

## Example of practice

# Working with external organisations to use evidence

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Examples of practice demonstrate effective practice in different education settings. You can use them to think about how to apply the practice in your own context. This example comes from Jo-Anne Dooner and Georgie Wynne.

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**Better use of evidence leads to improved student outcomes. But sometimes schools find it difficult to create and sustain a culture of evidence use on their own. This is an example on how schools have worked with external organisations to improve students' reading and literacy skills using evidence.**

## Improving reading

### Context

This example is about a public school in Western Australia. Around two-thirds of students have a language background other than English and there is a relatively high proportion of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students.

Year 3 and Year 5 students were significantly underperforming in NAPLAN reading scores compared to their peers. The school wanted to help boost their students' reading achievement and needed a step-by-step plan.

### Engaging with an external organisation

The school wanted to use an evidence-based approach to improvement, but were facing some struggles, including:

- uncertainty around which aspects of teaching quality to address and in what order
- resistance to change among some staff members
- tailoring research to their context
- knowing feasible ways to make sustainable changes
- navigating the vast education evidence-base and research to better support school improvement efforts.

The school applied to the Fogarty Foundation to join their 3-year school improvement program called Fogarty EDvance. The program has been running for a decade and has worked with 111 schools to date. It is designed as a leadership development program in a school improvement context, to help school leaders in Western Australia boost student learning. The schools apply a change management process to adopt and implement evidence-based approaches.

## Using student data to identify needs

Using the school's student data, the school leadership team identified 2 key goals within the teaching and learning focus area:

- to develop teacher effectiveness and efficiency
- to use data to inform planning.

The leadership team and EDvance also designed a 3-year plan to achieve these goals. This involved:

- following a scaffolded strategic planning process
- using a synthesis of research and evidence to identify high impact strategies and initiatives
- mapping initiatives as steps towards the goals.

Based on the evidence, the school focused on embedding more explicit teaching in K to Year 2 and developing phonemic awareness.

## Supporting teachers to make the changes

The school leadership team identified teaching practices that could best meet school needs. They also identified ways to support teachers to successfully make changes to their practice. Methods used to embed changes included mentoring, coaching, active learning and feedback. To assist the teachers with explicitly teaching phonological awareness, an expert was enlisted to deliver professional learning, classroom observations and ongoing modelling and coaching.

Through the EDvance program, the school leadership team were also paired with a mentor, an experienced, retired school leader, who provided on-the-ground support to help them implement their plans and increase accountability to the milestones they set.

## Evidence of improvement

Within 4 years, Year 3 students lifted their reading scores by 95 NAPLAN scores, ranking well above the state average.

## Improving literacy

### Context

This example is about a Catholic School in regional Queensland. Around 15% of students have a language background other than English and there is a relatively high proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

The school wanted to improve their NAPLAN literacy results, which were significantly lower compared to similar schools.

### Engaging with an external organisation

The principal wanted to use evidence to lift student outcomes but felt their current approach wasn't gaining traction. Challenges included:

- an inconsistent and ad hoc approach to content, teaching and learning, and assessment
- 'change fatigue' resulting from prior unsuccessful attempts to improve student outcomes.

The school reached out to Training 24/7, a professional learning provider that supports teachers and leaders to embed evidence-based practices.

## Developing a roadmap

The school made a 5-year commitment to restructuring literacy practices in line with Rosenshine's Principles of Instruction. Training 24/7 initially provided intensive support to establish a culture of evidence use, gradually fading out the support as the school gained more independence. School leaders and Training 24/7 co-designed 'scope and sequence' documents and 'essential agreements' as roadmaps for achieving school improvement goals. These documents included an evidence-based rationale for the practices and an assessment schedule using assessments informed by evidence.

## Supporting teachers to make the changes

Training 24/7 delivered professional learning to enhance teachers' knowledge of evidence-based practices and how to best teach them. Live demonstration lessons, classroom observations, detailed feedback and coaching were key elements of the professional learning. Teachers used journals to reflect on their practice and set practice change goals linked to the [Australian Professional Standards for Teachers](#). Training 24/7 supported leaders to analyse and interpret student learning data and to guide teachers to make instructional adjustments that drive school-wide practice change.

## Evidence of improvement

Since partnering with Training 24/7, Year 3 and Year 5 literacy NAPLAN scores have improved across the board. Two teachers from the school have achieved Highly Accomplished status and a further 2 have achieved Lead status.

## Summary

These examples show how schools can engage with other organisations to improve student outcomes. In these partnerships, organisations provide professional learning activities based on the most up to date knowledge about teaching and learning practice. Importantly, they guide schools to implement evidence-based change and manage this change well.

## Key takeaways

- Boosting educational outcomes takes considerable time, effort and organisation.
- Strong leadership is vital to drive whole-of-school change.
- Demonstrations, coaching, observation and feedback appear to help embed and sustain new teaching practices.
- Evidence can be used to identify how practice can be changed and motivate reluctant teachers who may feel burnt out from 'change fatigue'.

### Making changes in your school

The [Education Endowment Foundation](#) provides useful guidance and resources for school improvement.