

Using the LPFs to strengthen writing at De La Salle College

About the college

De La Salle College is a Catholic school in south Auckland with about 1000 boys from years 7 to 13. Most of the college's community is Pacific, including many families from Samoa, Tonga, Niue, and the Cook Islands, and most students and their families speak languages other than English at home.

The school's vision is to create "great men of learning, community, and character." Building culture, language, and identity and connecting to literacy are at the centre of the school's teaching and learning ethos.

The Learning Progression Frameworks inquiry

The college was invited to take part in an inquiry into how secondary teachers could engage with the Learning Progression Frameworks (LPFs). As part of the South Auckland Catholic Kāhui Ako, the college had already been working to improve writing outcomes, not only in their own kura, but across the Kāhui Ako. They had trialed a number of approaches to improving writing across the school. For example, they had co-constructed a cross-curricular writing rubric that supported teachers' understanding of students' progression in writing from levels 1 to 8 of the New Zealand Curriculum. They had also set up a school-wide goal for all students to write up to 300 words regularly in all subject areas.

Teachers at the college therefore saw the inquiry as a perfect next step in their professional learning journey. It would build on their knowledge and expertise to help them assess and monitor students' literacy progression across all subject areas.

The inquiry was seen as complementing the school's existing goals and teacher inquiries. Three sessions of two and a half hours were scheduled in terms two and three. The five teachers who volunteered for the inquiry taught English, social sciences, and mathematics.

Starting out

Some teachers had already encountered the LPFs and had some preconceived ideas about their purpose and relevance in the secondary context. The sessions began with an overview of the reading and writing frameworks. The teachers were introduced to the big ideas within the frameworks – the knowledge and skills that students are expected to develop and apply from school entry to the end of year 10.

Although some of the group felt overwhelmed by the level of detail involved in the overview, they passionately viewed themselves as teachers of literacy and were therefore willing to persevere with the process of unpacking the tool. They explored the seven aspects of reading and writing and investigated the range of illustrations that accompany each signpost.

One teacher commented, "I'm excited to keep learning, and I can see the relevance."

A focus on vocabulary

The teachers agreed that vocabulary was a common teaching and learning need across all subject areas, so this was a unanimous starting point for the inquiry. They realised that it was important to make explicit links between reading and writing, so they split into two groups and became "vocabulary aspect experts" in either reading or writing at the top end of the frameworks.

Deeper learning evolved as the teachers began to question and challenge each other about their expectations of students' vocabulary development in years 9 and 10.

Some of the group continued to be challenged by the level of detail and the specialist literacy language in the framework. They worked together to paraphrase the big ideas behind each set of illustrations and build a common literacy language across the disciplines.

Deeper learning evolved as the teachers began to question and challenge each other about their expectations of students' vocabulary development in years 9 and 10. For some teachers, this resulted in an affirmation of their students' current progress. Others discovered that their students had larger vocabulary needs than they had realised, and they were keen to find solutions and to carry out more explicit vocabulary teaching. The group as a whole agreed that they now had a clearer understanding of literacy progression.

One teacher commented, "I need to teach more sophisticated writing. I already introduce vocabulary, but I want them to be able to use it more deliberately."

The real "magic" happened when the group began to look at their own students' work through the lens provided by the LPFs.

Connecting students' writing with the framework

The real "magic" happened when the group began to look at their own students' work through the lens provided by the LPFs. Each of the teachers read aloud their students' work samples, analysing their strengths and learning needs alongside the framework. As a group, they then co-constructed the next steps in the learning process. This was powerful. Even though the teachers were still viewing the students' work primarily through the lens of their discipline, they were now beginning to explore the connections between the literacy aspects and the subject area's achievement objectives.

Reflecting on the learning

"It's highlighted the gaps in my teaching and helped me work out the next steps. It helps you be

more deliberate in your teaching approaches."

"It's been great to moderate and talk together so we can be more consistent."

"It was a reminder of the different levels – where the students should be and what they can do."

"We could use the language from the LPFs in our marking criteria. We want more techniques and strategies to help our learners. We want more!"