STORY HUBS PILOT

FINAL EVALUATION

5 AUGUST 2022

CONTENTS

The Story Hubs pilot created 'Hubs' in schools with the goal of improving student literacy outcomes and creativity, building teacher capacity to support student learning and creation, and a learning community within each school. Story Hubs (SH) was piloted in five schools and one educational institution between 2019–2022. Each Story Hub contains a co-designed creative space, a course program of teacher professional learning (PL), and a peer-to-peer (P2P) learning community. Each Hub was also encouraged to nominate a partner school to expand the program reach.

This report presents the evaluation of the Story Hubs pilot. The evaluation purpose was to understand and codify the Story Hubs model, capture learnings from the pilot period, and provide accountability to funders regarding outcomes achieved. The evaluation included 19 interviews and 23 consultations with teachers, 24 interviews with students, two interviews with 100 Story Building (100SB) staff, and a review of documents including student work samples.

What were the outcomes in the pilot hubs?

STUDENT OUTCOMES

Story Hubs contributed to student learning and wellbeing. Learning and wellbeing are the two ultimate outcomes of Victoria's Framework for Improving Student Outcomes (FISO), which is an evidence-based continuous improvement framework for all Victorian government schools. The evaluation found that **student engagement and agency increased** when teachers applied the Story Hubs principles in their classes. These changes occurred consistently over time and for normally disengaged students, and during a COVID-affected period where student engagement has been low. FISO identifies engagement and agency as key elements that support learning and wellbeing.

Story Hubs contributed to improved student writing. The evaluation found that **students improved their idea generation, writing length, and their attitudes towards writing**, all which contribute to writing outcomes according to research. While some teachers said writing had improved and others said it was unchanged, this evaluation found that particular writing improvements may not be recognised by teachers due to a focus on functional literacy above creativity and critical thinking. The consistency of this outcome was mixed and obscured by context and the challenge of measuring creativity and critical thinking.

Student writing and learning outcomes varied across schools in line with the level of teacher uptake of Story Hubs principles. Story Hubs was one component of a broader focus on writing in these schools, so any measurable changes in writing would be due in part to this broader focus, rather than Story Hubs entirely. The magnitude of the change in writing outcomes could not be measured due to restrictions for research in schools and the presence of major external factors such as online learning.

TEACHER OUTCOMES

Story Hubs contributed to **improved teacher capacity to support student creation and learning**. This improved capacity was shown by the student outcomes detailed above, which reinforced research that shows teacher capacity has the greatest potential to positively impact student learning. Story Hubs contributed to improved capacity primarily through teacher PL – especially in demonstrating the Story Hubs teaching principles through structured sessions – and the co-designed creative space.

Teacher capacity to support student creation and learning has improved in three ways: the learning and application of specific tools and methods to support student engagement, agency, and idea generation; the deeper adoption of new attitudes and principles to teaching for the same outcomes; and by integrating these principles into their curriculum. The evaluation found that teachers are tailoring what was learned in PL to suit their classes and inquiries, rather than just copying the activities.

Story Hubs contributed to **improved teacher confidence, enjoyment, and sense of support.** These outcomes stood out in a time when teacher wellbeing, morale and efficiency has declined, and teachers feel dispensable and underappreciated despite working incredibly hard. Teacher confidence and enjoyment rose once they successfully applied the teaching principles taught in PL, and their sense of support was directly due to fit-for-purpose PL during online learning.

Teaching outcomes varied across schools according to their engagement with and uptake of PL. Teacher uptake was high across the Geelong hub, low in two hubs, and low but increasing in one hub. Outcomes were consistent for teachers across the Geelong hub, who have continued to apply the teaching principles in their classes over multiple terms.

What was delivered in the pilot period?
School capacity to engage with external programs such as Story Hubs was hindered significantly from March 2020 – November 2021 by COVID restrictions and the associated challenges, particularly in Melbourne. Story Hubs was designed as a three-year, place-based program.

Of the four Hubs, one has been substantially delivered, one has partial and ongoing delivery, and two have had partial delivery. The co-design process was delivered as planned for all four Hubs. The Geelong Hub was substantially delivered during the pilot period: these schools received a full year of teacher professional learning (PL) delivered to the entire cohort of teachers, with active ongoing engagement and established partner schools. The other three Hubs faced limitations as to the extent and reach of PL delivered, ongoing engagement, and partner schools.

What was learned about the process for implementing each Story Hubs element?
Professional learning: Schools that received funding to cover Casual Relief Teacher (CRT) costs had the greatest PL uptake. Free PL alone did not ensure teacher uptake, as schools were influenced by

time scarcity, CRT availability and costs. The most appropriate PL process is to start with structured training ('Sparking Creativity'), then shift towards more responsive coaching in the second year. PL dates should be planned around the whole-school calendar and be locked into teachers' schedule far in advance.

Creative space co-design: The co-design process generally worked well and was positively received by teachers and students due to the high student involvement and agency. The most appropriate co-design process was shorter and facilitated by 100SB rather than teachers. Artists had significant discretion in the final creation despite the significant student agency before that point in the process.

Peer-to-Peer (P2P) learning: Opportunities and teacher appetite for P2P learning were limited due to time scarcity, which was compounded by COVID. P2P learning emerged through the coaching PL, with 100SB acting as the conduit between schools and teachers. This model allowed 100SB to facilitate a cross-pollinate ideas between different coaching sessions and did not require additional time or resources from teachers.

What are the requirements from schools and 100SB?
The key requirements from schools are a commitment of teacher time to PL, active ongoing support from senior leaders, and staff champions to oversee implementation.

The key requirements from 100SB are to navigate the time scarcity in schools, and to learn the unique realities of each school in order to tailor their services.

What was learned about scaling Story Hubs across schools and partner schools?
Reach within schools was determined by the number of teachers who participated in the initial PL sessions, and this reach did not increase over time. The level of senior leadership involvement in driving implementation and the influence of staff champions dictated teacher participation in PL and in turn Story Hubs' reach.

The evaluation found that while school partnerships are supported by both education literature and policy, schools generally lacked the capacity and resources to establish partnerships with other schools. Collaboration between partners was beneficial when it did occur. Story Hubs piloted two different 'partnership models', but lessons from these models are obscured by other factors including COVID.

STORY HUBS: IMPACTS ON TEACHING

100 Story Building

"You're not trying to steer them in a direction..."

Constantly saying...

"...use of STORY TELLING to unite learning elements and design learning arcs!"

Yes!

YES!

"One thing for me was to feel like I could be a CREATIVE PERSON for the kids..."

"...If you don't have that skill set you just try to steer to what you're comfortable with."

YES!!

CURRICULUM

Missing component for teachers

The BIGGEST thing we need to do is adapt the ideas in our classroom

We came up with these mysterious EGGS... Our WHOLE TERM became about these eggs we did...

An Information Report · Diary Writing · A life cycle · A story

If the coaching hadn't happened it would have been quite a disjointed term!

STORY HUBS seem to complement INQUIRY models!

OUTCOMES FOR STUDENTS

Snapshot data from STORY HUBS Evaluation April 2022 illustrated by BB.

"Definitely the BIGGEST THING was increased engagement"

ESPECIALLY FOR DISENGAGED STUDENTS

"Students wrote more..." "quality was higher."

"I found it hard to quantify ... a lot of the curriculum is based around grammar, spelling, things like that."

"I had one student ... he was highly engaged with the power to make the rules."

"Students are demonstrating the work of CREATIVE PRACTICE."

"Because they're writing more you can work on... capital letters, full stops, even paragraphs because they're at that point in their length."

"Hubs offers different access points."

"In normal class we write before drawing... What helps me is when I DRAW FIRST, then come up with ideas to write... That's what we've been doing in Story Hubs."

CREATIVE WRITING GROUPS

"Outcomes for those kids have been phenomenal... they've been able to focus on things they might not have in the classroom because [the classroom is] more structured."

"There are broader aspects to writing than what's contained in the CURRICULUM."
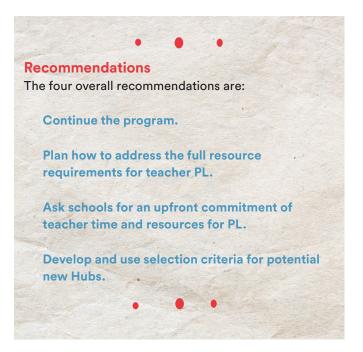
To what extent is Story Hubs appropriate for schools?

The evaluation found that Story Hubs was appropriate for schools where teachers had time and capacity to engage with the program. The demonstrated outcomes from Story Hubs elements – student engagement and agency, improved teacher capacity, active partnerships between schools – are key components of Victorian educational policy and supported by research. However, implementing Story Hubs was inappropriate (and not done) in schools where teachers lacked the time and capacity to engage, a challenge compounded by the onset of COVID and online learning.

YOU SHOULD ALWAYS LOOK AT IT BUT NOT TOUCH OR ELSE LAUGH HA HA HA HA

FIGURE 1
A sign in the Meadows Hub written by a co-design group student. This sign instructs others on the rules of the interdimensional control room.

Recommendations

The four overall recommendations are:

Continue the program.

Plan how to address the full resource requirements for teacher PL.

Ask schools for an upfront commitment of teacher time and resources for PL.

Develop and use selection criteria for potential new Hubs.

Recommendations related to each element are:

Professional learning: Keep the process of starting with structured PL and then shifting to more responsive coaching. Equip teachers to recognise changes in writing creativity and critical thinking, and keep tailoring PL content to the upcoming needs and gaps of teachers.

Co-design: Keep the co-design process and find ways to embed student agency into the physical design process, COVID allowing.

Partner schools: Revisit how to implement partnerships between schools for Hubs with teacher time and capacity to engage.

FIGURE 2
Student ideas on display in the Sunshine Hub.