



# Literature review: Ambassador Schools research program

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## About the report

The Ambassador Schools program aimed to deepen the evidence base of effective teaching and learning practices across NSW public schools. The research contributed to the growing evidence of effective practices in NSW public schools to inform ongoing improvement. Ten schools were selected to participate in this research as Ambassador Schools for their strong performance across a range of measures. These measures included NAPLAN top two bands targets for reading and numeracy, expected growth, attendance, and HSC performance.

This research identified the specific practices and enabling conditions that have contributed to the impact of Ambassador Schools. It adopted a strengths-based approach that recognised that effective practices can be found across a range of New South Wales (NSW) government schools. It was framed by a review of the research literature on effective teaching and learning and leadership practices, mindful of the NSW Department of Education's (NSW DoE) existing summary of effective practices, including *What Works Best*. This research sought to build upon what is already known about effective practices to uncover what is distinctive about the ways in which they were implemented in Ambassador Schools to enhance their effectiveness.

## Introduction

The literature review provided a contextual foundation for the research conducted in Ambassador Schools. It also identified gaps in existing research. These gaps established the need to develop a robust and evidence-based body of research on effective practices that contribute causally to the success of high performing schools within their unique school contexts.

# Literature Review

The following sections synthesise the existing Australian and international literature on pedagogical and leadership practices that lead to enhanced academic achievement and other positive student outcomes. It begins with a discussion of the importance of context and then critically analyses findings in a range of areas widely reported to support academic achievement and student wellbeing:

**1** Curriculum and differentiation,

**5** Leadership practices,

**2** Explicit teaching,

**6** Collaborative practices,

**3** Classroom management practices,

**7** Community engagement, and

**4** Assessment processes,

**8** Practices promoting wellbeing and belonging.

These eight overarching practice areas were selected because each has a substantive evidence base comprising at least ten peer-reviewed sources and, relatedly, they feature as key priority areas in the *'What works best: 2020 update'* report (Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation, 2020). We also discuss the evidence supporting these practice areas, analysing their reported impacts, and highlighting gaps and limitations of the findings. The sources included in this review were chosen using the following criteria:

1. They discuss and analyse pedagogical and/or leadership practices that directly or indirectly positively impact student outcomes (e.g., academic achievement, improved wellbeing); and
2. They were conducted in Australia or other similar national and socioeconomic contexts (e.g., the US, Canada, the UK).

The *'What works best: 2020 update'* report (Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation, 2020) informed the preliminary search of relevant databases to examine the evidence-base for these practices. Then, synonymous terms and other related key words were used to locate sources discussing and evaluating similar practices. The snowball method was also used to identify additional relevant and commonly cited sources.

This literature review predominantly includes peer-reviewed studies with some grey literature comprised of primary and secondary research, qualitative and quantitative data, various sample sizes, and published within a broad timeframe (1965–2022) to incorporate a range of formative sources.

Concerted effort was made to include studies conducted in diverse contexts (e.g., regional and urban geographic areas, primary and secondary school settings, and different student cohorts). The research team also sought to analyse how various contextual factors might impact student outcomes, and considered how specific practices might be implemented across highly diverse demographic and socioeconomic educational settings such as the NSW government school sector. The review also focused on practices with potential to be scaled and implemented in various NSW schools, although the lack of contextual analysis that characterised most reviewed studies made the scalability of practices difficult to assess.

# Contextual factors

## The impacts of context on student outcomes

Context is a central aspect of any inquiry into the impacts of educational practices (Seddon, 1995). Research that has analysed the influence of contextual factors has considered the circumstances within which a practice is delivered, thereby considering a range of intrinsic and external issues influencing its delivery and impacts on student outcomes (Drysdale & Gurr, 2011; Seddon, 1995). Context influences a variety of student outcomes in diverse ways. For instance, it is widely acknowledged that the socioeconomic status (SES) of a student is strongly related to their academic outcomes, as measured by standardised assessments (Perry & McConney, 2010). Some studies have shown that the SES of schools significantly impacts student achievement – even more so than a student’s individual SES. For example, Perry and McConney (2010) investigated how student SES and school SES is related to mathematics and literacy performance through a descriptive analysis of the Australian PISA 2003 dataset comprising just over 12,500 15-year-old students from 312 high schools. They demonstrated that school SES was consistently associated with academic performance regardless of the individual students’ SES.

Smith et al. (2019) used a geographic information system to analyse the spatial dimensions of educational outcomes in the results of the 2016 Grade 5 NAPLAN test, and consistently found that, in all cities across Australia, schools in advantaged suburbs had predominantly high results. Additionally, non-government schools generally performed better than government schools in disadvantaged suburbs, a finding that Smith et al. (2019) suggested might be due to the additional resources that private schools possess through attracting concentrations of higher-income families in disadvantaged areas (Smith et al., 2019). The findings demonstrate the significant influence of local socioeconomic contexts on student achievement.

Several studies have investigated the causes of lower educational achievement in certain geographic settings such as regional and remote areas of Australia, citing a variety of context-specific challenges and limitations such as high teacher turnover, poverty, and lack of training opportunities for teachers and principals (Smith et al., 2019; Wolgemuth et al., 2014). There is also evidence of achievement gaps based on demographic factors such as gender. For instance, boys tend to underperform on standardised tests and are less likely to complete high school than girls, although these disparities are overshadowed by the effects of ethnicity and social class (Scholes & Nagel, 2012).

Some studies have established positive correlations between intrinsic factors such as students’ beliefs and sense of self-efficacy, and their academic achievement (Molla, 2021). For example, Smith and Skrbiš (2017) analysed longitudinal data from 2,145 single-aged young Australians across five years in secondary school and found that educational performance was positively related to meritocratic ideas, such as the belief that hard work results in success. Other studies have established the interrelated impacts of intrinsic and extrinsic factors (e.g., student-teacher relationships and student motivation) on student outcomes (Smith and Skrbiš, 2017).

## Lack of contextual analysis in the literature

The educational landscape of NSW is large and highly diverse, with a sizeable proportion of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation, 2020). Yet, existing studies evaluating the impacts of specific educational practices mostly only describe the contexts within which they are conducted (e.g., geographic location, school size, cultural composition of students, socioeconomic backgrounds of students) without performing an analysis of how these contextual factors impact student outcomes.

Some researchers have considered how contextual issues might influence the implementation fidelity of specific practices (for examples, see Birenbaum et al., 2011; Briere et al., 2015; Motoca et al., 2014). Implementation fidelity refers to the extent to which a practice or programme is implemented as intended by the proponent or developer (Carroll et al., 2007). Hargreaves (2012) attributed the success of Singapore’s education system to the high degree of fidelity with which initiatives are implemented. Implementation fidelity affects the effectiveness of interventions and hence must be considered when evaluating the impacts of programmes or practices (Carroll et al., 2007). It is possible for aspects of an intervention to be adapted to better fit the context in which it is being implemented without compromising overall implementation fidelity provided elements of the intervention considered essential are not affected (Carroll et al., 2007).

Research has seldom explored the vital role and function of context in shaping student performance and well-being. Such depictions neglect the diversity of school settings and may result in research recommendations that lack nuance and are ineffective in specific contexts (Seddon, 1995).

There is, therefore, a need to further explore how a variety of contextual factors may affect the delivery and impact of different practices on student outcomes (Smith et al., 2019). Nonetheless, the following sections of the literature review will unpack the existing evidence on practices that promote student achievement, engagement, and wellbeing.

## Curriculum and differentiation

### Differentiation of curriculum and instruction

There is widespread support in the literature for differentiation – a teaching approach that modifies curriculum content, instructional methods, resources, and learning activities and routines – to address and cater for a broad variety of learners’ needs, readiness levels, interests, and modes of learning (Gomez-Arizaga et al., 2020; Tomlinson et al., 2003). Differentiation has been positively linked with academic achievement in both primary and secondary school settings, when instruction matches the abilities and thinking preferences of students during the learning process (Rayneri, Gerber, & Wiley, 2006; Sternberg, 1997; Sternberg et al., 1998).

These approaches tie in with Vygotsky’s theory, ‘zone of proximal development’, in which he suggests that students learn best when provided tailored support at their current level of development and assisted to incrementally achieve success at higher levels (Shabani et al., 2010). In this framework, course content and instruction are differentiated according to the student’s ‘zone of proximal development’ to offer them sufficient, but not overwhelming, challenge and complexity in their work, and enable them to successfully adopt and internalise new concepts, skills, and psychological tools (Shabani et al., 2010).

Differentiation approaches recognise the academic diversity of classrooms and seek to maximise learning opportunities for a range of students, including low- and average-level achieving students, students experiencing language barriers, and high-achieving and gifted learners (Tomlinson et al., 2003). Thus, such approaches promote principles of equity and inclusion in curriculum development. Despite the widespread endorsement of differentiation practices, these approaches are not always applied in mainstream classrooms as some teachers are unaware of how to operationalise the approach (Gomez-Arizaga et al., 2020).

### Differentiating content for bilingual students

Bilingual programs have been shown to be beneficial in improving first-language literacy and other academic outcomes for students from various lingual backgrounds (Helman, 2005). For example, some studies exploring strategies to improve literacy acquisition for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have emphasised the need to incorporate Indigenous languages and perspectives into the curriculum to improve student engagement and performance, especially in remote communities (Gutierrez et al., 2021).

Nguyen et al. (2015) found that learning an Aboriginal language at school significantly improved English decoding scores in the second grade. Hickling-Hudson (2014) introduced a series of 20 reading materials comprising of culturally relevant content in four Aboriginal languages and found that using these resources led to acceleration in literacy and oral language acquisition. Additionally, the sociocultural relevance of these items improved students’ interest and engagement with literacy content (Hickling-Hudson, 2014).

The findings from these early literacy interventions, albeit limited, are promising and highlight the potential of such bilingual, culturally relevant initiatives to reduce widespread achievement disparities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students (Gutierrez et al., 2021). There is, however, a need for research on effective bilingual approaches used in the secondary school context, especially considering that under a quarter of Indigenous students complete to Year 12 (Gutierrez et al., 2021).

## Differentiating content for high-achieving students

Gifted students are endemically under-served in various international contexts, including in Australian schools, with fewer opportunities in mainstream classrooms to engage in activities based on their skills and needs (Fraser-Seeto et al., 2015; Gomez-Arizaga et al., 2020; Henderson & Jarvis, 2016). This results in significant underachievement, with some scholars estimating that 15-40% of gifted students are at risk of performing well below their academic potential (Figg et al., 2012). Because gifted learners learn at a faster pace and at more advanced levels than their peers, they require a range of targeted interventions to maximise their learning opportunities such as acceleration (i.e., learning the curriculum more rapidly), enrichment (e.g., providing additional and more complex content that sparks higher order thinking), independent projects (e.g., student-led tasks, inquiry-based learning), and greater choice (Gomez-Arizaga et al., 2020; Henderson & Jarvis, 2016; Rogers, 2007; Yuen et al., 2016). Some studies have found that high-school-age gifted students prefer open-ended, unstructured tasks, whereas gifted primary students learn well through hands-on and experiential learning (Chan, 2001; Kanevsky & Keighley, 2003; Pereira & Gentry, 2013; Samardzija & Peterson, 2015). However, research on the effectiveness and impacts of such tailored interventions is mixed and inconclusive (for examples, see Morisano et al., 2010; Rubenstein et al., 2012; Steenbergen-Hu et al., 2020).

## Differentiating content for students with disabilities

Inclusive education whereby students with disabilities that impact their learning are taught in general classrooms has been emphasised in Australia since the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was ratified by Australia in 1992 (Faragher & Clarke, 2020). In mathematics – the subject area most frequently the focus of research studies on low attaining students' learning – there has also been a move away from approaches to teaching focussed on everyday skills (Butler et al., 2001) and the reliance on content from earlier years (Louden, 2000). Nevertheless, inclusion of students with mathematics learning difficulties in mainstream classrooms remains challenging in Australian schools with streaming according to ability commonplace, and low attainers typically offered impoverished basic skills focussed curricula (Beswick, 2017).

Faragher and Clarke (2020) described an alternative approach whereby students with disabilities are taught curriculum content from the year level corresponding to their age with adjustments. Determining what is a reasonable or appropriate adjustment is difficult for teachers as it demands knowledge of the learner and their unique strengths and needs, as well as of curriculum and pedagogy. There is evidence that teachers tend to offer greater adjustment to regular lessons than is actually required. For example, Faragher et al. (2019) provided examples of a Year 11 student with Down syndrome for whom the provision of a graphics calculator allowed meaningful participation in the lesson she observed, and a Year 8 student also with Down syndrome who was able to participate successfully in a lesson without any adjustments despite being judged to be 5 years behind his same age peers.

Based on a review of the international literature, Scherer et al. (2016) concluded that students experiencing difficulty learning mathematics benefit from explicit teaching, heuristics for solving word problems, graphical representations and manipulatives, careful selection and sequencing of examples, and encouragement to verbalise their strategies. They noted, however, that most studies that have demonstrated the effectiveness of explicit or direct instruction have focused on the learning of basic arithmetic skills. They cited extensive literature pointing to the benefits for all students of investigative pedagogies combined with effective practice. Teaching should allow learners to make connections across ideas rather than dealing with fragments of content (Scherer et al., 2016). For example, young children should learn about the whole numbers to 20 as a group rather than focussing on one number at a time (Scherer, 2013).

## Explicit teaching

Explicit teaching involves practices employed by teachers to clearly explain learning goals, expectations, methods, and success criteria, and build on students' previous understanding of related concepts and skills (Freeman, 2017; Killen, 2016). Studies suggest that explicit teaching can be effective with both small and large classes, with students from various cultural backgrounds, and within both high- and low-resource settings (Killen, 1991; 2016). It is also reported to be beneficial for students with varying abilities, especially low-achievers and students who struggle with locating, organising, and interpreting information such as those with limited prior knowledge, language barriers, or disabilities (Killen, 1991; 2016). Explicit teaching can be effective across diverse topics and student groups. Examples include studies by Andreassen and Braten (2011) on reading for primary school students, Doabler et al. (2015) on mathematics in kindergarten, and Kroesbergen and Luit (2003), and Powell et al. (2021) on using explicit teaching to teach mathematics to primary and secondary school students with special needs.

Explicit teaching, sometimes referred to as 'explicit instruction', is defined in many ways in the literature. This research project will draw from the five essential components of explicit instruction outlined by Hughes et al. (2017). The first essential component consists of segmenting complex skills, where complex tasks are divided into smaller simpler units. The second is to indicate important features of the content by either showing, if an action is being taught, or telling, i.e., thinking aloud, if a concept is being taught. The third is promoting successful engagement with the help of prompts that are gradually withdrawn. An example of this is to provide suggestions or partial solutions to students solving an exercise and provide less and less of them at each exercise iteration. The fourth component is frequently querying and engaging with students, which gives the teacher a chance to provide immediate feedback and monitor how much students are understanding the content. Finally, the fifth component is to create practice opportunities, especially if paired with affirmative or corrective feedback.

It should be noted that while some components of explicit teaching are found in other pedagogical approaches, explicit teaching or instruction is distinct from similar-sounding pedagogies such as Direct Instruction and Direct Explicit Instruction (Hughes et al., 2017). For instance, the Direct Instruction pedagogy includes scripted lessons – which are absent in Explicit Instruction. Moreover, Direct Explicit Instruction and Direct Instruction include both curricular (what to teach) and instructional (how to teach it) elements, while Explicit Instruction focuses on instruction characterised by the components suggested by Hughes et al. (2017).

## Teacher-directed and inquiry-based learning

Various research studies have suggested that many students gain in-depth knowledge through strongly guided teacher-directed explicit instruction (i.e., the teacher explains and demonstrates ideas, and leads discussion) (Moreno, 2004; Killen, 2016). For example, Morgan et al. (2015) analysed population-based longitudinal data with a sample of 13,393 kindergarten students in the US and found that teacher-directed instruction was significantly related to the achievement of students experiencing difficulty in mathematics ( $n=2,486$ ), with effect sizes ranging from .05 to .07. However, some researchers have cautioned that teacher-directed explicit teaching approaches may not assist some students in acquiring higher-order thinking skills such as inquiry (Killen, 2016). Inquiry-based approaches, where students are given more autonomy to pursue knowledge, have been found to facilitate critical thinking and problem-solving skills, particularly for gifted and high-achieving students (Gomez-Arizaga et al., 2020; Figg et al., 2012). There is some evidence suggesting that explicit teaching may impact large-scale standardised test results such as the OECD's Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) or Australia's National Assessment Program - Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN). For instance, Mourshed et al. (2017) investigated the impacts of both teacher-directed and inquiry-based teaching approaches through an analysis of the 2015 PISA results from five international regions. The study found that scores were generally higher across all five regions when teachers took the lead, whereas high levels of inquiry-based teaching without sufficient preliminary teacher-directed instruction resulted in lower scores (Mourshed et al., 2017).

There are several specific practices associated with explicit teaching reported to yield a variety of benefits. For example, Martin and Evans (2018) tested the impacts of load reduction instruction, a practice seeking to reduce the cognitive burden on students' working memory in the initial stages of learning by highlighting important information or possible challenges (Killen, 2016). Through surveys with 393 students (Years 9-11) from mathematics classrooms in two independent schools in Sydney, they found that load reduction instruction was associated with higher self-efficacy, persistence, planning, and task management in students (Martin & Evans, 2018). There is, therefore, a need to strike a balance between teacher-directed and inquiry-based approaches to ensure that students are explicitly provided with sufficient foundational knowledge prior to independently pursuing or applying learning (Freeman, 2017).

## Explicit teaching for English-language learners

English-language learners require additional support to experience the benefits of explicit teaching approaches more fully. Many studies have found that students learning English as a second language achieve much better outcomes when classroom instruction incorporates language learning and time dedicated to explicitly teaching specific language functions and forms to improve conversational and academic language skills (Freeman, 2017; Shoffner & De Oliveira, 2017). The findings of various studies based in the US and Australia suggest that teachers should identify language demands within their classrooms and tailor instruction accordingly given that students must first understand the vocabulary and meaning of an instruction before engaging in a functional analysis of its parts (Freeman, 2017; Goldenberg, 2013; Shoffner & De Oliveira, 2017). A US-based randomised control trial found that teacher-led discussions on prescribed reading material only improved the reading comprehension of students with the highest English proficiency (Saunders & Goldenberg, 2007). In contrast, there were no statistically significant impacts for mid- and low-level English speakers (Saunders & Goldenberg, 2007). These findings suggest that even sound explicit instruction might not benefit students with lower English proficiency if there is no additional language support.

There is strong support in the literature for applying a set of instructional supports or adjustments, sometimes referred to as 'sheltered instruction', to scaffold the learning of students with lower English proficiency (Goldenberg, 2013). These practices include developing content that is familiar and related to students' experiences, offering additional time for discussing key concepts, creating language-related objectives in addition to other learning goals, differentiating instruction based on students' English proficiency, and using demonstrations and multimodal materials such as diagrams and pictures (Goldenberg, 2013; Shoffner & De Oliveira, 2017). Silverman and Hines (2009) tested the impacts of multimedia instructions on vocabulary and found that students with low English proficiency learned more science-related target words when provided videos as part of their vocabulary instruction than those who did not (Silverman & Hines, 2009). However, beyond these findings, existing research exploring the impacts of some of these practices is yet to show more than a modest effect on student learning and achievement (Goldenberg, 2013; Lee et al., 2005). There is, therefore, a need for further rigorous testing of these practices to understand how and to what extent they might compensate for students' lack of English proficiency at various ages and developmental levels (Goldenberg, 2013).

## Classroom management practices

Classroom management refers to the actions taken by teachers to cultivate a safe and productive learning environment to reduce behavioural disruptions and maximise instructional time (Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation, 2020; Hepburn & Beamish, 2019). It is widely acknowledged that applying effective classroom management results in positive effects on students' socio-emotional outcomes (Korpershoek et al., 2016), behaviour (Oliver et al., 2011), and achievement, and engagement (Marzano et al., 2003). Simonsen et al. (2008) suggested a variety of evidence-based classroom management practices through their systematic review of 81 studies, grouped into five empirically supported categories: maximising structure and predictability (e.g., explicitly teaching class rules and routines, organising class layout to suit different activities, etc.), establishing, teaching and reinforcing expectations (e.g., providing pre-corrections, giving feedback on expectations, etc.), actively engaging students in observable ways (e.g., differentiating to suit learner needs, offering high rates of opportunities to respond, etc.), acknowledging appropriate behaviour (e.g., delivering specific and contingent praise, employing class-wide group contingencies, administering token or other reward systems, etc.), and responding to inappropriate behaviour (e.g., correcting errors, enacting planned ignoring, etc.) (Hepburn et al., 2021).



## Low implementation of evidence-based classroom management

There is a strong evidence base for all the practices listed by Simonsen et al. (2008). For example, a variety of studies have demonstrated that providing contingent praise for desired academic and social behaviour increases students' correct responses (Sutherland & Wehby, 2001), productivity (Wolford et al., 2001), language and math performance (Roca & Gross, 1996), attention and compliance (Brodén et al., 1970; Wilcox et al., 1988), and positive self-referent statements (Phillips, 1984). Some studies have recommended the targeted application of contingent praise to shape the behaviours of certain students in specific areas. For example, Smith and Skrbiš (2017) suggested that teachers praise the efforts of female students in STEM subjects and male students in literacy to counteract the lower achievement and self-confidence widely reported for female and male students in these respective areas.

However, many empirical studies on classroom management have relied on self-reported data from teachers and fail to explore other measures of impact such as student perspectives. Consequently, this has resulted in what some studies and reports have identified as a discrepancy between reported and actual implementation of these practices (Hepburn & Beamish, 2019; NSW Ombudsman, 2017). For instance, in a Queensland survey study involving 587 high school teachers with a range of teaching experience, Hepburn et al. (2021) found that the overwhelming majority of these teachers reported possessing relevant knowledge and skills to prevent behaviour issues (94%) and having a good understanding of evidence-based classroom management (86%). However, there were low rates of application of specific evidence-based practices such as explicitly teaching rules and maintaining at least a 4:1 ratio of positive to corrective feedback (Hepburn et al., 2021). The authors suggested that this discrepancy in findings may relate to social desirability bias impacting the teacher reports, or a lack of knowledge of evidence-based practices, concluding that it is, therefore, unsurprising that these practices continue to be implemented inconsistently in Australian schools (Hepburn et al., 2021).

## Proactive and reactive practices

Various research studies have found that preventative approaches to classroom management aimed at averting problem behaviour are more effective than reactive practices responding to problem behaviours after they occur (Hepburn & Beamish, 2019; Hepburn et al., 2021). Preventative practices (e.g., recognising responsible student actions, hinting at positive and negative behaviours) have been shown to decrease rates of disruptive behaviour and enhance academic engagement, while reactive measures (e.g., delivering reprimands or sanctions) have been demonstrated to diminish student engagement and lead to more exclusionary disciplinary practices (e.g., school suspension), especially for students experiencing disadvantage or barriers such as disability or trauma (Hepburn & Beamish, 2019; Hepburn et al., 2021). Yet, studies (e.g., Borgmeier et al., 2018; Pas et al., 2015; Sullivan, Johnson, Owens, & Conway, 2014) reveal that Australian teachers, particularly in secondary schools, commonly employ reactive classroom management practices.

Hepburn et al. (2021) suggested that there may be many factors contributing to the disproportionate use of reactive approaches in high schools, including difficulties maintaining consistent classroom expectations because of student exposure to multiple classes, common teacher perceptions that older students should know how to behave resulting in a lack of explicit teaching of expectations and acknowledgment of good behaviour, and the common characteristics of adolescent behaviour (e.g., testing boundaries and questioning authorities), leading to more disciplinary actions. Additionally, statistical data across Australian jurisdictions have demonstrated that exclusionary and reactive practices are predominantly applied in response to low-level disruptive and disengaged behaviour that can be more effectively managed through proactive methods (Hepburn et al., 2021; Graham 2018; Sullivan et al., 2014).

## Teacher training and coaching

Various scholars have reported that there is a substantial lack of teacher training on evidence-based classroom management. Some studies have highlighted the urgent need for pre-and in-service training that:

- 1 Translates key practices into observable elements and clarifies how to apply them (Hepburn et al., 2021),
- 2 Addresses the underlying causes or functions of student misbehaviour, as this has been established as a knowledge gap amongst educators (Sullivan, et al., 2014),
- 3 Emphasises the importance of preventative strategies, given the overuse of reactive methods (Hepburn & Beamish, 2019), and,
- 4 Is practical and relevant to real world classrooms, to ensure that teachers are not alienated by highly academic approaches to evidence-based practices (Cook & Cook, 2016).

Kennedy et al. (2017) recommended using multimedia training materials that can be accessed flexibly and repeatedly to enhance teacher knowledge and application of effective classroom management, especially in remote settings with limited access to resources or training personnel. The positive impacts of such training on classroom management are well-documented (Kamps et al., 2015; Reglin et al., 2012; Simonsen et al., 2020). However, existing studies evaluating classroom management training primarily focus on implementation fidelity and the effects on teaching practice and have failed to analyse impacts on student outcomes.

Several studies have contended that classroom management support must encompass school-based mentoring and coaching –where teachers are observed by an expert or skilled peer and are provided with performance feedback –to promote sustained practice changes in the long term (Hepburn et al., 2021; Kennedy et al., 2017). Such coaching provides teachers with opportunities to reflect on their practice and underlying beliefs, set goals for classroom management, trial and develop new skills, increase their use of specific evidence-based practices, and gather and analyse data to inform student interventions (Hepburn & Beamish, 2019; Hepburn et al., 2021). Multiple base-line studies have demonstrated that teachers employed more effective classroom management practices when offered a combination of brief training, followed by opportunities for feedback and planning (Briere et al., 2015; Farmer et al., 2013; Hagermoser Sanetti et al., 2018; Motoca et al., 2014).

## School-wide approaches

School-wide approaches to implementing initiatives –including those focussed on classroom management – involve coordinated activities. Important to their success are continuity and consistency of implementation, holistic consideration of social, emotional, and academic skills, a focus on relationships between students and teachers and among students, and positive and high expectations at both classroom and school levels (Goldberg et al., 2019). For teachers, school-wide approaches can promote collaboration and, most importantly, facilitate teachers learning from and supporting one another to implement initiatives (Penuel et al. 2006). This can help teachers to better understand the requirements of the initiative and its implications for their practice, resulting in a greater likelihood of changed practice and reduced variability of implementation (Penuel et al, 2006).

Classroom management, like other teaching practice areas, is influenced by broader contextual factors and school-wide approaches that shape teacher workload and efficacy (Hepburn & Beamish, 2019). In two US-based survey studies, primary and high school teachers (total sample n=88) listed a variety of broader issues that inhibited effective classroom management such as time constraints, limited resources, insufficient training and expertise on behavioural issues, and a lack of family input (Chitiyo & Wheeler, 2009; McGoey et al., 2014). Schools must establish a proactive disciplinary framework that identifies evidence-based practices as a first step to shift school culture and teacher views on classroom management (Hepburn et al., 2021; Wildy et al., 2014). One such strategy was used by a small rural K-12 school in Western Australia in a study comprising interviews and observations. As reported by the school principal, behaviour management plans were developed and displayed in every classroom for quick reference, yielding positive results such as exemplary student behaviour at inter-school events (Wildy et al., 2014). However, further evidence is required to support such schoolwide strategies across different contexts (e.g., larger schools, urban areas).

# Assessment processes

## Inclusive assessment task design

Proactive planning and accessible assessment task design are necessary to promote positive academic outcomes for students with varying abilities and needs, including gifted students and those with disabilities, as well as other groups at risk of underperforming, such as Indigenous and non-English-speaking students (Freeman, 2017; Graham et al., 2018; Rajagopalan & Gordon, 2016; Thurlow & Kopriva, 2015). Formative assessments support learning by offering opportunities to test the abilities of students, pinpoint their needs, and determine the degree of scaffolding required to enable them to access and engage effectively with course content and subsequent assessment tasks (Freeman, 2017). It is an essential part of explicit teaching as it allows instruction to be built upon students' current understanding (Freeman, 2017; Killen, 2016) and enables teachers to provide immediate feedback to students (Hughes et al., 2017). Indeed, the frequent querying of students that Hughes et al. (2017) recommend is an important way to conduct formative assessment.

Research suggests that in-school assessments in Australian and international contexts largely cater for the 'average' student and often fail to accommodate the needs of students with varying abilities and alternative modes of learning (Gomez-Arizaga et al., 2020; Henderson & Jarvis, 2016). For example, gifted students master proposed content more rapidly and require additional and diverse forms of assessment to test and monitor their abilities and efforts, but these tailored practices are seldom offered to them in regular classes (Gomez-Arizaga et al., 2020; Henderson & Jarvis, 2016). Several studies have suggested that practices such as providing variety and choice in assessment tasks and incorporating critical thinking and abstraction (e.g., open-ended questioning), are crucial in honing the talents of gifted students and enhancing their academic performance (Gomez-Arizaga et al., 2020; Kanevsky, 2011; Kanevsky & Keighley, 2003; Rogers, 2007). The benefits of these types of assessment practices extend to all students, affording opportunities for students to show what they can do and the depth and complexity of their understanding (Scherer et al., 2016). Students with learning difficulties can reveal surprising abilities when offered choices about the ways they demonstrate their learning (Scherer et al., 2016).

Students with disabilities are reported to be the most likely to be excluded in assessment processes due to a lack of adjustments, especially those having disabilities considered to be 'mild' such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and Developmental Language Disorder (DLN), who predominantly study in mainstream Australian schools (Graham, Tancredi, Willis, & McGraw, 2018; Marshall, Stojanovic, & Ralph, 2002; Mulholland, 2017). Graham et al. (2018) conducted an evaluation of an 8th grade sample English assessment task in collaboration with English teachers from two Australian high schools. They found that the assessment comprised design features that would exacerbate the challenges faced by students with ADHD and DLN (Graham et al., 2018). The authors suggested that although well-intentioned, teachers may enact evidence-based assessment practices such as establishing learning intentions and success criteria (Sharratt, 2018) through detailed and reiterated instructions. Such approaches can exponentially increase complexity for students, thereby diminishing the chances of those with ADHD or DLN appropriately applying instructions and achieving academic success (Graham et al., 2018). They suggested a range of assessment-design practices to promote visual, procedural, and linguistic accessibility for students with ADHD and DLN such as using short and simply structured sentences, employing bias-free language, using consistent terminology, providing definitions of specialist jargon, excluding less relevant information, creating white space between sections, using readable font sizes, and seeking feedback from students (Graham et al., 2018).

## Student-led assessment

Other studies have investigated the impacts of student-led assessment and goal setting on student learning (e.g., Chang, Tseng, & Lou, 2012; Sebba et al., 2008). For instance, Fletcher (2021) explored the benefits of using large-scale assessment rubrics as a basis for student-led evaluation. In a qualitative study with 7 teachers and 126 students (Years 2, 4, and 6) from a non-government school in the Northern Territory, the author piloted a formative self-assessment template based on existing NAPLAN writing assessment rubrics (Fletcher, 2021). Through interviews and document analyses of student writing samples, the study found that students used the self-assessment process to self-regulate their learning and identify specific learning goals to improve various areas of their writing (Fletcher, 2021). Although the study did not report the impacts of these self-assessments on students' academic outcomes (e.g., their NAPLAN results), it nonetheless demonstrates how large-scale rubrics with detailed descriptors of student progression can be useful tools in providing avenues for student self-reflection.

## Standardised exams

Disjunctions between the strongly framed evaluative mechanisms of high-stakes examinations (e.g., NAPLAN, HSC) and the relaxed, pedagogically progressive classroom practices of Australian primary schools have been noted by researchers (Campbell & Proctor, 2014; Hughes & Brock, 2008) and can be a concern for parents (Sriprakash et al., 2015). While high stakes tests can have a formative function, they are not suited to the provision of immediate feedback to support students' learning. They can inform school planning and curriculum, but their primary purpose is evaluative of the education system (William & Thompson, 2008).

## Leadership practices

There is widespread acknowledgement across studies spanning many decades that effective leadership is a key contributor to high-performing schools, supporting student learning through improving a school's capacity for academic achievement (Cheng, 1994; Gross & Herriot, 1965; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008; Wildy et al., 2014; Wiley, 2001).

## Distributed leadership

There is strong support in the literature for principals and other school leaders to enact distributed leadership – the sharing of leadership among school staff members occupying various roles – based on evidence suggesting that such approaches strengthen collective vision and buy-in from people at all levels, thereby improving schoolwide practices and learning outcomes (Harris, 2008; Leithwood, Anderson, Mascall, & Strauss, 2010; Riley & Webster, 2016). Distributed leadership, also known as shared or collaborative leadership, requires the principal to recognise the skills and abilities of different staff members, build on their strengths, and work collaboratively with them to address issues (Schrum & Levin, 2013). It may take on many forms, including delegating responsibilities to teachers, and allowing them to work within teams to guide specific aspects of school practice (Schrum & Levin, 2013). Distributed leadership requires trust and a sense of safety in the emotional and professional bonds between staff, as supported by Louis (2007) who demonstrated that schools with high levels of trust exhibited more shared decision-making.

There are a range of empirical studies linking distributed leadership to positive academic outcomes. For instance, in a US-based study, Hallinger and Heck (2010) analysed the results of a longitudinal dataset collected from 198 primary schools over 4 years, involving a cohort of 13,000 third-grade students and surveys with teachers. After controlling for a variety of student variables (e.g., gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, mobility, English language proficiency, and special education status) and school characteristics (e.g., student cohort composition, teacher experience, etc.), the study found that collaborative leadership was positively associated with school capacity for improvement, which in turn was positively related to student growth in reading and mathematics (Hallinger & Heck, 2010). Furthermore, some studies have demonstrated that when schools have some form of shared leadership systematically built in, they experience less of the adverse outcomes often seen when principals leave (e.g., reduced academic performance). Distributed leadership may therefore be a way to achieve sustainable school performance (Drysdale & Gurr, 2011; Seashore Louis, Dretzke, & Wahlstrom, 2010; Wildy et al., 2014).

## Instructional leadership

There is also widespread support in the literature for a set of practices often described as instructional leadership. A leader demonstrates this approach through possessing strong knowledge of the curriculum and principles of quality teaching and learning, and the application of this expertise to provide constructive feedback to enhance teaching or to develop a system in which others deliver this support (Seashore Louis et al., 2010). Principals in secondary school settings are less likely to offer direct instructional support to teachers due to the presence of multiple specialised disciplines represented in the curriculum (Seashore Louis et al., 2010). Studies exploring instructional leadership in high school contexts, have, therefore focused on indirect approaches such as improving learning environments for teachers and stimulating innovative practices (Seashore Louis et al., 2010).

## Examples from high-performing schools

Qualitative research in Australia and the US offers insights into specific practices related to effective leadership approaches, as highlighted by teachers, principals, and parents from high-performing schools. For instance, Schrum and Levin (2013) conducted a study with eight award-winning public schools with varying student numbers (from 400 to over 2,000), a range of socioeconomic conditions, and from rural and urban areas across eight states in the US, to investigate how leaders and teachers work towards school improvement and student achievement. The researchers conducted more than 150 interviews and focus groups with school leaders, teachers, support staff, and parents, 300 hours of classroom observation, and analysis of key school documents (e.g., school improvement plans, principal blogs, meeting minutes, and student achievement data) (Schrum & Levin, 2013). Drysdale and Gur (2011) described a model of successful school leadership based on case studies of four high-performing primary and secondary government schools with small- to moderately sized student numbers in Victoria through document analysis (e.g., school review reports, newsletters, etc.) and interviews with principals, teachers, parents, students, and other school staff (Drysdale & Gurr, 2011). Notably, there were a range of themes that featured significantly in the findings of these studies.

In both studies, distributed leadership emerged as a prominent component of effective leadership, reported to positively impact school performance, staff culture, and student outcomes (Drysdale & Gurr, 2011; Schrum & Levin, 2013). School principals were said to demonstrate distributed leadership through practices such as taking consensus votes on key changes, collaboratively evaluating learning outcomes, sharing decision-making about curriculum and course developments, involving teachers in the recruitment of co-teachers, and instating multiple configurations of teacher groups to champion different initiatives (Drysdale & Gurr, 2011; Schrum & Levin, 2013). These practices include opportunities for teachers to develop and exercise consistent judgment. Instructional leadership, whether applied directly or indirectly, was also considered essential in challenging and enhancing teaching practice, and was displayed through actions such as establishing professional learning communities, facilitating debate and an exchange of ideas at staff meetings, encouraging peer observation, regularly visiting classes to assist students and teachers, and introducing an innovative arts-based curriculum to cater for students with disabilities (Drysdale & Gurr, 2011; Schrum & Levin, 2013). Other strategies and methods discussed in both studies included acknowledging and celebrating staff talent and student excellence (e.g., allocating specialised work to teachers skilled in certain areas, displaying student work), employing values-based approaches (e.g., using language, words, symbols, and actions to emphasise the school's vision and core values), and enacting targeted community engagement (e.g., building parent-school partnerships, developing strategic relationships with external agencies) (Drysdale & Gurr, 2011; Schrum & Levin, 2013).

These findings indicate that the abovementioned school leadership approaches and practices may be effective in yielding positive student outcomes across a variety of school contexts. This is evidenced by the strong support for these strategies across diverse school contexts represented in both studies (i.e., different socioeconomic conditions, student ages and cultural backgrounds, specialties, student numbers, geographic locations, etc.). One challenge in analysing and comparing research exploring effective leadership practices, however, is that these studies often investigate a limited set of leadership behaviours, thus making comparisons across studies difficult (Seashore Louis et al., 2010).

## Collaborative practices

A wealth of existing research supports the notion that school performance is inextricably tied to staff structures and interactions, and that instructional quality and student achievement are improved when teachers are actively involved in promoting cultural shifts and collaborating on various practices (King & Newmann, 2001; Louis & Marks, 1998; Schrum and Levin, 2013; Smylie & Wenzel, 2003; Wildy et al., 2014). Several studies have highlighted the need to foster purposeful professional communities focused on enhancing teaching practice and student learning (Hord & Sommers, 2008; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001; Seashore Louis et al., 2010). In a US-based longitudinal study comprising surveys with teachers (n=4,491 in 2005-6 and n=3,900 in 2008) from primary and high schools of various sizes and socioeconomic backgrounds, Seashore Louis et al. (2010) found that students' mathematics scores were significantly associated with professional communities and teachers' trust in professional communities. Such findings suggest that these peer professional relationships, when underpinned by trust, are important factors influencing student performance (Seashore Louis et al., 2010). A positive and safe school climate, characterised by supportive relationships, is necessary for staff to exchange and discuss ideas, and to reflect on their own practices and the impact of their teaching on student learning (Wildy et al., 2014).

## Joint planning & teaching practices

A broad range of research has established that collaborative lesson and curriculum planning provides several benefits for teachers in different national contexts (Dudley, 2013; Fernandez, 2002; Fernandez et al., 2003; Lawrence & Chong, 2010; Lewis et al., 2006). One form of this collaboration popularised in Japan, the lesson study model, comprises small groups of teachers planning a 'research lesson' that is taught by one group member, while others observe one or two 'case' students (Cajkler et al., 2014; Dudley, 2013). The lesson is then evaluated by the group to address specific learning challenges for 'case' students, and subsequently refined where necessary (Cajkler et al., 2014). A study in the UK tested the impacts of the lesson study approach through interviews with 4 mathematics and 3 modern language teachers in an urban high school (n=1100 students), and found that participating teachers reported important gains, including greater focus on student-centred approaches, heightened confidence to innovate and take risks, and more student engagement (Cajkler et al., 2014). The study also found that these opportunities for collaboration reduced feelings of professional isolation, especially for early career teachers, who felt a sense of stagnation when working in silos (Cajkler et al., 2014). However, such collaborative processes require dedicated time to develop and employ, and are expected to yield small, incremental improvements in student outcomes in the long run. As a result, they are neglected in school systems that are under resourced or seeking quick-fix impacts and improvements (Cajkler et al., 2014).

Other collaborative practices, such as in-school peer-mentoring and coaching, classroom observations paired with constructive feedback, and special interest committees, have been shown to generate a variety of benefits, including enhanced knowledge of curriculum content and instruction, improved ability to observe students and identify their needs, more motivation and self-efficacy, heightened sense of joint responsibility, and greater understanding of students' prior knowledge (Cajkler et al., 2014; Dotger, 2011; Dudley, 2013; Lewis, Perry, & Hurd, 2004; Ylonen & Norwich, 2012). While much of the literature has discussed the positive impacts of collaboration on instructional practice and teacher wellbeing, there are fewer studies that have analysed in depth how these approaches have shaped academic achievement and other student outcomes.

## Consistent teacher judgment

Teacher judgments, particularly those related to student achievement, convey powerful messages to students about their abilities (Alvidrez & Weinstein, 1999) and have implications for student motivation and self-concept. Because teachers' judgments of students' current performance are closely related to their expectations of students' future achievement, teachers' judgments, like their expectations, can result in self-fulfilling prophecies. When their achievement is overestimated, students have higher self-concepts of their ability than do similarly performing students whose achievement is underestimated (Urhahne et al., 2011). Urhahne (2015) showed that the connection between teacher judgment and student performance is mediated by the differing emotional support, provided by teachers depending on their judgment of their students' ability. Students thus receive both verbal and non-verbal messages about their ability through teachers' interactions with them and their motivation and engagement and hence their achievement are influenced as a result (Archambault et al., 2012).

The accuracy of teacher judgments is important not only for the motivation of individual students and student groups but also for the decisions that teachers make about their subsequent teaching including their choice of tasks (Urhahne & Wijnia, 2021). Accurate and consistent teacher judgments are important for comparability of assessments of student work and can be enhanced by moderation processes that involve teachers working together to achieve consensus judgments of work samples (Klenowski & Wyatt-Smith, 2010). In addition to improved consistency of judgments, social moderation processes whereby students' work is collectively judged against clear standards, can build teachers' confidence in their capacities as assessors of students' learning while improving their ability to make accurate and reliable judgments (Koh, 2014). Such practices also contribute positively to teachers' autonomy and agency (Koh, 2014).

## Collective teacher efficacy

Bandura (1997) defined collective efficacy as the belief that together teachers can enhance student outcomes. It is more than simply the sum of individual teachers' self-efficacy but, rather, is emergent property of schools (Goddard et al., 2000). Analogously to the association of teacher efficacy and improved student achievement, collective teacher efficacy helps to explain the differing impacts of schools on student achievement (Goddard et al., 2000). Collective teacher efficacy has been shown to lead to better teaching (Tschannen-Moran et al., 2004) and is positively related to student achievement even when SES and prior attainment are controlled for (Strahan, Gibbs, & Reid, 2019). Conversely low collective efficacy can lead to teachers experiencing feelings of futility and failure (Bandura, 1993).

Assessing collective teacher efficacy requires teachers to consider the competence of their colleagues. Teachers can form opinions of colleagues' competence in the course of collaborative activity and the perception that one's colleagues are competent (high collective teacher efficacy) motivates collaboration. Collective teacher efficacy is thus both a product and a driver of collaboration (Durksen et al., 2017). Activities in which collective teacher judgment is employed and developed are important collaborative contexts for the development of collective efficacy.

## Community engagement

### Parent-school partnerships

There is a wealth of literature suggesting that parent-school partnerships are significant in promoting a variety of short-term outcomes (e.g., literacy and numeracy development) and long-term benefits (e.g., social, emotional, and academic growth) for students (Daniel, 2015; Emerson, Fear, Fox, & Sanders, 2012). Parental involvement in such partnerships may take many forms, including volunteering in school activities, contributing to the curriculum, participating in parents' groups and councils to influence school policy, planning local events and social initiatives, and communicating between home and school about their child (Daniel, 2015; Epstein, 1995). The Epstein Model of Parental Involvement (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Epstein et al., 2018), a widely cited framework for understanding school-parent partnerships, emphasises that schools play a central role in facilitating parent engagement. However, there is a pressing need to identify effective strategies to foster and maintain parent-school partnerships with families from different socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds, particularly during the high school years (Daniel, 2015). Parent involvement in family-school partnership activities declines for various reasons as students progress through the year levels, including increasing student independence and more parental engagement in paid work (Daniel, 2015). Families may be less likely to engage in parent-school partnerships due to factors, including language barriers and unfamiliarity with Australian schooling systems (Hornby & Lafaee, 2011; Kim, 2009; Turney & Kao, 2009).

### Community engagement models

There is a growing body of research supporting the use of different community engagement models to improve partnerships with culturally diverse families, including Indigenous parents, and promote positive student outcomes (De Gaetano, 2007; Lewis et al., 2011; Yunkaporta, 2009). For example, an initiative called Principals as Literacy Leaders with Indigenous Communities improved students' literacy, through collaboration with Indigenous leaders on place-based reading action plans (Johnson et al., 2014; Johnson & McKenzie, 2016; Lovett et al., 2014; Riley & Webster, 2016). Children from participating schools who regularly attended this program experienced an increase in home-based support with reading, and made significant academic gains (e.g., Year 7 students' NAPLAN scores improved to the extent that 90.5% were performing at or above national minimum standards) (Gutierrez et al., 2021).

Another study comprising interviews with nine career coaching staff from nine Victorian high schools found that cultural liaison officers were instrumental in preparing students from African backgrounds for post-school transitions into further education or work and facilitating communication between schools and the students' families (Molla, 2021). The author recommended other community engagement strategies, such as delivering information sessions for parents on the labour market, to mitigate different factors (e.g., family misconceptions about qualifications and low student self-efficacy) that impede student achievement and transition into viable opportunities.

## Practices promoting wellbeing & belonging

Research has demonstrated that a student's sense of wellbeing and belonging within their school is positively associated with academic outcomes (Allen et al., 2017; Rumberger & Palardy, 2005; Stewart, 2008). Evidence suggests that when basic psychological needs (e.g., feelings of autonomy or agency, efficacy, safety and connectedness) are satisfied, engagement and achievement follow (Deci & Ryan, 2002; Hardre & Reeve, 2003; Jang et al., 2012; Reeve & Lee, 2014; Tarbetsky, et al., 2017; Vansteenkiste, et al., 2010). For instance, a study of 4,822 students (Years 7–9) from 20 urban schools on the East and West coasts of Australia found that high self-efficacy and positive interpersonal relationships (e.g., healthy teacher-student interactions) were consistently related to higher achievement in literacy and numeracy, with the effects significantly stronger for children with ADHD (n=164) (Martin et al., 2017). The authors highlighted that different groups of at-risk students especially require support to bolster their academic resilience, as they are more likely to encounter academic adversity (Martin, Cumming, et al., 2017).

Researchers have proposed various practices to foster individual student wellbeing that tie in with other evidence-based strategies, such as explicit teaching, proactive classroom management, and curriculum differentiation. For example, some have recommended supporting students through providing choice in learning processes, explaining rationales for activities, acknowledging student perspectives, and offering task-based feedback and reinforcement contingent on student effort (Martin, Cumming et al., 2017; Tarbetsky et al., 2017). Others have suggested that teachers can promote students' self-efficacy and motivation by facilitating opportunities for moderate-to-high rates of success (e.g., dividing tasks into smaller manageable components and tailoring activities to students' skills and knowledge) (Hunt et al., 2009; Killen, 2016; Martin, Cumming et al., 2017). Evidence also suggests that connectedness and belonging can be enhanced by developing students' social and emotional competence and encouraging them to set prosocial personal goals related to their wellbeing (Allen et al., 2017; Stewart, 2008).

## Theoretical perspectives

A number of theoretical perspectives both informed the research and have potential to ground further research and connect the practices and enabling conditions identified. They are described in the paragraphs that follow.

Strengths-based research focuses on the strengths and positive potential of students, educators, families, and other relevant parties as the primary focus of inquiry, as opposed to their deficits or weaknesses (Maton et al., 2004; Zimmerman, 2013). Accordingly, ASRC aimed to explore individual-level strengths, such as cognitive, behavioural, and psychological capacities (e.g., self-efficacy, positive coping strategies, talents, knowledge, resilience), and practices that have cultivated and bolstered them (Maton et al., 2004). As such, a number of theoretical perspectives both informed the research and have potential to ground further research and connect the practices and enabling conditions identified.

Self-Determination Theory states that people thrive when they have a sense of relatedness, autonomy, and competence. Teacher autonomy refers to the capacity of teachers to make decisions about their work for themselves, either as individuals or with colleagues. It incorporates teacher agency which focus on teachers' capacity to independently make decisions and act upon them in their classrooms (Lennert da Silva & Mølsted, 2020). Both autonomy and agency are exercised within constraints which are typically external, perhaps related to government regulation, in the case of autonomy (Wermke & Höstfält, 2014), and concern resource and other limitations of the immediate school environment in the case of agency (Errs, 2018). In this report we use the term teacher agency, consistent with the focus of the research on practices within schools, unless cited research or survey scales refer to teacher autonomy. Similarly, we refer to student agency to convey the capacity for students to make independent decisions about their learning activities except when citing research or referring to survey scales that specifically referred to autonomy.

Student relatedness was evident in these data, with students describing their connection to the community, school, and teachers. Student agency was evident in students' descriptions of how the AS encouraged and supported them to take responsibility for their actions towards each other and in their learning endeavours. A sense of competence was promulgated in the AS through a focus and recognition on mastery of key skills and knowledges. These three constructs can be measured in school populations using validated scales, allowing them to be linked to effective micro-practices. The emergence of autonomy-supportive pedagogies (Reeve, 2009) and strategies to enhance teachers' relatedness with students (Klassen et al, 2012) are two examples.



Teacher Collective Efficacy refers to the collective sense of efficacy for all teachers in a school; in other words, their shared belief that together they can positively impact student learning. Student focus groups can provide insight into what students see their teachers doing in the classroom, and these data conveyed very strongly that high expectations for all students was a default setting for AS. These data can be triangulated in other sections of the broader report including the teacher surveys and interviews.

To better understand students' academic development and success at school, we used Social-cognitive Theory (SCT) as an overarching model. Bandura's (1997) SCT recognises the importance of context when considering relationships among environmental (e.g., teacher support), personal (e.g., self-efficacy, goal setting), and behaviour or outcome factors such as aspirations and plans. Within SCT, Bostwick and colleagues (2022a) have tested a broader growth orientation as a multidimensional growth construct comprised of growth-focused motivational beliefs including growth mindset (improvement-oriented beliefs about intelligence and ability) and growth goals (personal targets set by students). This is a particularly relevant focus for ASRC as previous –and current –research links such growth-focused constructs with student wellbeing (Bostwick, et al., 2022b).

Martin (2007) has validated an integrated theory-based model as the Motivation and Engagement Wheel. Conceptual work by Martin and Dowson (2009) also identified a range of theories that, together, can ground and guide projects seeking to identify enabling conditions and practical implications for student success. For example, achievement goal theory and goal setting theory for understanding personal growth approaches (e.g., mastery) and self-determination theory for helping recognise the conditions that can satisfy key psychological needs (e.g., relatedness and autonomy). Self-determination theory states that people thrive when they have a sense of relatedness, autonomy, and competence. For example, relatedness can be elicited from students when asked to describe their connection to the community, school, and teachers.

Martin and colleagues (2022) continue to apply theories of motivation and engagement when theorising and investigating growth goal setting through large scale research. For example, they partnered with CESE to conduct a synthesis of research and found that instructional support was associated with students' growth goal setting –that is, “specific, challenging, and competitively self-referenced targets that match or exceed a previous best effort or performance” (Martin et al., p. 753). Growth goal setting via personal best or self-based goals was positively associated with gains in engagement and a reduction in potential negative effects. Theory- and research-based recommendations can be found in the related ‘What Works Best’ (2020 update) practical guide for schools published by CESE (2021) Growth goal setting –What works best in practice.

Growth mindset is the belief that intelligence is not fixed but can be developed (Dweck, 2002). That is, not only is it possible to learn, but one can also become better at learning. Because of its foundation in the belief that change is possible, growth mindset has been associated with self-efficacy. Street et al. (2022), for example, recommended teachers provide students with feedback aligned with growth mindset, early in a learning sequence because of its potential to enhance self-efficacy. It has also been associated with greater academic resilience and motivation, and a tendency to set more challenging learning goals (Schleicher, 2019). Schleicher (2019) suggested instilling a growth mindset by teaching students about the brain's capacity to change, attributing success to hard work, and avoiding lowering expectations when students experience difficulty. Growth mindset is also a potentially powerful way to impact academic achievement at scale. In a large-scale Chilean study, for example, growth mindset was associated with higher achievement and appeared to ameliorate the effects of poverty on achievement (Claro et al., 2016). As noted above, growth mindset, along with growth goals set by students for their own learning, comprise a growth orientation (Bostwick et al., 2022a).

## Discussion and conclusion

The literature review has revealed considerable support for the use of practices associated with explicit teaching, effective school wide approaches to classroom management, catering for the diversity of student capacities and needs in curriculum delivery, supporting teacher collaboration, the use of distributed and instructional leadership practices, engaging effectively with the school community, and supporting student wellbeing and belonging. There is strong alignment between these practices and those recommended in the NSW DoE 'What works best: 2020 update' report.

Although existing studies offer strong empirical evidence to support the use of these practices, this literature review has demonstrated various research gaps. First, there is an urgent need to further explore how different contextual factors may shape the delivery and impact of these practices to identify more nuanced approaches for implementing them in the highly diverse contexts of NSW schools. Additionally, some studies focus on the implementation fidelity of specific practices (e.g., collaboration) and their impacts on instructional practice and teacher wellbeing; but fail to evaluate how these practices impact student outcomes. Some practices (e.g., differentiation activities for gifted students, bilingual programs in secondary schools, 'sheltered instruction' for non-English speakers) require more rigorous testing to further investigate their impacts on academic performance and student engagement. Other practice areas, such as related to classroom management – although well-supported by empirical evidence – are underutilised in classrooms. There is a need, therefore, for further research into the factors that enable or inhibit the uptake of these evidence-based classroom management practices, particularly in secondary school contexts typified by cumulative challenges in teaching practice and additional risks of student disengagement. There is also a pressing need for further research into strategies that cultivate and bolster parent-school partnerships, especially with families from different socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds.

It is important to note limitations associated with the extant research literature. These include a reliance, in many cases, on self-report data, the prevalence of small studies, research designs that preclude causal findings, and the failure to appropriately consider the impacts of contextual factors on the impacts of various practices.

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