

The impact of the reading framework at Porirua School.

About us

We are a small decile 2 school in Porirua. Our vision includes: 'active learners achieving success within an inclusive, supported, learning community.' We are a learning community of students, staff and whanau. We have been using the reading framework for over two years. Here is our story about why we began using the reading framework, how we got started and the impact it has had on our teaching and learning.

Why we began using the reading framework

We knew our students weren't achieving well in reading but we had nothing concrete to tell us exactly where students were. We suspected that many students weren't achieving because they weren't being provided with the opportunities to develop their reading knowledge and skills. Our leadership team went to some initial professional development workshops to learn more about PaCT and we realised that not only would the PaCT help us to make consistent judgments about where students were, but also that the reading framework itself was an incredibly useful tool for building teachers' professional knowledge about reading in the curriculum.

How we introduced the framework to our teachers

We began slowly, taking several staff meetings to explore the place of reading and writing within the different learning areas of the curriculum, using relevant sections of Effective Literacy Practice 1–4 and 5–8 to guide our discussions. Then in term three 2016 we teamed up with another local school and held several combined staff meetings to explore the reading framework, one aspect at a time. Teachers unpacked the descriptors and described the key points in their own words. Then they tried to order illustrations along the progression. To start with, we thought we could

easily order the illustrations just by using the text levels. However, we quickly found out that we had to carefully read and unpack the annotations and we realised that these, along with the descriptors, were key to understanding progress from one signpost to the next. This was important learning for us all.

The framework generated much excitement for teachers because at last they had something that helped them understand what reading progress actually looks like. They were really motivated to learn more. By the end of the year, most teachers had explored all three frameworks – reading, writing and mathematics – and many were using the progressions to help with end-of-year overall teacher judgments. By the beginning of 2017 everyone was using the reading framework to inform their planning, monitor progress and reflect on their teaching.

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Keeping the focus on teaching practice

At the beginning of 2018, we knew that we needed to deepen our knowledge and learn more about using the framework. We chose two aspects each term to explore in depth at weekly staff meetings. To manage teachers' workload, we cut out all other after-school meetings.

We explored big ideas about reading, such as; 'What is learning to read, and reading to learn?'

We reviewed our hard-to-shift students' running records. We reviewed the evidence of what we now knew about developing a processing system, and encoding, then decided on actions. Each week, teachers were expected to try something

new over the following week and then pre-populate their actions in the staff meeting minutes on a shared Google doc before the next meeting. Some of the things they reported include:

“I am really thinking about and trying different prompts for my lower students seeing what works for them when they get to a difficulty.”

“I am noticing students have greater understanding and generate more discussion during shared reading.”

This is what we do now. The reading framework helps us to link everything up. It’s not an extra on top.

How the reading framework has helped us to understand progress in reading

By understanding what’s involved at each signpost along a progression, we know where our students are going. It took some of us a while to understand that the gaps between the signposts can vary. We pulled out the Literacy Learning Progressions and plotted the students’ next learning steps. From this we realised that some of the jumps between signposts stretched over two years. The framework underpins our sense of urgency and our focus is on accelerating the progress of students who need to make more than one year’s progress in a year. We monitor our students’ progress regularly and think about the kinds of conversations we are having with them. We notice, and we gather evidence from observations such as running records. Together we continually build a deep understanding of our students’ progress.

How the framework has impacted on our planning and teaching

The biggest change is that now students’ reading (and writing) is purposeful. All learning tasks link to students’ goals and all our reading and writing is integrated with our students’ inquiries. For example, a recent focus across the school was: ‘We are scientists’. This meant we were selecting texts that required students to build and use knowledge of the particular language, features and structures of science texts and to understand how

all these features influence their navigation and use of the texts. We also deconstructed the texts to learn how scientists write and this fed into our writing programme.

Another big change is that we no longer group students according to text level. Teachers have a clearer idea about reading progression and what is represented at each signpost. Grouping for literacy instruction is flexible and more workshop based. Students know what they are learning and where they are headed and are able to self-select workshops they know they need. Teachers provide the necessary scaffolds so that all students can access the texts. They have noticed that struggling readers are highly motivated because they can access texts that they would never have read before. Teachers also notice that students support each other in these groups and modelling by peers is just as, if not more, powerful than modelling by the teacher.

In our junior school (years 1–3), teaching is now really focused on building students’ independence, making sure that their students know what they’re doing, as they problem-solve their way through a text. The teachers have become expert at ‘over the shoulder’ teaching; they know what to notice and how to support and respond to each student, wherever they are on a progression. In our senior school (years 4–6), inquiry is no longer something that just happens in the afternoon. The reading framework helps us to ‘teach wide’ and we continually go back to the framework and learn more from the rich tasks and the student responses. We continually reflect on our programmes to ensure that we are planning rich tasks and providing multiple opportunities for students to talk about their learning, with each other and with their teacher.

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