

*Schooling improvement
in New Zealand*

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What is schooling improvement (SI)

- Planned interventions designed to raise achievement of all students underachieving (Gray, Hopkins, Reynolds, Wilcox, Farrell & Jesson, 1999)
- Effective SI has a positive and statistically significant impact on student achievement (Borman, Hewes, Overman & Brown, 2002)
- Too few SI initiatives do this (Borman et al, 2002; Furhrman, 2002; Levin & Wiens, 2003)

Effective SI develops professional inquiry practices

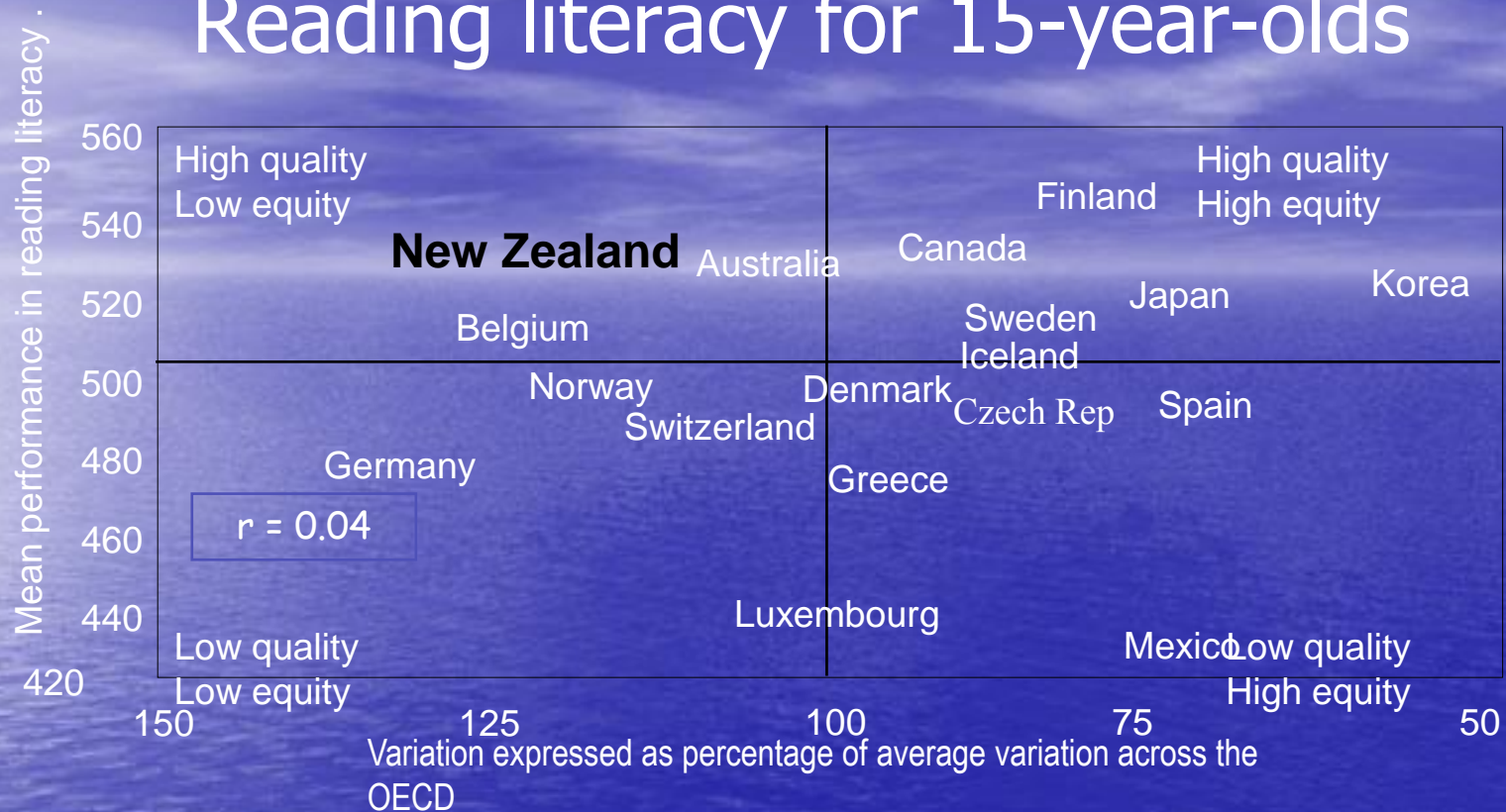
- Practices that work out next steps in the teaching and learning process
 - a road map
- Most important to investigate your own practices

Standard inquiry practices

- Three standard inquiry practices
 - Plan
 - Implement
 - Evaluate for student outcomes
- NZ system relies heavily on teacher-centred inquiry practices
 - Teachers have integrity and assessment capacity to independently create a road map
 - Individual schools are able to support teachers to inquire into their practice
- Works for most students

However, standard inquiry practices are not sufficient for students underachieving

Reading literacy for 15-year-olds



- Standard inquiry practices are not sophisticated enough to solve complex underachievement problems
- It is too hard for teachers and schools to work out the road map alone

A more sophisticated solution

Collaborative inquiry

Collaborative inquiry, Part 1: Investigating together

- Assumption – teaching professionals investigating their practices together might solve complex underachievement problems
- Teaching professionals work in groups within and across schools to
 - Use common assessment tools
 - Analyse data to identify priority problems
 - Alter teaching/leadership practices
 - Re check student outcomes

Collaborative inquiry, Part 2: Learning partners

- Assumptions
 - No one group knows how to solve complex achievement problems
 - Authority is best vested in knowledge rather than at the top of a hierarchy
- Agencies, expert researchers/developers, school leaders
 - Agencies are better as learning partners than wielding big sticks
 - Experts supporting teaching professionals and the Ministry have a lot to learn

Collaborative inquiry, Part 3: A theory for improvement

- Assumption – we tend to keep our theories to ourselves so disagreements are not resolved
- Theorise explicitly about the problem and your solution
- Problem-based methodology (Robinson, 1993)
 - Identify the priority problem
 - Agree on practices to solve the problem
 - Explain your reasons for those practices
 - Outline intended consequences
- Reasoning gets into theorising – do it together and you can identify and resolve competing theories

Collaborative inquiry, Part 4: Learning talk

- Assumption – much professional talk is hot air
- Learning talk is talk that helps change your practice (Annan, Lai, Robinson, 2003)
 - Analytical, critical and challenging talk
- Benefits of learning talk
 - Professional ties ahead of friendship ties (De Lima, 2001)
 - Invites collegial critique and challenge
 - Avoids peripheral issues (Timperley, Robinson & Bullard, 1999)

Advantages of collaborative inquiry

- It works for student outcomes (Lai, M; McNaughton, S; Phillips, G; Timperley, H; Parr, J; Robinson, V 1999-2007)
- Connects people solving similar problems
- Creates a critically challenging culture
- Teachers give up their autonomy to use effective practices
- Analysis and use of data is close to the classroom
- Collegial accountability avoids unhelpful external accountability

Disadvantages of collaborative inquiry via networks

- It is a slow process
- Capacity issues
- Partners can slip into old habits
- Negative networks will always work against useful networks
- A project environment – everyone wants to hang on to their projects

Next steps...

- Learn collaborative inquiry practices
- Connect appropriately to solve priority problems
- Build evaluative capability to check for success