





INNOVATING KING DAVID

The best educators, like all leaders, adapt to the changing information in front of them. This takes place on two levels: teachers are continually evaluating progress in the classroom and adjusting accordingly, and, as a field, education research is continually evaluating what works and what doesn't. This means that teaching best practice is dynamic. We no longer expect students to learn rote passages from a textbook or listen to the teacher talk for an entire lesson without an accompanying task, let alone copy from the board!



ABOVE LEFT: Kaisu Tonkyra teaching the Writing Revolution to Year 4 students.
 ABOVE RIGHT: Rebecca Fiala teaching the Science of Language & Reading to Prep students.



"70 percent of kids will learn to read no matter how you teach reading but the 30 percent of kids who won't learn, will learn this way."

King David has incorporated continual pedagogical innovation into its leadership structure.

There is a Vice Principal Teaching and Learning whose role it is to ensure that teachers' pedagogical approaches are in line with ever-evolving best practice. There is also a Coordinator of Innovation who works with teachers throughout the school to ensure their curricula align with current research on how students learn best.

Two particularly innovative programs in the Junior School illustrate KDS's commitment to best practice: a literacy initiative, the 'Science of Language and Reading' and the writing program, 'The Writing Revolution'. At our Magid Campus, staff are undertaking comprehensive training in 'Walkthrus', a systemic classroom development framework.

The 'Science of Language and Reading' is an evidence-based structured literacy program that teaches children how to read. The Grattan Institute recently released a report on the state of literacy at schools in Australia. It made sobering reading with its view that over one third of school students nationally are not reading at proficient levels. The Grattan Institute attributed

this failure to the rise in the 'whole language' approach to teaching literacy, which has been in vogue in Australia since the 1970s.

As opposed to the whole language approach which relies on students already possessing the word in their vocabulary, the structured literacy approach uses explicit instruction to teach phonological awareness. That is, it teaches children to hear and then read the 44 combinations of sounds in English. This allows children to decode words without necessarily having to know their meaning first. Vocabulary is developed through the rich texts that teachers use in the classroom, alongside explicit instruction and readers.

As Prep teacher and Science of Reading champion Rebecca (Beck) Fiala said, "70 percent of kids will learn to read no matter how you teach reading but the 30 percent of kids who won't learn, will learn this way. If taught well and systematically, only two percent of students will genuinely struggle with literacy."

Prep-Year 2 students engage in the Science of Reading program every day. In Prep, for example, students use retrieval practice through a daily review, matching letters with sounds, blending them and putting the letter combinations into words.



"Every day I get more excited and I find it more easy to read. I can put way more sounds together than at the beginning of the year."

"Teachers here are really inspired by what we're doing and are actively sharing best practice with each other."

They also practise 'segmenting', writing down the sounds they hear, then the combination of the letters that make the sound. Preppies improve their speaking skills through an oral reading component each day.

Beck Fiala said, "Within two weeks we can already see students reading and writing words and even students that you wouldn't expect to pick it up quickly are. Daily retrieval practice is neuroscience best practice." The Program "gives students a sense of pride because they see results quickly which increases their confidence and they want to learn more."

Prep student Julius Bieber embodies this pride, saying "Every day I get more excited and I find it more easy to read. I can put way more sounds together than at the beginning of the year." Julius tells us that he loves reading at home as well as school.

'The Writing Revolution' program was trialled in Term 4 of last year. Like the Science of Language and Reading, it takes a step-by-step approach to teaching students how to build sentences, paragraphs and whole texts. Recent NAPLAN testing found that writing is an issue across the country. This program addresses this. Assistant Head of Junior School Janice Shearer explains,

"it starts from sentence building blocks – 'What is a fragment?' and 'What is a sentence? What's a question? What's a statement? What's an exclamation?'" Junior School teachers have had 12 hours of intensive professional development training them in the Writing Revolution.

To ensure students have relevant and sustained content to write about, English is now combined with what used to be called 'Units of Inquiry', creating a double subject called 'Integrated English'. Now as students learn their inquiry content, they utilise The Writing Revolution framework. Curriculum Specialist Junior School (and Year 4 teacher) Kaisu Tonkyra says this means there is "more time for deep learning in the unit content and at the same time we can teach deep writing skills."

The Writing Revolution teaches students how to revise and edit their own work. It also aids reading and comprehension through asking them to summarise what they have read. Beck Fiala adds that as part of this program, students are "forced to think deeply. In their writing, they have to articulate a reason and a contrasting opinion. This changes the way students think as well."

Year 4 student Joseph Welch says that the class has "learned

how to use descriptive language and how to use it in our narratives to give the reader more information. For example, writing about a penguin, I would say 'In a cascade of dew drops Peak the penguin lifted her head.'" Maddie Pryles, also in Year 4, adds that in Integrated English, "We worked on argumentative pieces. We also learned how to do 'because, but, so' and some subordinating conjunctions." Joseph further explains that "a subordinating conjunction is something that combines the sentences: the school was white *after* the painters painted it."

As well as how to build sentences into argument, students are taught note-taking techniques and how to turn their notes into structured paragraphs.

Janice states that "These are skills students can take with them into Middle and Senior School." It is not just students who are benefitting. Kaisu adds, "Teachers here are really inspired by what we're doing and are actively sharing best practice with each other."

In every classroom at King David, our teachers are innovating to create innovators.