Teacher Learning Communities: a way to effect change in formative assessment and teaching practices

Richmond Road Primary School (TLIF 1-120)

For the Ministry of Education
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Contents

Summary ...........................................................................................................................................3
  Inquiry Team .....................................................................................................................................3
Background .......................................................................................................................................3
  The inquiry .......................................................................................................................................4
Key findings .......................................................................................................................................5
Key implications (in terms of the goals of TLIF) ...........................................................................5
Plans for sharing the findings ...........................................................................................................6
Reference List .....................................................................................................................................6
For further information .......................................................................................................................6

Project title:
Teacher Learning Communities: a way to effect change in formative assessment and teaching practices

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Summary

This TLIF addressed the questions:

- How does a teacher learning community change the formative assessment practices of teachers?
- What formative assessment practices changed as a result of the teacher learning community?
- What initiated, sustained and/or inhibited changes in formative assessment practices?
- To what extent, if any, does student achievement data in literacy and mathematics change over the period of the project? What might explain these patterns of achievement?

Inquiry Team

- Project leader: Jonathan Ramsay [Tumuaki Richmond Road School].
- The other members of the project team were Catherine Vetelino, Stacey Dewar and Petrea Barker.
- Dr Mary Hill, University of Auckland. Mary supported the team by assisting them with data collection and draft report writing through the last eighteen months of the project.

Background

This inquiry was built on the rationale that by working together as a collaborative learning community, teachers and students could build their understanding and practice of assessment for learning (AfL) practices. It was based on the work of Wiliam and Leahy (2015).
The inquiry

The teachers worked in Teacher Learning Communities (TLCs) to improve their formative assessment practices, which included students developing their own abilities to self and peer assess. The five formative practices and associated strategies were:

1. Clarifying, sharing and understanding learning intentions and success criteria (Strategies: framing learning intentions; sharing samples of work to demonstrate aspects of quality; sharing big ideas, learning progressions, and staging posts.)

2. Engineering productive discussion and activities that elicit evidence of learning (Strategies: no hands up; time for thinking; avoiding questions altogether; all-student response systems; question shells; hinge questions.)

3. Providing feedback that moves learners forward (Strategies: feedback should be more work for the recipient than the donor; focus on the reaction of the students not the feedback; develop a growth mindset in students; design feedback as part of the system; longer time for feedback; concentrate on personal bests; make feedback into detective work; comment-only marking; focused feedback.)

4. Activating students as learning resources for each other (Strategies: Incorporating the five conditions for cooperative learning; peer feedback; group goals; individual accountability.)

5. Activating students as owners of their own learning (Strategies: self-reports; time for students to own the learning; nurture intrinsic and extrinsic motivation; engage students as lesson observers.) (For further details see Wiliam & Leahy, 2015).

The project involved teachers in regular collegial observations of teacher and student use of the strategies outlined above. This was followed by feedback discussions between the teacher peers. The observation and feedback sessions were followed by a workshop in school time to allow teachers to focus on the feedback given and to learn about new strategies to try.

Data was collected throughout the project and was used to inform project development. Data included: structured classroom observations; teacher questionnaires; discussions with students; half yearly achievement data against National standards; and teacher interviews at the conclusion of the project.
Key findings

- Classroom observations demonstrated generally that while teachers began with teacher centred practices, over time they moved from a limited range of formative practices to including the students in their own goal setting and in evaluating their progress against these goals.
- Most of the teachers made significant strides in embedding new ways of teaching and assessment into their regular classroom approaches.
- Questionnaire analysis indicated that teachers expanded their understanding of assessment by the conclusion of the project. In particular there was more awareness of how student self-assessment assisted students to manage their own learning.
- Students developed their capacity to assess and respond purposefully to data about their own learning and that of their peers. It was clear from the student data that they felt engaged with their own learning and assessment and used and appreciated the strategies that the teachers had introduced and used through the TLC programme.
- Although student achievement in reading and writing data showed a general upward trend, a causal relationship between increased achievement and increased use of AfL cannot be demonstrated in this kind of inquiry. However the relationship can be inferred from the broader range of strategies employed and student engagement with these.

Key implications (in terms of the goals of TLIF)

- The study highlights how teachers need support to change their practice towards AfL. The support includes within-school facilitation, facilitators who are also supported in their roles, commitment from school leaders, and provision of time for teachers to think critically about what they are learning from their inquiry, to enable them to build new practices.
- The buddy observations were a critical component of the TLCs. It appears that regular and supportive peer observations assisted teachers to make steady progress toward implementing a wider range of strategies.
- The structured programme, professional readings and workbook allowed teacher facilitators to develop confidence in the content of their work. These
resources initiated and sustained the change process, along with professional development days with Dylan Wiliam, author of the programme.

- Building in scheduled professional readings related to their work built knowledge and understanding and enriched collegial discussion.

**Plans for sharing the findings**


Local Principal Cluster and Kāhui Ako

**Reference List**


**For further information**

If you would like to learn more about this project please contact the project leader Jonathan Ramsay at jonathan@edendale.school.nz
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