

Innovation teams explore the potential of the curriculum progress tools at Ashburton College

About the college

Ashburton College is a large co-educational college south of Christchurch. They initially became interested in the tools because the college is part of a Kāhui Ako that is beginning to use the Progress and Consistency Tool (PaCT) to track students' progress in reading, writing, and mathematics across all levels. Senior teachers at the college were keen to use both PaCT and the Learning Progression Frameworks (LPFs), and the English department had already been exploring the reading and writing frameworks, so the school responded positively when they were invited to take part in an inquiry into how the tools can be used effectively in years 9 and 10. In particular, the teachers were interested in exploring how PaCT and the LPFs could inform teaching and be used to track students' progress in literacy across all subjects.

Cross-curricular teaching and learning

Until recently, English teachers have shouldered most of the responsibility for teaching literacy at the college. However, teachers of other subject areas are now increasingly realising that literacy skills and knowledge are also needed if students are to succeed in all subjects.

This year, the college has undertaken an innovative trial of cross-curricular teaching and learning in year 9, and this will be extended to year 10 in 2020. The teachers work in teams of three and teach separately due to older, single-celled classrooms. Each teacher covers key content and skills from their own subject area, but they collaborate to plan programmes that are thematically linked, project based, and encompass any relevant learning area. Teachers from a range of areas are included in each team: one English teacher and two other teachers (of science, social studies, or health and physical education). Nine teachers, from three of the teams, have been

developing an understanding of how they can align their teaching with the literacy aspects outlined in the LPFs.

Beginning with the writing framework

The nine teachers were invited to participate in the LPFs inquiry, with the aim of eventually introducing both the LPFs and PaCT to the whole staff. Four two-hour sessions were planned, over terms 2, 3, and 4. The PLD facilitator began by exploring the writing framework, with a particular focus on the aspect *Writing meaningful text: using knowledge of text structure and features*.

It soon became clear that the English teachers were far more confident in their literacy knowledge than the teachers of other subjects were. To support all the teachers in making sense of this aspect, the Head of English had gathered writing samples from the innovation teams, in which students were responding to a cross-curricular task. Samples with a science focus that reflected low, medium, and high achievement were selected for the group to examine in relation to the aspect *Writing meaningful text: using knowledge of text structure and features*. Science was chosen because it would support the science teachers and provide a challenge for the English teachers.

Analysing students' work

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In their discussions, the teachers noticed some writing behaviours in their students' work that reflected some of the features in the illustrations for the top three signposts. For example, some students had used sentence structures (such as passive constructions) that were appropriate for reporting on the outcome of a scientific experiment. On the other hand, they noticed that some students had difficulty with linking cause and effect in their writing.

The group also explored the aspect *Writing meaningful text: vocabulary knowledge*. They decided that for the next session they would collect and annotate samples of their own students' writing, comparing them with the illustrations in the two writing aspects. When considering their students' vocabulary knowledge, they noticed some effective use of topic-specific and academic vocabulary. However, it became clear that some of the lower samples were best matched to signposts well below the top three signposts in the progression. This led to a discussion of how their students' writing skills could be strengthened.

The teachers tried out some of the resulting ideas in their classrooms, and they became increasingly aware of the specific literacy skills required for success in subjects such as science. Although the teachers of subjects other than English were still finding the LPFs challenging, they could see the benefits the frameworks would have for teaching and learning.

Using the LPFs and PaCT to track students' progress

The teachers were enthusiastic about using the LPFs to track their students' writing skills and knowledge and were keen to continue exploring the other aspects. They were also keen to learn more about how PaCT could help them make consistent and dependable judgments about their students' progress and achievement.

The facilitator outlined a process for making aspect judgments efficiently for a class of students and showed the group how to record the judgments in

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PaCT. They were then able to log in to their own PaCT accounts and make and record judgments in one aspect for their own students. The teachers discussed the types of report that could be generated by the tool and were enthusiastic about the potential benefits of PaCT for tracking their students' progress and planning next steps in their teaching.

Teachers' comments included:

"This makes so much more sense than the kinds of data we're entering now."

"It's what we do with the data to decide on the next learning steps that'll make the difference. That's when the rubber really hits the road."

"It's a big challenge, but there's a huge benefit if it's done well across the country."

The school is planning to extend the innovation teams approach to year 10 in 2020, and to the wider English faculty and other teachers in 2021. They anticipate that teachers will continue to deepen their understanding of the LPFs and collaborate to build confidence in making judgments in PaCT. Professional learning of how to use the LPFs for making judgments about students' reading and writing skills will be an important next step in enabling teachers across the school to track and support student progress.