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Evidence Based Observations and Coaching

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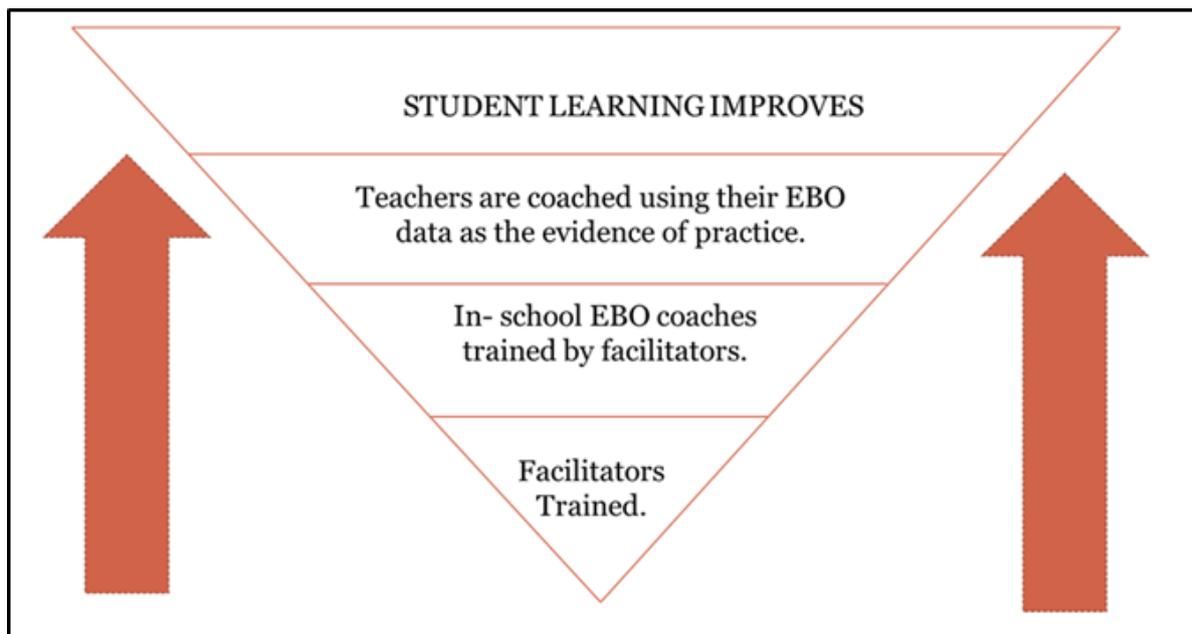
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Summary

Good teachers engage in self-reflection and seek student feedback to be effective and increase student outcomes, great teachers look to peers for mentoring, advice and feedback to critically reflect on and extend their teaching practice to become student-centred, flexible, informed and innovative teachers.

Independent Schools Victoria implemented the use of Evidence Based Observations (EBO) as the basis for coaching in an extended professional learning approach to ultimately improving and sustaining literacy and numeracy outcomes for students. School-based coaches gather data about the specific behaviours of teacher and student engagement, and set goals collaboratively with the teacher to navigate pathways to developing more culturally inclusive, learner-centred classrooms.

Figure 1: Evidence Based Observations for improved outcomes



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Detailed description for Figure 1

An upside down pyramid with arrows pointing upward. The layers of the pyramid from top to bottom are: Student learning improves; Teachers are coached using their EBO data as the evidence of practice; In-school EBO coaches trained by facilitators; Facilitators trained.



'I have had my eyes opened ... I think that it is fair to say that you may have heard from many of our school staff, including myself, that "we already do that". I think that doing the training has given us each an insight ... I would now say, that we may have thought that we were reflective but now know clearly the difference.'

'In all honesty this was the best PD I have ever attended. It was like a mini university course and it allowed me to regain that level of enthusiasm I had when I was a first-year teacher.' (Year 11/12 coordinator)

Target student group

The EBO initiative targeted all students from 38 metropolitan, regional and rural schools in Victoria; this comprised four secondary schools, 27 P–12 schools and three P–10 schools.

Method

One hundred and thirty-nine nominated teachers or school leaders from the teaching staff at the pilot schools were trained as coaches by Independent Schools Victoria. The coaches undertook an initial four-day training course in the use of the evidence-based observation tools and cognitive coaching techniques. External facilitators liaised with coaches and schools to assist in maintaining the integrity of the initiative and to provide ongoing professional learning.

Coaches worked with up to nine teachers, taking them through three cycles of observations over a period of four terms. This comprised four hours of a coach's time per teacher, per term across one year. A typical cycle includes an observation of a lesson to gather EBOs, followed by a collaborative feedback and goal-setting session using the qualitative data. There is a planning meeting and allocated time to practise the revised teaching strategies and then further observation and feedback sessions.

During an observation session, the coach moves around the classroom. Over a 25-minute period, the coach records examples of teaching practice using a list of six Effective Teaching Profiles, each with a set of associated behaviour descriptors.

Effective teachers demonstrate:

- caring for the student as (culturally located) individuals
- caring for the performance of students (integrity/personal responsibility)
- behaviour expectations
- management of the classroom
- culturally appropriate context
- culturally responsive context.



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The coach also observes five nominated students and their engagement in the lesson. The students later respond to questions about their level of cognitive engagement and the amount of work they completed. Questions included: 'How much do you think you learnt?' and 'How hard was the thinking you did in class?'

During the session, the coach simply records observations about what the teacher and nominated students say or do. Following the observation session, the coach provides 'warm' and 'cool' feedback to the teacher using feedback protocols. The discussion enables the teacher to reflect on their teaching practice and interactions with students – identifying patterns, strengths and areas for improvement.

The focus of the initiative is on teacher learning rather than on teacher appraisal. The combined activities of classroom observation, data collection, giving and receiving feedback, self-reflection and goal setting, over time, can support a performance-and-development culture in schools.

Strong school leadership and alignment with performance-and-development activity supported the implementation of change-management strategies for the robust data gathering processes and delivery of adequate resources. At the school level, scheduling time for each phase of the cycle, including significant teacher planning, raised awareness of the benefits of planning and building capacity to improve teaching practices. This in turn improves student engagement in their learning and establishes a culture of high quality performance and improvement within the schools.

The coaches worked with a National Partnership Advisor each term to gather and collate data from the EBO. The data was shared with the school leaders and the teachers who were part of the EBO process. The data contained in the collated Trends and Issues Reports was used to inform decision-making about staff professional development requirements, identify and track students at risk or needing extension, and assist with the reorganisation of some school structures in relation to the use of classrooms and resources.

The data analysis and self-reflection enabled the teacher to set new goals towards improving their classroom practice. The discussions are confidential; however, the information and self-reflections can be used by the teachers to inform discussions about performance and development with their managers or principals. It is important to note that the data is owned by the teacher and the coach works for the teacher they are observing. Over time, the data analysis and comparisons have enabled the coaches and teachers to assess the extent to which teachers' practices and student learning outcomes and engagement have improved.



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Results

Evidence about the impact of the initiative was gathered through the analysis of NAPLAN data about the EBO classes.

The data about teachers' and students' behaviours gathered by the coaches during the observation sessions was analysed and trends noted. This information was aligned with students' results as measured by other assessment tools to check for correlations and improvement trends.

Comparisons were made before, during and after the observations about the nature of teacher language used in classrooms, teacher dialogue about their practice, and the extent of change in practices of teachers who participated in the project over different periods of time.

The data was combined across the schools and trends and changes in teachers' practices and students' achievements noted. Trends and Issues Reports were collated by individual schools after analysis of the EBO tool results. Before-and-after comparison qualitative data about literacy and numeracy learning was analysed and has presented improved engagement, cognitive challenge relationships and questioning in the classrooms.

There was evidence of improvement in students' verbal interactions and cognitive behaviours with each other and with the teacher, improvement in the nature and quality of teachers' verbal interactions with students, and improvement in the nature and quality of teacher discourse about their teaching. There were shifts to more expansive, interactive and collaborative interactions between teacher and students leading to improved student engagement levels.

Table 1 and Table 2 show how teachers reflecting on their own data and planning to implement effective strategies, leads to improved student engagement and improved cognitive levels during lessons. At school 1 in 2012, 35 students were asked to comment on their level of engagement and how much thinking and learning they were doing during lessons.



Table 1: Levels of engagement among students

Levels of engagement (%)	Term 1 (percentage of students)	Term 2 (percentage of students)
90 to 100	46	50
80 to 89	34	50
50 to 79	20	0
less than 50	0	0

Table 2: Levels of cognitive challenge among students

Levels of cognitive challenge	Term 1 (percentage of students)	Term 2 (percentage of students)
High	43	79
Medium	23	14
Low	34	7

Many students have been interviewed in relation to EBOs about their perceptions of the cognitive challenge of observed lessons. These comments followed immediately after a Year 9 English lesson in November 2012. Student 1: 'I rated the cognitive level a 4/5. It was an in-depth topic and the ideas were drawn out by the teacher. We had to analyse a lot.' Student 2: 'We get to work in groups and talk about the ideas together and this is helpful before responding to the questions.'

In a 2011 survey of principals of the National Partnership Schools, 68 per cent believed that the EBO was effective or very effective in improving teaching and learning. In November 2012, 88 per cent believed Strongly or Very Strongly that the EBO and Coaching was a practice that has developed teaching at their school.

A sample school's improved NAPLAN reading and numeracy data:

- Reading
 - Year 9, 2011: 88 per cent of students at or above National Minimum Standard (NMS)
 - Year 9, 2012: 100 per cent of students at or above NMS. (Teachers cited the EBO and Coaching as a major contributing factor to the improvement in NAPLAN results for almost every domain at Year 9.)



- Numeracy
 - Year 7, 2011: 90 per cent at or above NMS
 - Year 7, 2012: 99 per cent at or above NMS
 - Year 9, 2011: 95 per cent at or above NMS
 - Year 9, 2012: 97 per cent at or above NMS.

Lessons learned

Challenges encountered during implementation of EBOs and Coaching highlighted the need for improving teacher knowledge about using data to plan for teaching; along with a school-wide focus on effective teacher collaboration to drive improved student learning outcomes.

The coaches had to work with teachers to encourage acceptance that they are responsible for managing classroom behaviours. The behaviour descriptors that are used to define what effective teachers demonstrate assisted with this challenge.

Development of a culture of open (as opposed to isolated) classrooms by working towards building trust was acknowledged by the coaches as an important focus for the success of the initiative. There was some initial anxiety expressed by teachers about being observed by their peers, but this was overcome by having supportive coaching experiences in a positive collaborative environment. Once teachers realised that the observation and coaching led to improved classroom practices and enhanced student learning outcomes in literacy and numeracy and other areas, they embraced the tool positively.

Next steps

Sustainability has been achieved where there has been a high uptake within schools. A reduced hierarchical structure of professional learning and an increase in collegiality has been a positive outcome. The EBO initiative aims to continue with increased teacher support for participation to promote a better culture of professional trust among teachers in a school.

The impact of informed and supportive school leadership for the EBO and coaches has been considerable and will continue to be upheld along with emphasising the need for adequate funding provided by schools.

Schools will be encouraged to undertake a skills audit with teaching staff to identify opportunities for skill development and clarifying roles/expectations of teachers within the school-wide focus to drive improved student learning outcomes.



Research base

The importance of evidence as a basis for teachers to reflect on their work and make changes to their practice is reflected in the [Australian Teacher Performance and Development Framework](#) (AITSL, 2012) which states that 'an important part of effective professional practice is collecting evidence that provides a basis for ongoing feedback, reflection and further development'.

The EBO and Coaching initiative is strongly informed by the work of Professor John Hattie, in particular his focus on the importance of providing appropriate feedback in the learning process.

The initiative is currently being implemented in schools throughout New Zealand, having initially been developed in schools with large numbers of students at risk of not making expected progress. The initial impetus came from the work of Professor Ted Glynn and colleagues in the late 1970s, with an 'ecological model' of classroom learning. Around 2006, the initiative was adapted by Professor Russell Bishop and Dr Mere Berryman (Waikato University School of Education) in the Te Kotahitanga Project, commissioned by the New Zealand Ministry of Education. The initiative hypothesises that effective teaching is supported by teachers maintaining positive relationships with students, encouraging positive collaboration and interaction with and between students and developing culturally appropriate teaching and learning strategies

The initiative's key feature of a coach working with an individual teacher is consistent with a number of recent Victorian, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development initiatives designed to strengthen the capacity of teachers including [Teaching and Learning Coaches Initiative](#) (2011), [Literacy Improvement Teams Initiative](#) (2010), [Professional Learning in Effective Schools](#) (2005), [Principles of Learning and Teaching P-12](#) (2004) and [Value-added Measures for School Improvement](#) (2007).

Further reading and links

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