to deepen their use of the HITS in the context of AAC.

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[3] Cornell University (unknown), *The Cornell Note-taking System,* Cornell University, http://lsc.cornell.edu/notes.html

RELEVANT TOOLS AND RESOURCES

This note is part of a series of professional practice notes to support school-based staff to continue improving their practice. See *Professional Practice Elements* for more information.

Relevant tools and resources include:

- Evaluating the impact of your teaching

- Expert literacy videos

- Framework for Improving Student Outcomes

- High Impact Teaching Strategies

- Peer observation, including feedback and reflection

- Practice Principles for Excellence in Teaching and Learning

- Practice Principles for Excellence in Teaching and Learning reflection tools

- Literacy Masterclass on High Impact Teaching Strategies

- Literacy and Numeracy Strategy

- Literacy Teaching Toolkit

- Victorian Literacy Portal

CONTACT US

For more information, or to share your feedback on this resource, please email:
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