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Improving student writing outcomes through teacher induction

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Summary

Supporting successful literacy and numeracy outcomes for students is the core business of North Lake State College (NLSC) in all eight key learning areas. With this as our foundation, we are able to provide quality learning pathways for all students. However, each year many new teachers commence work with NLSC as the result of natural attrition and an increasing student population. A significant number of these teachers are 'beginning teachers' in their first, second or third year of teaching, so our induction program ensures consistency of practice in support of our positive college teaching and learning culture. This initiative, which has proven successful, is designed to help newcomers to the college understand the strategies we use across the school to develop and maintain our high standards and outcomes.

The teacher and beginning teacher ratios at NLSC are as follows:

- 25% of our current teaching staff has been teaching five years or less
- 62% of those have been teaching for less than three years
- 98% of these beginning teachers are teaching a NAPLAN year level or a year level that will take NAPLAN testing in the following year
- 11 beginning teachers commence each year on average.

The induction program forms one part of the whole-college 'Literacy Initiative', which provides all teachers new to our college with mentoring, professional learning and ongoing support. The program assists them to be successful in the classroom, particularly in the teaching of literacy and writing. NLSC aims to make sure that students in the NAPLAN years achieve at or above the National Benchmarks in all areas of Literacy, and in writing in particular. Through quality ongoing induction, we expect to retain our beginning teachers, thereby ensuring that the best outcomes for students remain the focus of all teachers across the college.

Target student group

North Lakes is now a large satellite city 25 kilometres north of the Brisbane CBD, with a variety of cultures represented in its growing population. As a result, NLSC is classified as a metropolitan area school, although it opened its doors in 2002 as a P–3 college accommodating only 75 students.

The rapid growth of the college has had a significant effect on the student and staff population over the past ten years. But the aim of the college has always been to develop and consolidate students' literacy skills, enabling them to continue successfully through to graduation in year 12 at the same school. The NLSC literacy initiative to develop writing was implemented from inception and has continued ever since.



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NLSC is now a Preparation to Year 12 school, with a current student population of approximately 2900 to 3000 students. To accommodate the students and meet their learning needs in the best environment possible, NLSC has created two sub-schools: P–9 and 10–12. In them, they further address the different phases of learning:

- Early Phase (Prep to year 3)
- Lower Middle Phase (year 4 to year 6)
- Upper Middle Phase (year 7 to year 9)
- Senior Phase (year 10 to year 12).

The administration team is allocated responsibilities for particular portfolios across P–12 in order to maintain a cohesive and whole-school approach to all aspects of the teaching and learning programs in the college, but particularly to maintain focus on the literacy initiative. The literacy initiative is designed to support all students, but particularly those who are at, or below, the NAPLAN benchmarks in writing, to ensure that they can develop their skills and achieve better outcomes in all subject areas and in their national testing results.

For this reason, explicit teaching practices have been identified as the key to best classroom practice and the best means to ensure all students will be literate for life. Scaffolding has been identified as particularly necessary to achieve a balanced approach to the teaching of reading and writing, and this is the approach that is adopted across the P–12 school.

Method

Initially the school worked with Dr Judy Smeed from Queensland University of Technology (QUT) to identify the best approach and design for what developed into the induction/literacy initiative. The group working with QUT consisted of the executive principal, all sub-school principals, deputy principals, Heads of Department (HoDs) and guidance officers, who met fortnightly. Their long-term goal was to support senior students in their future pathways through initial analysis and response to the current NAPLAN data. This same team continues to meet fortnightly, although no longer under the guidance of QUT.

NLSC retains the acronym 'QUT'. However, it stands for 'Question, Understand and Teach' because each fortnight we examine and explore curriculum and learn together. Our vision remains to ensure that NLSC prepares literate students for the challenges of learning and living in a rapidly changing society, by supporting teachers to identify and address literacy needs, particularly in writing outcomes.



The costs of this initiative are not high and NLSC uses its annual grant money to provide professional development opportunities for staff to attend, so as a result the college has ensured that the cost of this initiative has been kept low. In this instance materials were costed at \$240 and there was no need for in-kind contributions. The aim of the induction program is to ensure that new and beginning teachers understand the initiative and what it means in the teaching and learning programs at NLSC.

Beginning teachers are coached within sub-school and/or faculties on explicit teaching and the process of analysis of, and response to, student performance data, equipping them with the skills necessary to align teaching practice with teaching pedagogy to meet student needs, and to successfully plan strategic intervention for all students in their classrooms. New teachers transferred into NLSC are identified for induction by the executive principal and deputy principal responsible for induction.

The program introduces the inductees to whole-school programs, strategies and procedures, and provides an introduction to the college community and culture of the school. In conjunction with the initial induction program, teachers are provided with learning-area-specific professional development, for example, using 'Literacy Block', 'Literacy for Learning' and/or 'Persuasive Writing'. A resource audit is also conducted by the induction coordinator to ensure that all new teachers have the resources they need to support their teaching and the literacy programs. Each new teacher is then provided with a mentor/team teacher to ensure that they are supported during their induction program and beyond. The HoDs also play a crucial role by monitoring each beginning teacher through regular observations, meetings and professional conversations.

At the start of the year, all teachers are provided with an overview of student performance data in relation to each student in their class and are up-skilled on how to access the 'Queensland Education One School' site should they need it. During the year all teachers also engage in professional discussions with their line managers to review student performance data and pedagogy, which involves explicit teaching.

The key elements of explicit teaching are:

- knowing the learner
- responding to the learner
- implementing focused lessons
- reflection and review.

Source: www.myread.org/explicit.htm 



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In this context NLSC recognises that reading and writing play a joint role in developing and empowering each child to learn. To this end, the following actions have been identified as keys to the success of the induction initiative and are recognised as having a major impact on students' writing outcome.

- Implement explicit teaching practices, such as delivering daily reading and writing programs using a variety of methods, strategies and approaches.
- Monitor continuously and assess to identify learning needs, in order to 'win the game' in the early years of learning.
- Expect high levels of achievement appropriate for each child – a good teacher is demanding, but caring.
- Include the four aspects of a balanced literacy program (modelled, shared, guided, independent).
- Focus children on what we want them to know and do.
- Model the love of literature.
- Identify reading books for developmental learning and homework appropriate to students' needs and abilities.
- Immerse the classroom in print.

Other vital elements identified include:

- two hours dedicated time to literacy every day:
 - one hour for explicit teaching of reading (USSR: Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading)
 - one hour for explicit teaching of writing
- whole-college organisational structures to ensure that these time blocks are uninterrupted as much as possible
- allocation of intervention educational assistant time for individual and small group support
- consistency of approach, language, routines and structures by all teachers
- embedding of Australian Curriculum strands Language, Literature and Literacy into all learning area teaching and learning programs.

Further information on the Explicit Teaching Cycle can be found at www.sacsa.sa.edu.au/link.asp?ID=FRAMEWORK:EQDISSETC:TAG 



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Results

Beginning teachers were provided with support and induction of varying levels to assist them to work with students to improve student outcomes. At NLSC it was decided that investment in the mentoring of beginning teachers increased their productivity and level of satisfaction more than if they were left unsupported.

By working with this target group, research shows that NLSC retains beginning teachers longer. If no induction occurs, research indicates 41 per cent of teachers leave the profession. By implementing just a mentoring program, a system will retain only 2 per cent of those who would have left the profession. By combining both an induction process and a mentoring structure in a P–12 whole-of-college approach, statistics indicate that NLSC could expect to retain between 70 and 90 per cent of its beginning teachers because it has retained 87 per cent of them over the past five years.

Capacity building of beginning teachers enables them to teach effectively in their classroom and, in turn, achieve quality outcomes with students (Wong 2012). As a result of the success of the induction program – introducing teachers to the explicit teaching model and its flow-on effect of enabling students to continually demonstrate high outcomes in Literacy (Writing) – it is evident that this initiative has merit.

Success, due to whole-school understandings and pedagogy, can be measured in the NAPLAN results and the high quality of student achievement at the college. The data demonstrate that high quality outcomes were not only sustained but improved and in all year levels, a minimum of 95 per cent of NLSC students are performing at or above the National Minimum Standard.

Lessons learned

The keys for success of this program are many and include the fact that it is an integral part of our overall school instructional leadership strategy and therefore a whole-of-college initiative. It connects teachers to a range of professionals they might otherwise not meet; this has developed into an effective mentoring program, the centre point of which is a formalised induction structure that leads into the Developing Performance Framework process. What is also essential is that we continue to examine the data and stay in tune with best practice and pedagogy to ensure our initiative remains innovative and successful, supporting our students to achieve their goals and best outcomes.



Alex Granlund (year 3 teacher) who started with NLSC as a first year teacher in term 2:

I was placed with a year 1 level mentor. She assisted me with planning and classroom management. We did a lot of team teaching together, which assisted me in learning the effective teaching of Literacy as I was able to observe her teaching and seek feedback from her on my own teaching. I had daily contact with the HoD to assist me to understand the curriculum and the moderation process. The HoD also led me through the process of data analysis to improve student outcomes. Administration was only a phone call away and approachable with any questions in relation to curriculum and student engagement. They gave me the confidence to contribute meaningfully to the team even though I was a graduate teacher.

Next steps

NLSC identified literacy as one of the school's main priorities at its inception and this remains a key focus in future planning. The objective of the initiative to induct new and beginning teachers at the college was to build capacity, particularly in the area of Literacy (Writing), in order to sustain high quality outcomes for our students across the college and to continue to build a culture of improvement and high performance.

Through coaching the beginning teachers within sub-school and/or faculties on the process of analysis of and response to student performance data, it was anticipated that teachers would be equipped with the skills necessary to align pedagogy to student need and successfully plan strategic intervention for all students.

There is, however, an emphasis on continued review and evaluation of learning in the school plan to ensure that future planning is taking on board new approaches that can be embedded in the existing pedagogy, and to ensure that teachers and students are well prepared to achieve the best outcomes possible.

Plans underway also include the provision of all mandated requirements of the Australian Curriculum, which requires that all learning areas, not only English, address literacy, language and literature in curriculum design and management. It is clear that in the case of NLSC, quality ongoing induction delivers the strong possibility that the college will retain quality teachers who are supportive of the college values, ethos and pedagogy, thus supporting outcomes for students.



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At NLSC we now have ongoing, quality professional learning provided to the target group, the focus of which forms part of every sub-school and faculty meeting structure. Committed staff members also conduct school-based initiatives such as tutorials after school and enrichment programs before school, both with the stated aim of improving student performance. At NLSC we also have a consistent approach to analysis of and response to student performance data, which entails a review cycle to ensure that the induction and literacy programs continue to meet the needs of beginning teachers.

One of the successes of this initiative has been the expansion of roles for experienced senior teachers. These were extended to include the role of mentor to the beginning teachers, thereby building leadership capacity within the college. To support this expansion, leadership sessions are held with the senior administration team, and professional discussions are developed in response to educational readings. The development of experienced teachers supports the P–12 faculties and sub-schools because these teachers take on roles that embrace the whole college, as previously discussed.

Research base

The research base is articulated and supported in the findings and guidelines of the Education Queensland (EQ) initiative to support staffing:

Education Queensland

www.education.qld.gov.au/staff/development/employee/teachers/induction.html

Explicit Teaching www.myread.org/explicit.htm , which acknowledges the following:

Comber, B, Badger, I, Nixon, H & Pitt, J 2002, 'Literacy after the early years: a longitudinal study', *Australian journal of language and literacy*, 25(2), pp 9–23,

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Cope, B & Kalantzis, M (eds) 2000, *Multiliteracies: literacy learning and the design of social futures*, Macmillan, South Yarra, Victoria.

Freebody, P & Luke, A 1990, 'Literacies programs: debates and demands in cultural context', *Prospect: Australian journal of TESOL*, 5(7), pp 7–16.

Freebody, P 1992, 'A socio-cultural approach: resourcing four roles as a literacy learner', in A Watson & A Badenhop (eds), *Prevention of reading failure*, Ashton Scholastic, Gosford, NSW, www.myread.org/readings_freebody.htm

State of Queensland (Department of Education), 2000 *Literate futures: report of the literacy review for Queensland State Schools*.



Lo Bianco J and Freebody, P 2001, (2nd edition). *Australian literacies: informing national policy on literacy education*, Language Australia, Melbourne.

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Commonwealth Department of Education, Training & Youth Affairs 2000, 'Mapping the territory, primary students with learning difficulties: literacy and numeracy'.

Wilhelm, J, Baker, T & Dube, J 2001, *Strategic reading*, Heinemann, Portsmouth, NH.

Hattie, John 2009, 'Visible learning', PowerPoint,
[growthmindseteaz.org/files/Visible Learning Collingwood 23.11.09.ppt](http://growthmindseteaz.org/files/Visible_Learning_Collingwood_23.11.09.ppt)

Further reading and links

My School website

www.myschool.edu.au/MainPages/SimilarSchools.aspx?SDRSchoolId=47574&DEEWRIId=0&CalendarYear=2011&RefId=BoU4uWajqMVhwJISWM65pQ%3d%3d

North Lakes State College Queensland www.northlakescollege.eq.edu.au/wcms
[www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North Lakes, Queensland](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_Lakes,_Queensland)

NAPLAN www.nap.edu.au

OneSchool A–E Data www.education.qld.gov.au/smartclassrooms/working-digitally/oneschool.html

Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading (USSR)
www.lallison.wordpress.com/2010/09/17/uninterrupted-sustained-silent-reading

Wong, Harry K 2012

[www.effectiveteaching.com/newteacher.com/pdf/Significant Research on Induction.pdf](http://www.effectiveteaching.com/newteacher.com/pdf/Significant_Research_on_Induction.pdf)

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