

PBL in practice

Sustaining PBL in high-turnover schools

All schools experience principal and staff changes at some stage, but some schools are more susceptible to high turnover due to factors such as school size, location and other demographics. Research has consistently found that leadership and staff support are the strongest predictors of effective PBL implementation, therefore the ability to sustain PBL implementation through frequent staffing changes is critical.

This PBL in practice paper discusses the challenges of implementing and sustaining PBL in schools experiencing high turnover and provides evidence-informed strategies for successfully counteracting these challenges.

References

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Sustaining PBL implementation

Research has identified key features which help schools to maintain momentum for PBL implementation. Focusing on these features will help schools to reach and maintain PBL fidelity in the face of leadership and staff turnover challenges.

Positive school culture

A positive school culture is built by consistent small actions, repeated over time. Having high expectations and a positive attitude about the school help build a sense of belonging. The belief that it's a privilege to work at a school has been shown to be a key factor in retaining staff. Find opportunities for collaboration and sharing, such as establishing Communities of Practice, setting up focus groups and running special events. Simple actions such as positive greetings and acknowledgements between adults help build a sense of community where everyone feels welcome. Part of having a positive school culture is taking a proactive and preventive approach to behaviour and building everyone's understanding about why this is important. Make sure your school vision statement aligns with your goals for PBL.

Staff capability

Building knowledge about PBL and effective behaviour support helps everyone to stay on the same page, develops a common language and encourages collaboration. Documenting and sharing PBL processes and practices ensures that PBL is embedded across all aspects of school functioning and provides a record that supports effective transitions and ensures continuity. Make sure that documentation is stored in a central location that everybody knows about.

It's important that all staff, including teacher aides and non-teaching staff, have access to ongoing professional development and coaching



support. There will always be new staff, so plan ahead and have induction packages ready to go and continuously available. All staff working in classrooms need to know how to implement evidence-informed classroom practices which align with school-wide PBL. Build in opportunities for modelling, practice and feedback and use data to determine what to work on.

Collection and use of data

Teams that use a consistent process for data collection, analysis and problem-solving are more likely to sustain PBL implementation long-term. It's important to build capability of all staff to interpret data and understand how to use it for solution planning. While each PBL team has a designated data manager, it is wise to have several people with access to data and the ability to organise it so that schools are not relying on one person. Provide access to data workshops provided by PBL regional advisers to groups of staff and consider allocating time in staff meetings to model the solution planning process with all staff.

A representative school team

A well-functioning PBL team can help schools maintain momentum for PBL even when there are changes in school leadership. Teams should have representation from across the school, including teaching and non-teaching roles, staff from different year levels or different faculties and staff in student support roles. Spreading representation in this way encourages input from everyone in the school, making it more likely that staff feel included and listened to. Teams also need well-established working norms and procedures, such as working from an agenda and having designated roles. A good way to build capacity is to have 'understudies' for key team roles such as team leader, coach and data manager. This means that meetings can still run effectively if someone is away, or when there are staffing changes. Rotating staff on and off the PBL team is another way to develop skills and knowledge.

Involvement of the whole school community

Effective PBL implementation includes listening and learning from students, families and the community. Including student voice, reaching out to families and communicating regularly with the wider community builds positive relationships and demonstrates that everyone is valued. Giving students and families opportunities to contribute to PBL implementation builds mutual respect and trust. Intentionally connecting with the local community and making cultural adaptations to PBL implementation will help PBL to stay on the agenda, even through leadership and staffing instability.

A school example

The 3rd principal in 2 years is due to begin at Faraway State School at the start of Term 4. At the end of the year the school will also farewell their PBL internal coach and 3 other members of the PBL team. Typically, at the start of each school year around a third of teachers are new to the school. The school has just reached Tier 1 implementation fidelity and is keen to start building Tier 2 systems. The PBL team is worried that they will lose momentum and even go backwards with so many pending changes. Rather than waiting for the changes to happen, the team decides to act proactively by putting in place strategies to strengthen PBL implementation.

- 1. Strengthen the team.** Having a strong and representative PBL team will be critical to the ongoing success of PBL implementation. Existing PBL team members start actively recruiting staff who will be remaining at the school next year to join the team. Additionally, they plan to invite new staff to join the team at the start of the new school year.
- 2. Share the data.** The team has been sharing student outcome data and PBL fidelity data with staff each term to ensure that staff are aware of priorities and next steps. They determine to put together an annual PBL report at the end of the year which will be shared with the incoming principal and new staff.
- 3. Handover leadership.** The current principal meets with the incoming principal to provide background on how the PBL framework relates to school improvement goals and helps set up a meeting with the new principal and the PBL team leader to discuss PBL status and priorities.
- 4. Provide professional development.** A PBL induction and refresher session is scheduled for the student free days and brief PowerPoints on key aspects of PBL implementation are developed and uploaded to SharePoint as a ready reference for all staff.
- 5. Review documentation.** PBL is included in the annual review of school policies and procedures and the PBL Handbook is updated and uploaded to SharePoint.
- 6. Access regional support.** The PBL team works with the regional PBL adviser to ensure continuity of support for the school team. The outgoing principal works with the school supervisor to ensure a smooth transition for the new principal.

Staff turnover is a reality for many schools. By taking a prevention-focused approach, schools can plan for predictable staffing changes and strengthen PBL implementation by building systems which sustain PBL long-term.

