Investigating the effects of a T-Shaped Literacy intervention on Year 7 & 8 students' reading and writing in subject English

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Project description:

This design-based project used quantitative and qualitative approaches to investigate the effects of the innovative T-Shaped Literacy Model on Year 7 and 8 students' disciplinary reading and writing in subject English. Partnering with The Manaiakalani Programme (TMP) network of schools allowed a group of teachers to co-design, implement, investigate and re-design units in which students read text sets linked by a "big idea" (such as evocation of mood or narrative reliability) and conduct and synthesise complex literary analyses of multi-modal text sets. Students then applied what they learnt about language, to their own writing.

Why is this research important?

There is a pressing need to learn how to transform literacy teaching in Aotearoa New Zealand so we can become more effective in preparing learners to read and write more complex texts for diverse and complex purposes. The project aimed to prepare students for some of the ways in which literacy becomes, or *should* become, more complex as students advance through their schooling years. Local, national and international data all show a pattern whereby many students, despite having acquired strong foundational skills and knowledge in the early years, struggle to keep up with the increasingly sophisticated and subject-specialised literacy demands expected in the later years.

What we did:

We supported teacher-partners over each year of the project to plan and implement three units of work (e.g., narrative reliability) in a series of online co-design and professional learning and development (PLD) sessions. Informed by design-based research principles, analyses of pre-assessments and teacher voice informed the design of all PLD sessions, and learnings from each completed unit informed the design of the subsequent unit. Repeated measures of students' reading and writing included standardised measures and more disciplinary-specific researcher-designed measures. Student work and student voice were also collected and analysed. Teacher-partners participated in focus group interviews throughout each year and case study teachers were used in the second year of the project. A quasi-experimental design allowed for judgements about effectiveness; each year there was a treatment group, who participated in the PLD, and a comparison group who did not.

Key findings:

- Evidence overall points to the programme being an engaging and effective component of a two-year English curriculum for Year 7 and 8 students.
- The development of students' knowledge and skills for literary analysis fostered rather than hindered their creativity.
- Features of the project approach to teacher PLD suggests that it is more scalable than some programmes.
- A potential tension is in the balance of teacher autonomy and programme prescription.
- It is important to strike a balance between explicit teaching and student-centred collaboration.

Table 1. *Pre-post Analysis of Researcher-designed Measures for 2022 and 2023*

Category	N	Pre score	Post score	Gain	SD	t-statistics	p-value	Sig	Effect size
2022 Language Features	211	6.8	9.1	2.3	4.0	8.55	p < 0.01	***	0.59
2023 Language Features	87	7.6	9.7	2.1	3.4	5.73	p < 0.01	***	0.61
2022 Close Reading	201	3.8	5.2	1.3	3.4	5.70	p < 0.01	***	0.40
2023 Close Reading	87	3.1	4.7	1.6	2.9	4.98	p < 0.01	***	0.53
2022 Creative Writing	186	15.1	14.8	-0.3	5.0	-0.72	0.473		-0.05
2023 Creative Writing	76	20.4	22.0	1.6	5.5	2.50	0.015	**	0.29

Implications for practice:

- For both Year 7 & 8 teachers and students, the T-Shape Literacy Model is an engaging and effective component for a literary knowledge and skills programme.
- Developing students' knowledge and skills for literary analysis fosters creativity.
- For teachers when planning a unit, there is a point of balance between explicit teaching and student-centred collaboration.
- For teachers, there is a point of balance between programme prescription and autonomy.
- Iterative, responsive, online PLD can be manageable and helpful for ongoing development of teacher practice.

Future research:

Will include a focus on how we can better effect improvements in close reading AND in reading comprehension more generally. An implication of this result nationally is that we cannot assume that a strong English programme in and of itself will accelerate students' achievement in global measures of reading comprehension, at least not in the short term and not for students who begin the programme with lower scores.

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This was a research-practice partnership between researchers, teachers, and their students from The Manaianakalani network, internationally recognised for its expertise in digital pedagogy.

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