

The impact of the LPFs on literacy across the curriculum at Onehunga High School.

About the school

Onehunga High School is a large and diverse community in one of Auckland's oldest suburbs. Its students come from Māngere Bridge, Royal Oak, Onehunga, and Hillsborough. Traditional subjects sit alongside a Pathways programme which includes a business school, a building and construction school, and a catering and hospitality school.

Onehunga High School is part of a Kāhui Ako that has focused on improving literacy across the curriculum. The school was first introduced to the Learning Progression Frameworks (LPFs) a couple of years ago as part of a whole-staff PLD session. At that stage, some staff were doubtful about the LPFs' relevance, but the school has decided to take another look at them because they link well to the goals of the Kāhui Ako and provide a useful next step for understanding students' progress in literacy across all subject areas.

Investigating the frameworks

The school agreed to take part in an inquiry into how secondary teachers could engage with the LPFs. The six teachers involved in this inquiry taught in a variety of subject areas: English, maths, health and P.E., social sciences, and learning support. Some were already leading departmental literacy inquiries or were keen to learn more about effective literacy teaching. They committed to three two-hour sessions over two terms, with timetabled relief provided. The meetings focused on how the frameworks could strengthen their understanding of students' progress in reading and writing in their subject areas.

Setting goals

At the first session, as part of whanaungatanga, the teachers shared a range of approaches they

were already trialing in their classrooms or departments to improve literacy (for example, the maths teacher talked about helping students to read maths texts).

A prior-knowledge survey showed that teachers at the school were already using a range of formative and summative assessment tools and approaches to assess and understand students' progress in literacy in years 9 and 10. These included e-asTTle, verbal checking, and conferencing. Some teachers hoped that the LPFs would help them make more accurate judgments of students' progress in years 9 and 10 and at curriculum levels 4 and 5. Others wanted to deepen their own understanding of literacy skills, knowledge, and competencies and to learn about literacy strategies and pedagogy.

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The learning journey

To start with, the teachers chose the reading critically aspect as a focus for discussion. They agreed this was a key skill that all learners needed to develop in years 9 and 10. At the higher end of this aspect, students are expected to analyse and evaluate writers' development of ideas and themes and the ways in which they position their readers. For example, students could evaluate a text's reliability and relevance and analyse the ways in which it portrays individuals or groups.

The teachers looked at the level 5 signposts and illustrations for this aspect. They commented that the science illustrations focused on students' analysis of a text's reliability and the author's presentation of evidence, while the English illustrations demonstrated students' understanding of how an author's imagery and vocabulary choices could influence the reader's response.

This discussion highlighted the different ways in which the same reading aspect could be viewed in a range of disciplines. The teachers found that, as they negotiated their understanding of the aspects with teachers from different subject areas, they began to develop a deeper knowledge of the literacy content. As one teacher commented, "The illustrations give us examples of different strategies for unpacking text."

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The impact of the LPFs on teaching and learning

The teachers realised that their students needed help with transferring generic literacy approaches to their writing in all subject areas. As the inquiry continued, the teachers reflected on their teaching and tried out new approaches. In the inquiry sessions, they shared the impact the LPFs were having on their teaching and learning.

The social sciences teacher was now teaching vocabulary more explicitly and had developed a glossary with students. Another teacher had noticed that her students' writing lacked structure, so she had begun to develop a teaching focus on text structure and organisation. The health and P.E. teacher said that she had now become more aware of the level of paragraphing required for writing in her subject area. She had trialed some

writing approaches, for example by asking students about the paragraph structures they were already using and then helping them to use a writing structure to strengthen their writing in health and P.E.

Strengthening understandings

In the final session, the teachers worked in groups on one aspect of reading or writing, focusing on the differences between the top three signposts.

They read aloud and discussed samples of their students' work, highlighting the strengths and aligning any learning needs to particular aspects. In the discussions that followed, the teachers sometimes challenged each other about their thinking. Although not everyone came to an agreement, the teachers felt that they had strengthened their understanding of their students' literacy progress.

Their comments included:

"I loved learning about the aspects and looking at the illustrations. I feel that I'm getting much better at understanding my students' progress."

"I did struggle with some of the signpost descriptions. But I loved listening to the writing samples from other subject areas. And it was great to have discussions with my colleagues about literacy."

"Some of the differences between the signposts are pretty subtle – but there are differences. The illustrations made it much easier to understand the learning progressions."