



Case study

Bracken Ridge State School

Bracken Ridge State School is a mid-sized metropolitan school located in a northern suburb of Brisbane, with a total student population of 371 students and two Prep classes. Just over 60% of the school population is in the bottom two quartiles of the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) (2014). 11% of children are indigenous, while 7.5% have English as an additional language or dialect.

Taking action

The leadership team, consisting of the Prep teacher, speech language pathologist, literacy coach, deputy principal, and principal, decided to focus their action plan on identified vulnerabilities in children's oral language and narrative competence. It was determined that one Prep teacher would participate in the Age Appropriate Pedagogies pilot, while the other Prep teacher continued with existing pedagogies and approaches. The leadership team felt that having one prep class involved in the project and the other not, offered an ideal opportunity to compare differences. The team met weekly throughout the pilot to determine the impact of the changes on classroom practice.

They used the Quick Test of Oral Language, along with two narrative sequence and retell tasks to provide evidence of children's developing oral language and narrative competence. Pre-tests were conducted in both classes at the beginning of Term 3 and then the implementation process began. The participating teacher chose to use a range and balance of characteristics to develop narrative understanding and rich oral language. She wrote regular, detailed personal journal entries reflecting on her teaching practice and the children's responses.

Creating change

An important aspect of the Bracken Ridge plan was to improve the teacher's capacity to provide a language rich and dialogic classroom. The speech language pathologist and the teacher worked together to develop an approach that would expand opportunities for the children to engage in oral language and narrative activities. They used Blank's (1978) levels of discourse and a reading program to focus their thinking and planning. Specifically, they identified dramatic play and story talk as being useful, and gradually moved

through three phases, shifting from explicit instruction and teacher-directed learning (start of the project) through scaffolded, teacher-directed but student-led learning (middle of project, end of Term 3) to responsive and active and child-directed learning (Term 4). As the pedagogies provided opportunities for more student-led learning, the teacher observed that participation and engagement increased. She noted that previously her teaching plans saw good academic results, however the implementation of the characteristics saw her wonderful class come alive with enthusiasm for learning.

In each of three phases, a series of lessons was offered, with the first lesson focusing on introducing key vocabulary and a specific text. In the second lesson, the focus shifted to text comprehension using Blank's levels of questioning (1978). The third lesson emphasised narrative elements, while the fourth lesson saw the children retelling or innovating on the original story, using pictures, puppets or dramatic play. At times during the lesson sequence the children engaged in independent play related on the story, role-playing in pairs or small groups, using available blocks and materials to construct the setting for the story, and drawing props and costumes from their dress-up materials. A vocabulary wall was also constructed to support the children's oral story telling.



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Initial findings

Analysis of the data collected from the pre-and post-tests demonstrates that the application of age-appropriate pedagogies had a significant impact on both the oral language and narrative competence of the children, with their outcomes being noticeably better than for the children in the comparison class.

While positive academic results were evident, the teacher also noticed enhanced engagement and attitudes to learning for many of the children. She singled out the changes she noticed in one boy, described as quiet and [did] not participate in group discussions. In conversation, the teacher identified that he had an active imagination. She discovered that he was very creative, commenting that using multiple approaches has allowed him to access his imaginative side. This was just one example of a child who has made significant progress and now participates actively. The teacher noted that he came up with descriptive words and contributing information around the problem, solution, characters and setting of the story.



Prep 2			
Names	Initial Score	Retest	Difference
Student 1	10	12	2
Student 2		13	
Student 3	5	10	5
Student 4	8	11	3
Student 5	8	12	4
Student 6	14	18	4
Student 7	17	24	7
Student 8	13	19	6
Student 9		15	
Student 10	17	19	2
Student 11	15	22	7
Student 12	17	25	8
Student 13	10	11	1
Student 14	12	21	9
Student 15	12	19	7
Student 16	15	20	5
Student 17		13	
Student 18	14	22	8
Student 19	14	20	6
Student 20		20	
Student 21	17	19	2
Student 22	9	16	7
Student 23	23	21	-2
Class student improve:			4.7894737
OL group student improve:			5.6666667

Challenges

The classroom teacher worked consistently to gain an understanding of the eleven characteristics and incorporate them into her teaching practices. She deepened her understanding of the research in the Foundation Paper and sought out other associated literature; participated in additional professional learning related to oral language development and collaborated with the speech language pathologist. She found that her regular reflections, together with the mentoring and support from others in the leadership team who met with her weekly to provide advice and feedback, were invaluable.

Future plans

Next year, both Prep teachers will employ age-appropriate pedagogies and work collaboratively with the speech language pathologist to gain insight into each child's language and narrative skills. Once again the speech language pathologist will work closely with the teachers to design learning opportunities that are language rich, and to monitor children's progress.

The school leadership team will provide professional learning opportunities to familiarise all of the school staff with the eleven characteristics, and liaise and collaborate with local kindergartens to support their understanding of the characteristics and approaches that are age appropriate in the early years of school.