

REPERTOIRES FOR DIVERSITY: EFFECTIVE PEDAGOGIES FOR INCLUSIVE PRACTICE

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Abstract

This paper reports on the findings of a Tasmanian study for the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST). The study, *Repertoires for Diversity*, soon to be published by DEST through the Literacy and Numeracy Clearinghouse, was funded through the Australian Government's *Effective Teaching and Learning Practices for Students with Learning Difficulties Initiative*. Its purpose was to provide specific support to increase teachers' capacity to enhance the literacy and numeracy development of students with learning difficulties in the early and middle years of schooling. The Tasmanian study was designed to explore connections between school and teacher practices used in inclusive primary grade classes and schools' levels of 'value-adding', determined from national benchmark testing.

The results showed that value-adding schools used a range of policies, programs and school-wide processes and professional learning to support literacy and numeracy pedagogies. The study acknowledged the multiple challenges facing teachers who are attempting to balance continuous improvement of students' literacy and numeracy learning with that of increasing social and educational diversity of inclusive school communities.

Background

The study reported in this paper was Tasmania's contribution to the Australian Government's *Effective Teaching and Learning Practices for Students with Learning Difficulties Initiative* (Department of Education, Science and Training [DEST], 2002). The initiative aimed at identifying effective teaching and learning practices that lead to measurably improved outcomes in literacy and numeracy for students with high support needs (HSN). Students with HSN were defined for the purposes of the study to be (a) those judged by schools and support services to have the greatest need in the school for literacy and numeracy support and intervention; or (b) students with an Individual Education Plan (IEP) submitted in 2003 for central funding identifying literacy and/or numeracy difficulties as central to the IEP's elements. Tasmania's *Repertoires for Diversity* study focused on how teachers' pedagogies influenced both general and intervention practices for literacy and numeracy. The report of the research (Andrew, Beswick, Swabey, Barrett & Bridge, in press) is soon to be published by DEST through the Literacy and Numeracy Clearinghouse.

Research in the United Kingdom has claimed that contexts good at inclusion are also good at the business of learning (Office for Standards in Education, 2003). Our

Tasmanian study examined the reciprocal relationship between effective pedagogy generally and teaching and learning for students with HSN. The initiative offered an opportunity for Department of Education, Tasmania (DoE, Tas.) to probe connections between its state-wide data on learners' continuous improvement (or *value-adding*) and the combined factors of inclusive schooling and best practice in literacy and numeracy.

Indicators of 'value-adding' measure progress made by students at the same school, over time, compared with the average progress made by a larger sample of students. Measures of value-adding take into account differences between schools in the numbers and proportions of students they enrol from various socio-economic backgrounds and equity target groups. By describing rates of learning or relative progress over time, rather than single 'scores', they provide a fairer basis for comparison of schools than students' absolute test scores (Fitz-Gibbon, 1997; Sanders, 2000). An 'above average' result means that students at the school progressed at a rate greater than that of the average for all students in schools in the relevant jurisdiction over the period. According to Sanders (2000), value adding data are robust at the school level but not when applied to individual teachers. In Tasmania, value-added analysis of state-wide monitoring data concerning students' growth in reading, writing and numeracy performance was undertaken on schools in both the government and Catholic sectors. Test data included in this analysis were from the years 1998-2002 for Government schools, and 2000-2002 for Catholic schools. Independent schools were not involved in this process but monitored their students' learning against national literacy and numeracy benchmarks through assessments conducted by the Australian Council for Educational Research.

While value-adding focuses on schools' relative effectiveness, it has been recognised that the greatest influence on students' learning is the teacher (Buckingham, 2003; Hill & Crévola, 2000; Ramsay, 2000; Rowe, 2001). Nevertheless, teachers operate in the contexts of schools which are in turn influenced by the wider educational policy environment. This study sought to examine factors at both school and classroom levels that might contribute to effective learning for all students and hence to the value adding performance of schools.

The study was timely given that several Australian states, including Tasmania, have recently undertaken, or are in the process of implementing, significant change towards values-based curricula that emphasise deep understanding rather than the superficial coverage of content. Of particular relevance to this study was the Atelier Report (Atelier Learning Solutions, 2004) which emphasised the importance of offering rich, broad and challenging curricula, such as that framed by Tasmania's Essential Learnings (DoE, Tas., 2002b) to *all* students. The report highlighted shortcomings in the transfer of *policy* level commitments to equity and inclusion into *practice*. In the area of mathematics, there is evidence that teachers do not regard curricula that emphasise conceptual understanding as appropriate for students with learning difficulties (Beswick, 2005), however De Geest, Watson & Prestage (2003) demonstrated that low achieving students can engage in the kinds of mathematical thinking usually associated with higher achieving students. Such findings suggest that the goals of equity and inclusion policies are indeed attainable and worth pursuing in the context of ambitious or 'higher order' pedagogies.

'*Repertoires for Diversity*' was the outcome of a joint endeavour between the Tasmanian Department of Education, the Catholic Education Office of Tasmania, the

Association of Independent Schools, conducted by the University of Tasmania in association with Edith Cowan University, WA. The contexts of inclusivity targeted were schools and classes accommodating learners with high support needs (HSN). The study was framed cognizant of existing knowledge of effective pedagogies in literacy (e.g. Luke & Freebody, 1999) and numeracy (e.g. Charles, 1999), and of findings concerning successful programs and strategies for students with HSN (e.g. Loudon et al., 2000).

Research questions

The guiding objective of the study was to identify those school and classroom factors within above average ‘value-adding’ schools which contributed to ongoing improvement in literacy and numeracy outcomes for students with HSN. The two research questions that underpinned the study and that are addressed in this paper are:

1. How do school-level policies, processes and programs in high ‘value-adding’ schools support literacy and numeracy practice in inclusive classes?
2. What pedagogies are used by participating teachers in above average ‘value-adding’ schools to pursue literacy and numeracy improvement for all learners?

Methodology

Sample

Figure 1 illustrates how, from the 90 schools invited to complete an initial survey, a focus subset of five teachers was identified. The larger group of 20 teachers (one from each selected school involved in the study) taught classes in the range K-7 and were volunteers who had at least one student with HSN in their class. Their 20 schools represented a broad range of socio-economic background, size, and rurality.

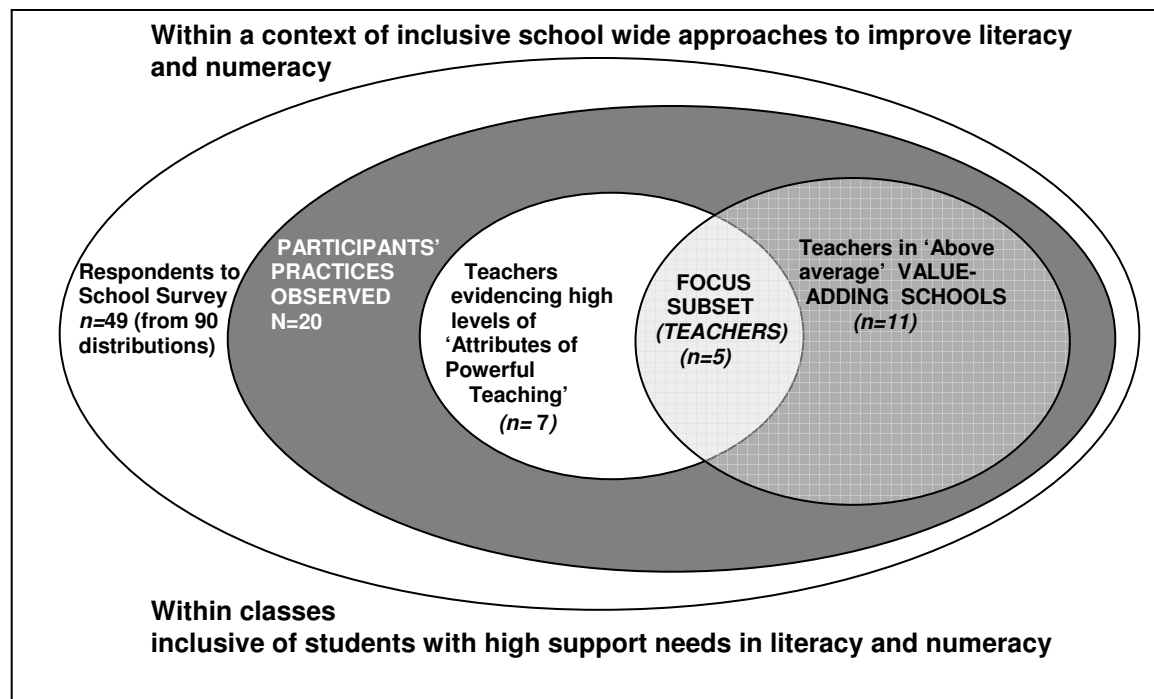


Figure 1: Towards a focus subset of teachers

A member of each school’s leadership team, usually the principal, participated in an interview and was responsible for the completion of the school survey. The data from the surveys were used to sort inclusive contexts suitable for leader interviews, class observation and teacher-follow-up interviews.

Instruments

School survey: The survey sought nominal data on primary age students with HSN, including methods by which they were identified, funding, assessment, programming, and support for both general and HSN students. It was based on a questionnaire used in the *Mapping the Territory* study (Louden et al., 2000), and asked for largely nominal data, with an open-ended invitation to comment as its last item.

Interview with school leader: This comprised a semi-structured interview based around questions drawn from Tasmania’s *Supportive School Communities* (DoE, 2002a) document. It included questions about school level supports for inclusive practice that related specifically to school culture, decision-making, curriculum, teaching and learning, assessment and reporting, the school community and parents, and professional learning.

Classroom Activity Record (CAR): Used in the classroom observations, the CAR facilitated recording of the time spent on various activities, student groupings, activities, and teaching strategies used for both the class generally and for the one or two students with HSN who were members of the class.

Classroom Observation Reflection Chart (CORC): Three sets of best practice indicators were drawn together to describe and explain school and teacher practices. One related to school level factors through indicators of Tasmania’s *Supportive School Communities* initiative (DoE, Tas., 2002a), while two focused on teachers’ practices. These were the *Productive Pedagogies* (Education Queensland, 2001), and *Flying Start* effective teacher practices from Tasmanian professional support materials (DoE, Tas., 2001). Together they encompassed both higher order and foundational pedagogies, framed for the study as *Attributes of Powerful Teaching*. The categories and sub-categories of the attributes are listed in Table 1 with those derived from the Flying Start materials in italics. A further level of detail, in the form of exemplified indicators specific to literacy and numeracy teaching (relating to each of the sub-categories of the attributes) was provided to guide the observations.

Table 1
Attributes of Powerful Teaching

Category	Sub-categories
Intellectual quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher-order thinking • Deep knowledge /understanding • Substantive conversation / <i>questioning</i> • Knowledge as problematic • Metalanguage • <i>Constructive self critique</i>
Supportive classroom environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student direction / <i>choice</i> • Social support / <i>Positive High Expectation</i> • Explicit quality performance criteria • Self-regulation

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Motivate / celebrate</i>
Recognition of difference	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural knowledge / <i>context-honouring</i> • Inclusivity / Personalised / <i>tailored learning</i> • Narrative • Group identity / <i>Community of Learners</i> • Active citizenship
Connectedness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge integration • Background knowledge • Connectedness to world • Problem-based curriculum / <i>inquiry learning</i>
<i>Strategic Instruction</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Explicit / Expository</i> • <i>Modelling</i> • <i>Purposive monitoring</i>

Teachers' use of *Attributes of Powerful Teaching* was evaluated using just two levels: 'Low' and 'High'. Low (L) signified sporadic or very sparse evidencing of the *Attributes*' elements, whereas High (H) signified frequent or multiple evidencing of the various pedagogies. The two-level scale was also introduced to maximise inter-rater reliability.

Teacher interview: The teacher interview schedule included several questions matching those used with school leaders as well as questions related to the typicality or otherwise of the lessons observed. Questions common to both the school leader and teacher interviews afforded an opportunity to analyse the extent of alignment between school and classroom practices as perceived by the teachers.

Procedure

The school survey was administered in November and December of 2003 and provided background information that informed the school selection process and the design of the other instruments. The 20 schools to be sites of interviews and observations were selected by the Tasmanian Education Department's Office for Educational Review in the first term of the following school year. They included schools designated as above average, average and below average in terms of their value-adding status. To avoid any possible bias, the researchers were not made aware of the schools' status until after the collation and initial analysis of the data.

Both the CAR and CORC were piloted prior to being finalised and the research assistants who conducted the observations participated in a number of joint classroom observations followed by debriefings aimed at moderating their interpretations of classroom events and their use of the instruments. The in-school phase of the study in each of the 20 schools involved four procedures: (i) an initial visit to the class; (ii) the school leader interview; (iii) a four hour observation of class practices in the pre-lunch hours when literacy and numeracy activity is most commonly scheduled in primary programs and; (iv) a teacher interview.

Data analysis

The complete data set for each school was collated and examined to identify practices that accorded with the *Attributes of Powerful Teaching*.

The quantified *Attributes of Powerful Pedagogies* ratings for each teacher were tabulated, with percentages of 'High' ratings determined. The analysis looked for a consonance of high *Attributes of Powerful Teaching* and high value-adding. Commonalities were examined both among teachers with highly rated *Attributes of Powerful Teaching*, and among those teachers in high value-adding schools who showing high incidence of *Attributes of Powerful Teaching* in their classroom practice.

School level supports for teaching and learning were interrogated through the survey and interviews with school leaders and participating teachers. Each school's data from those procedures were summarised to differentiate those relevant to literacy, numeracy or inclusive practice in literacy and numeracy. A further categorisation was made across four dimensions of coherence: 'claimed'; 'observed'; 'aligned' (i.e. both claimed and observed) and 'lacking coherence'. Coherence was deemed 'lacking' if perceptions were not shared or sustained between senior staff and teachers, or where practices were not evident at both school and classroom levels.

School level practices were interrogated in high value-adding schools for their alignment with the reflections of teacher participants who evidenced high levels of the *Attributes of Powerful Teaching*.

Findings and Discussion

The findings presented here relate primarily to those schools that were rated 'above average' in terms of value-adding, and in which the participating teacher exhibited relatively high levels of the *Attributes of Powerful Teaching*. In this discussion these schools and teachers are referred to as the 'focus schools' and the 'focus teachers' (as in Figure 1). Seven of the observed teachers evidenced high levels of 'Attributes of Powerful Teaching' (APT) during the observation period. Of those, five were found to be in 'above average' value-adding schools (i.e., those whose improvement in literacy and numeracy statewide test results had been continuous and significant). On the basis of these observations, Tasmanian teachers whose pedagogical repertoires display high levels of elements commonly associated with best practice are more likely than not to be contributors in high value-adding schools. However, because the value-adding data is school-based rather than teacher-based, associating arguments cannot be sustained at a teacher level. The researchers were also aware of the difficulties posed by the gap between the collection of the data that formed the basis of the value-added analyses of the schools and this study, and the consequent changes in both the student and staff populations of the schools. Of key interest to the study were the sorts of practices employed in pedagogically rich, inclusive classrooms and how their schools helped to sustain them.

The results are presented and discussed in relation to each of the two research questions in turn.

Research question 1: How do school-level policies, processes and programs in high value-adding schools, support literacy and numeracy practice in inclusive classes?

From the school surveys four domains of whole school supports were identified as supporting literacy, numeracy and inclusive practice. They were:

1. Policy / principles / philosophies / priorities (promoted *and* published)
2. Programs (funded and/or co-ordinated and implemented on a regular basis)

3. Processes (organisational systems designed or developed to support or put in practice policies and programs)
4. Professional Learning (both within-school and outsourced)

Focus schools showed coherence between their espoused provision of supports for inclusive literacy and numeracy practice and the practices observed classrooms. Many of these schools had developed processes and practices tailored to their particular context. Most prevalent were the following conditions of support:

1. Significant, dedicated professional learning time within schools and between staff
2. Regular, scheduled time for planning between teachers, assistants (T/As) and specialist support staff
3. Research-based school and classroom level inquiry into innovative practices
4. Identified senior staff responsible for maintaining coherence between priorities and practice, needs and support, orthodoxies and innovations.

Teachers in a number of the other schools expressed feeling alone in their inclusive responsibilities, struggling for sufficient effective collaborative planning time. Interestingly, few teachers indicated any dissatisfaction with the amount of external professional development they had received, but there was a perceived need for more within-school professional learning, and for more purposive, dedicated sharing opportunities, with greater access to other teachers' input regarding learning accommodations for students with HSN.

Research question 2: What pedagogies are used by participating teachers in above average 'value-adding' schools to pursue literacy and numeracy improvement for all learners?

The 'high' or 'low' ratings given to each sub-category of the *Attributes of Powerful Teaching* for the teachers in the five focus schools are shown in Table 2 (following page). Although these teachers evidenced the attributes to a greater extent than other teachers, a number of elements were only thinly evidenced in the four hour observation period. Of course it would be unreasonable to expect that every attribute would be evident in such a period, but it is worth noting that those attributes thinly evidenced among the focus schools were also the practices least evident among the broad range of 20 observed classes/schools.

The data summaries in Tale 2 show that the focus teachers, those with inclusive classes in high value-adding schools, most consistently employed attributes of a 'Supportive Class Environment', particularly in pedagogies of *Social support/Positive high expectation, Explicit quality performance criteria, Self-regulation* and practices used to *Motivate/celebrate* student learning. In the area of 'Intellectual Quality', *Metalanguage* was strongly evident, as was *Inclusivity* and development of *Group identity* in the attribute of 'Recognition of Difference'. It appears that although these classes were in contexts with histories of high level 'value-adding' on literacy and numeracy, high performance was not gained at the cost of the more social conditions of learning

The complete data set revealed that the focus teachers utilised explicit structured pedagogies, and also *planned* for higher order engagement for the *full range* of learners.

Table 2

Relative strength and absence of certain pedagogies in the focus subset of observed classes

School	A	B	C	E	G	Relative strength
Intellectual quality	H	H	H	L	L	M
Higher-order thinking	H	H	H	L	L	M (Moderately evident)
Deep knowledge/understanding	H	L	H	H	L	M
Substantive conversation/ <i>questions</i>	L	H	H	L	L	M
Knowledge as problematic	L	L	L	L	L	T (Thinly evident)
Metalinguage	H	H	H	H	H	S (Strongly evident)
<i>Constructive self-critique</i>	H	L	L	L	L	T
Supportive classroom environment	H	H	H	H	H	S
Student direction/ <i>choice</i>	H	H	L	L	H	M
Social support/ <i>Positive high expectation</i>	H	H	H	H	H	S
Explicit quality performance criteria	H	H	L	H	H	S
Self-regulation	H	H	H	H	H	S
<i>Motivate/celebrate</i>	H	L	H	H	H	S
Recognition of difference	H	L	H	L	H	M
Cultural knowledge/ context-honouring	L	H	L	L	H	M
Inclusivity/ <i>all engaged</i>	H	L	H	H	H	S
Narrative	L	L	H	L	H	M
Group identity/ <i>Community of learners</i>	H	H	H	H	H	S
Active citizenship	L	H	L	L	L	T
Connectedness	H	L	L	L	H	M
Knowledge integration	H	H	L	L	H	M
Background knowledge	H	L	H	L	H	M
Connectedness to world	H	L	L	L	H	M
Problem-based curriculum/ <i>Inquiry learning</i>	H	L	L	L	L	T
Strategic Instruction	H	L	L	H	H	M
<i>Explicit/Expository</i>	H	L	L	H	H	M
<i>Modelling</i>	H	L	L	H	H	M
<i>Purposive monitoring</i>	H	L	L	L	L	T

Note: Grey-barred row = Overall for element

Several pedagogical practices characteristic of teachers in these classes are presented and illustrated in the following five common characteristics:

1. Trans-disciplinary and interdisciplinary connectedness was pursued frequently during literacy and numeracy times.

An example of this was the collaborative planning evident between a class teacher and the school's PE teacher to create continuity between class and outdoor work around the topic of co-ordinates and directions. Mathematical understandings were reinforced and expanded in the outdoor context. Another example arose in a discussion of birds in captivity. Substantive student-student and student-teacher exchanges about cage sizes were linked to the book *Wedgetail* being read as a class novel.

2. Plenary sessions (as orientation or follow-up) purposively sustained analysis and deepened awareness and understanding of what was being learned.

Unlike many of the classes observed in low value-adding schools, focus teachers went beyond asking for narrative reporting to engage learners in extended conversations around matters of understanding and transfer of the learning. These teachers used open-ended and hypothetical probes in whole class sharing contexts, to move the discussion beyond reporting to focus on higher order thinking. An example from an early childhood class was a multiple-contributor discussion around seed pods. This was sparked by a sample brought in by one of the class's students who had significant physical and communicative disabilities. The child's parents had used a recording aid to offer a sentence explaining the 'news'. Probes about why seed pods might dry and crack ensued with the whole class. This discussion could have been conducted in one-to-one T/A time, but instead took a priority place in the mid-morning plenary time.

3. Metalanguage was explicitly explored during inquiry units and skill routines.

Focus classrooms' teachers frequently made the obvious problematic. This characterised even routine activities such as guided reading or genre-based writing investigations. Relishing linguistic and conceptual opportunities, these teachers often paused to discuss ideas related to units of investigation or routine skills, and they used opportunities to pick up on children's naïve terminologies and use them respectfully to build engagement and shape language understandings. An example of the latter arose in the context of a garden-based activity, in which the teacher took his children's term 'blobbies' (for insect deposits) and respectfully used the term often through the morning to maintain the momentum of the children's curiosity: "Why don't we check when there are blobbies and try to work out what makes them ... and why they are there?"

4. Thinking aloud, metacognitive cueing, modelling and explicit feedback were used without succumbing to 'answer-getting' or 'quickest' closure on challenges.

Focus teachers were more likely than others to model higher order thinking skills including self critique, and to communicate their valuing of these skills to their students. Contexts included strategies for writing, spelling and mental computation and often involved public pondering of alternatives with tacit invitations for class contributions. The discussion relating to birds in captivity also provided an example relevant here, with the teacher saying, "I'm not sure I can write that down until I have thought about this. Are we sure all birds in cages are 'prisoners'? How do you see it,

Nathan? That sick eagle you read about in *Wedgetail*; it was in captivity, but was it in 'prison'?" Modelling was also used in most focus classrooms to provide students with explicit guidance concerning what would constitute a quality performance or product.

5. Differentiation and multi-layering supported by student self regulation and open-ended activity.

The practices of focus teachers purposely maximised the fit of child and challenge. Project-based or multi-disciplinary approaches were evident as a vehicle for this in each focus school, the inclusive negotiations not so much targeted to the students with HSN, but rather to learners who had fallen behind their peers. In one focus school, Beane's (1993; 1997) processes of consensual curriculum negotiations were highly valued for this purpose, whereas another focus school employed collective negotiation with students on rubric descriptors to guide and evaluate their work.

Overall, five characteristics that specifically supported the inclusion of learners with HSN were evident in the practice of focus teachers. These were:

1. Ownership of the HSN child's program by the teacher, rather than the T/A (Teacher Assistant or Teacher Aide);
2. Exposure for the student with HSN to rich pedagogies through learning activity in the main groupings undertaking main activity, bridged where appropriate by the T/A or peers;
3. A focus by the T/A on communicative competence, capitalising on 1-1 and T/A-mediated class group opportunities;
4. A supportive classroom environment, high in student self-regulation, allowing increased opportunity for teachers to engage personally and generatively with high needs students;
5. Connectedness, relevance and intellectual quality enhanced through attention to life skills for a wide range of learners.

Though the focus subset of classes specifically designed higher order approaches for their full range of learner abilities, the same cannot be said for the majority of classes observed. Furthermore, despite the school survey and school leader interview data that espoused inclusive school community values, the communication and professional learning processes that characterised the program planning of the focus schools and teachers was missing in many observed contexts.

Conclusion

Teachers face multiple challenges as they attempt to balance continuous learning improvement with increasing social and educational diversity of inclusive school communities. This study suggests that school level supports for inclusive and ambitious pedagogies can be relatively simple (though not easy to obtain), such as the provision of collaborative planning time between teachers and T/As. Schools as a whole can also structure programs so that trans-disciplinary practice is a reality, with units of learning collaboratively co-managed by both classroom and specialist teachers.

The focus schools and teachers in this study demonstrated that inclusion can be conducted in the context of exciting and effective programs that provide access for all students to higher order pedagogies. Overall, there was a relative dearth of evidence

for several *Attributes of Powerful Teaching*, even in classrooms in the focus schools. This highlights the need for ongoing efforts to expand the pedagogical repertoires of teachers in order to maximise the benefits promised by progressive curricula such as Tasmania's Essential Learnings (DoE, Tas., 2002b), to which higher order pedagogies are fundamental.

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