



Using a collaborative approach to enhance the implementation of AVID in four regional secondary schools

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AVID Australia



About the project

Funded by the Helen Macpherson Smith Trust, this project was designed to trial a collaborative approach to enhance implementation of the AVID professional learning system for school improvement by improving culture, learning and teaching and systems in order to improve student outcomes in four regional schools. The project was originally funded to run from 2018-2020. However, due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic early in 2020, project implementation was extended until 2021 in consultation with participating schools and the funding body, the Helen Macpherson Smith Trust.

In 2018, four Victorian government secondary schools began implementing AVID. Two schools (Schools 1 and 2) were co-located in one regional city, while the others (Schools 3 and 4) were co-located in another. Project funding enabled participating schools to send staff to national AVID conferences (Summer Institute) in Melbourne in 2018 and 2019 and to access two days of school-based professional learning and on-demand coaching from expert AVID coaches each year. Funding also supported the project research reported here.

Acknowledgements

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This research report drew on a summary of implementation interviews and reports on 2019 interview analysis prepared by Dr Camilla Nicoll, who conducted interviews in 2019. Using existing data, Dr Juliana Ryan developed the findings presented in this report. Thanks to Professor Lyndal Bond for overseeing design and implementation of the project research.

Most importantly, special thanks to the four participating schools for contributing to the research component of the project and, since 2019, for continuing to implement the AVID system of school improvement and related professional learning beyond the term of the project.

Project Lead

Dr Claire Brown

About AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination)

AVID stands for Advancement Via Individual Determination. Originating in the United States in 1980, it is a whole-school improvement system of professional learning that supports teachers and school leaders to close gaps in students' academic and social-emotional learning. AVID's journey in Australia began in 2011, when The Victoria Institute for Education, Diversity and Lifelong Learning (Victoria University) received Commonwealth funding to trial and research AVID implementation in Australia. The trial proved successful and in 2015 AVID Center (USA) issued AVID Australia with an exclusive site license for Australia. Since 2011, AVID has been implemented in nearly 100 sites across Australia, equipping several thousand students and teachers with AVID's high engagement learning strategies every year.

AVID supports schools to improve the quality of teaching and learning and social-emotional support for students by:

- › Equipping students with the academic behaviours and social and emotional skills that will enable them to succeed at school and beyond
- › Helping teachers become facilitators of learning in a student-centred classroom
- › Supporting principals to foster inclusive and high performing teaching and learning cultures and systems at their schools.

Implementing AVID

AVID Australia offers schools two options for implementation:

1. A Preparation Year for schools new to AVID to work on an implementation plan with staff before they embark on full implementation of AVID in the following year
2. Full implementation of AVID from their first year and each subsequent year (AVID Australia, 2021).

The AVID Australia team collaborates with each AVID school to develop an implementation plan that is customised to school needs, context and priorities, and aligned with strategic objectives. Forming a school-based AVID Site Team is critical to successful AVID implementation (AVID Australia, 2019; 2021). The AVID site team's role is to lead and build support for effective implementation of AVID with guidance and support from an AVID Education Coach. AVID schools are encouraged to appoint an AVID Coordinator to lead an active and participatory AVID Site Team as part of a distributed leadership model. The AVID Coordinator oversees the consistency, quality, sustainability, and fidelity of AVID implementation. Acting as a committed advocate of the philosophy of AVID, the AVID Coordinator:

- › liaises between the Site Team, the school principal and AVID support staff
- › oversees data collection and analysis to generate evidence about AVID implementation and its outcomes
- › provides professional learning using AVID's many resources for colleagues at the school (AVID Australia, 2021).

The AVID Coordinator takes on a school-based coaching role and is ideally given time release to undertake this role.

AVID professional learning system

AVID's professional learning system provides schools with a scaffolded model of ongoing and customisable professional learning. Each AVID school receives two days of professional learning annually that can be timed and co-designed to suit the school schedule. Schools work with AVID to customise the modules to suit their context and address priorities. Additional professional learning events include AVID's national, three-day, immersion-style professional learning conference, known as Summer Institute. Summer Institute offers both content-specific and cross-curricular specialisations in intensive mode. Schools can also access on-demand coaching from teaching and learning experts throughout the year (AVID Australia, 2021).

AVID Education Coaches support schools in transforming knowledge gained from professional learning to improve practice and measure progress. Furthermore, AVID Education Coaches work in ongoing partnership with schools to refine their AVID implementation plan to meet changing needs and to foster implementation of AVID schoolwide. Schoolwide implementation of AVID is achieved through AVID's four pillars of school improvement: instruction, systems, leadership and culture. Customised to a school's context, implementation of AVID schoolwide involves embedding instructional strategies with systematic support encompassing governance, curriculum, evidence of outcomes, professional learning, student and parent outreach to improve all students' school and work readiness. A culture of high expectations and active school leadership are also essential to the successful implementation of AVID schoolwide (AVID Australia, 2019).

AVID's teaching and learning framework — WICOR

AVID's teaching and learning framework is known as WICOR (Writing, Inquiry, Collaboration, Organisation and Reading). The WICOR framework is aligned with the general capabilities needed for contemporary learning and career readiness, including critical thinking, creativity, collaboration and communication. The WICOR framework emphasises the development of strong organisational skills, both organisation of materials and of the learning, and encompasses high engagement and collaborative activities, community projects, and strategies for peer and self-assessment. AVID's focus on communication includes a range of strategies for learning to write and read and writing and reading to learn as a basis for lifelong improvements in communication skills. Collaborative activities, development of strong organisational skills, community projects, and strategies for peer- and self-assessment are also emphasised in the WICOR framework (AVID Australia, 2019). **A glossary of AVID implementation terms is included in Appendix 1.**



WICOR is an instructional approach involving both teachers and students that places students at the centre and empowers them to take ownership and agency in their thinking and learning. When educators create instructional experiences integrated in the rich layers of WICOR, students are actively engaged with content through productive struggle, cognitive wrestling, and critical thinking to access rigorous content from a multitude of perspectives and use it to create new innovations, challenge old ideas, and positively impact the world around them.

Project Research

The project's research component was designed to explore:



Whether a collaborative approach enhanced implementation of the AVID system by fostering inter-school professional learning conversations and facilitating the development of professional learning communities



The impact of AVID implementation on school culture, leadership, learning and teaching to influence improvement in student outcomes

Researchers from Victoria University and AVID Australia conducted project research with ethics approval from Victoria University (HRE18-050) and the Victorian Department of Education and Training (2018_003844).

The original research design comprised:

- › Qualitative examination of AVID implementation in each of the four participating schools based on interviews conducted in the first year of the project (2019)
- › Qualitative examination of participants' perceptions and experiences of participation in the collaborative AVID implementation based on interviews conducted at three different times during the project
- › Quantitative analysis of routinely collected staff and student survey data to evaluate the impact of AVID implementation on staff and student attitudes and student learning outcomes.

However, in response to impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, research in Victorian government schools was suspended at different times during 2020 and a research suspension has been in place since 2021. Consequently, the intended research design could not be implemented.

Data that informed research

This report draws on data from:

- › Implementation interviews in May 2019 with three school principals (Schools 1, 3 and 4), four AVID Coordinators (all schools) and three teachers (School 1). These focused on how schools planned to implement AVID, their choice of professional learning and the extent to which they collaborated with other AVID schools.
- › Individual Interviews between August and October 2019 with four principals (all schools), one acting assistant principal (School 3), three AVID Coordinators (Schools 1, 2 and 4) and ten leading teachers from all schools. Interviews focused on participants' roles, experiences of AVID professional learning and teaching, including any benefits and challenges, and experiences of professional learning communities within AVID.
- › An interview in July 2022 with an AVID Educational Coach. Employed by Victoria University, this coach has facilitated professional learning in the four schools since the beginning of 2021. This interview was conducted with the approval of Victoria University following an ethics modification intended to cover other AVID experts who, unfortunately, could not participate due to being employed in Victorian government schools at a time when a research suspension is in place.

What participants told us



1

Schools customised AVID implementation to suit their contexts.



2

Professional learning communities formed organically around schools' needs.



3

Sustainability of AVID implementation needs alignment between AVID's underpinning philosophies and schools' strategic priorities, allocation and distribution of responsibility for AVID leadership, time and visible commitment from school leadership.



1

Schools customised AVID implementation to suit their contexts

From early in the project, participants told us how they customised implementation of the AVID system to suit their school contexts and staff needs, and chose professional learning activities accordingly.

One school began planning for AVID implementation in 2018 and, from 2019, implemented AVID in its accelerated learning program from years 7-10. During an implementation meeting early in the project, the principal expressed a preference for implementing AVID slowly and well. The school's AVID Site Team also mentioned their interest in embedding AVID culture in the school and, in 2019, commented that implementation was working very well, noting a positive response from parents (School 1 implementation meeting, 2019). Importantly, while speaking about the AVID implementation focus, staff also commented on the close alignment between AVID and accelerated learning program objectives (attendance and organisation) and high impact teaching strategies, mandated by the Victorian Department of Education and Training, that were already a focus in the school (School 1 implementation meeting, 2019). Reflecting the reported approach to implementation noted earlier, a teacher observed that targeted implementation meant school-wide culture change would not be expected (School 1, teacher 4 interview, 2019). Another commented that involving greater numbers of teachers in AVID professional learning would lead to a 'more holistic approach' (School 1 teacher 5 interview, 2019). In 2019, staff from the school stated that future plans included schoolwide implementation by 2021 (School 1, AVID implementation meeting, 2019). However, that did not eventuate (AVID Education Coach interview, 2022).

Although located in the same regional city, the other local school took a very different approach. In 2019, School 2's AVID implementation involved the explicit teaching of AVID strategies in years 7 and 8 in two sessions per week as part of the school's personal learning program, while the AVID Elective was introduced in years 9 and 10 (School 2 implementation interview, 2019). Despite this targeted implementation, the AVID Coordinator commented that the AVID system was 'interwoven into the fabric of what we staff do' across school curriculum. 'Everything is being structured around the AVID model' (School 2 implementation interview, 2019). The AVID Coordinator also reported that AVID wasn't explicitly timetabled as a subject of study in years 11 and 12, but the AVID learning strategies were carried over by teachers who had been introduced to AVID in earlier years (School 2 implementation interview, 2019).

Located in a different regional city, another school also opted to implement AVID schoolwide from the outset (School 3 implementation interview, 2019). Staff reported how, in 2018, they had put posters about the AVID teaching and learning framework, WICOR, in every classroom. They told us that they focused on collaboration and organisation goals, chosen to build relational capacity in line with a school priority for personal learning (School 3 implementation meeting, 2019). In 2019, staff reported that organisation remained a focus and coincided with

school-wide implementation of AVID organisational tools (School 3 implementation meeting, 2019). Staff also told us that AVID's WICOR instructional strategies had been integrated to inform all school teaching and learning programs (School 3 implementation meeting, 2019).

Staff at the other school in the same regional city reported that they began with a general introduction to AVID in 2018 and opted for a slower implementation, starting with years 7 and 10 in 2019 and aiming for schoolwide implementation after three years (School 4 implementation meeting, 2019).

Schools customised the AVID professional learning to suit their AVID implementation approach

Early in the project staff told us how they customised professional learning choices to align with their school's AVID implementation focus and the professional learning needs of staff. One school chose professional learning activities based on three school goals (School 2 AVID implementation meeting, 2019) and made it a priority for all staff to attend AVID professional learning, including administrative staff (School 2 teacher 2 interview, 2019). A teacher at another school commented that most staff had attended AVID professional learning in 2019 (School 3 teacher 5 interview, 2019). Expressing a similar aspiration, staff at another school reported plans for staff from years 7 to 12 to receive AVID professional learning (School 4 implementation meeting, 2019).

Reflecting on collaboration with schools during a period of COVID-19 impacts and lockdowns, an AVID Education Coach emphasised the importance of a customised approach to professional learning. That coach shared how professional learning was tailored to schools' different strategic learning and teaching objectives, and how they adapted professional learning timing and delivery to accommodate school needs and staff availability (AVID Education Coach interview, 2022). For example, two schools focused on professional learning for small groups of staff and targeted student cohorts, choosing professional learning to ensure all staff were familiar with AVID fundamentals (AVID Education Coach interview, 2022).

Participants told us how valuable it was to directly experience AVID's high engagement teaching and learning strategies as modelled by an AVID coach during professional learning activities (School 2 and School 4 implementation interviews, 2019) and take those instructional strategies back to the classroom (School 1, teacher 2 interview, 2019). After the project, an AVID Education Coach affirmed this feedback. The coach recounted how staff (School 2) had commented on the value of an AVID strategy for helping students collaboratively and individually process complex content that the coach had modelled (AVID Education Coach interview, 2022).

What schools told us about how they customised AVID implementation connects with characteristics of effective school improvement identified in previous research. These include:

- › collaboratively undertaking professional learning to share responsibility for all students' learning
- › distributed leadership via site teams responsible for leading AVID
- › ongoing reflective conversations about effective teaching practices (Lee & Lewis, 2019).

Further, participants' accounts of professional learning experiences connect with research on characteristics of effective professional learning:

- › customisation to school context
- › alignment with school goals and policy
- › ongoing and active professional learning and collective participation (Cirkony et al., 2022; Desimone & Garet, 2015)
- › a focus on quality of instruction and professional behaviours (Coe, Aloisi, Higgins, & Major, 2014)
- › external coaching offered by people who are familiar with working with teachers and able to draw on their own experience and expertise (Cirkony et al., 2022).



2

Professional learning communities formed organically around schools' needs

This project was designed to explore whether an inter-school collaborative approach would enhance AVID implementation. While participants expressed commitment to this idea in principle, the available accounts of their experiences suggest that the intended collaboration was less important in their implementation of AVID than connections that they fostered themselves, based on their schools' needs.

Staff expressed a commitment to the concept of collaboration with other schools

From the outset, all schools told us they valued the idea of collaboration with other schools. Staff at one school commented that 'networking is very important' and noted that they had an existing relationship with the other local school in the project (School 3 implementation meeting, 2019). A teacher from the same school remarked on the value of collaborative learning and curriculum sharing (School 3 teacher 1 interview, 2019). A principal echoed this sentiment, commenting on the value of speaking to other schools, sharing information and learning about successful implementation of AVID, and mentioned that there had been some information sharing with another school in the project (School 1 principal interview, 2019). Teachers also commented on being open to meeting with other schools to share experiences and challenges around AVID implementation (School 1 teacher 4, teacher 5 interviews, 2019). Further, participants from two schools also talked about the value of building connections with feeder primary schools through AVID (School 2 teacher 4 interview; School 3 principal interview, 2019).

Staff from two schools suggested that joining a community of practice would help engage their colleagues by building 'enthusiasm at the school for AVID' (School 4 implementation meeting, 2019) and helping 'staff to see the value in AVID' and become involved (School 1 implementation interview, 2019). In contrast, another teacher talked about the absence of a school AVID Site Team as a barrier to implementation. That teacher expressed reluctance to be part of a professional learning community with other AVID schools because the school's implementation of AVID was not as developed as some other schools, based on what other teachers had reported during Summer Institute. (School 4 teacher 5 interview, 2019)

These accounts indicate challenges for facilitating collaboration and creating AVID professional learning communities among the project schools, as well as the importance of considering schools' specific needs to foster collaboration with other schools.

Facilitating collaboration and professional learning communities among project schools — enablers and barriers

Despite the general positivity about collaboration with other project schools that many participants expressed, inter-school collaborations did not occur. A series of lockdowns due to COVID-19 during 2020 and 2021 posed a significant challenge to inter-school collaboration, as an AVID Education Coach remarked:

You know, it just hasn't happened. 2021 with all of its lockdown challenges and all those sorts of things, it's just been really, really difficult. I think the landscape at the moment has made it incredibly hard. (AVID Education Coach interview, 2022)

Challenges

Even before the pandemic, participants mentioned some challenges to fostering collaboration and professional learning communities among schools. One teacher observed that 'time, coordination and who runs it, and staff buy-in' were barriers to fostering professional learning communities (School 3 teacher 2 interview, 2019). That teacher was one of several participants who told us that they did not know that they could be part of an AVID professional learning community (School 3 teacher 2 interview, 2019; School 4 teachers 3 and 5 interviews, 2019). Fostering professional learning communities among the participating schools was one of the original goals of the project before COVID-19 impacts.

Participants also expressed uncertainty about responsibility for fostering inter-school collaboration. A principal mentioned being unsure who was leading professional learning communities across schools and suggested that if AVID began coordinating inter-school workshops and professional learning communities, that principal would happily participate based on the value of 'ongoing learning and collaborating with other colleagues' (School 4 principal interview, 2019). Similarly, leadership at another school commented that they would be 'happy to collaborate' and meet 'as a professional learning group' if AVID could organise it (School 1 implementation interview, 2019).

Two principals reported that negative historical events posed a challenge to collaboration between their schools (School 1 principal interview, 2019; School 2 principal interview, 2019). This perceived challenge wasn't reported by all participants, as staff from one of the schools commented that the schools already had some non-AVID related contact (School 1, implementation interview).

Participants also reported the prior existence of other professional learning communities as a challenge. Staff commented that an AVID professional learning community would be an addition to others that they already belonged to (School 4 implementation meeting, 2019; School 3 teacher 4 interview, 2019). Similarly, a principal noted the existence of a professional learning community facilitated through the Department of Education and Training which staff from the two AVID schools in the project already attended. (School 2 assistant principal, 2019). Nonetheless, another principal commented that, 'if it is worthwhile they would make it work', while also noting that timing could make participation challenging (School 4 principal interview, 2019). This emphasis on the value of collaborative opportunities appears to have motivated school-initiated collaborations reported below.

Opportunities to facilitate professional learning communities

A number of participants shared ideas about how AVID could help to facilitate collaboration among schools in the project. These included:

- › Sharing information about other schools' activities, for example, via a web platform (School 3 implementation meeting, 2019; School 2 AVID Coordinator interview, 2019; School 3, teacher 2; School 3 principal interview, 2019)
- › Telling schools about upcoming professional learning to enable attendance by staff from other AVID schools (School 1, AVID Coordinator interview, 2019; School 4 AVID Coordinator interview, 2019; School 4 teacher 3 interview, 2019); and
- › Arranging Site Team visits across schools (School 2 assistant principal, 2019)
- › Facilitating termly meetings to bring together AVID schools (School 4 implementation meeting, 2019)
- › Sharing student experiences of the impacts of AVID could help with the formation of professional learning communities (School 1, teacher 2 interview, 2019; School 1 teacher 5 interview, 2019).

Many participants identified AVID's Summer Institute conference as a valuable collaboration opportunity. One principal commented how welcoming staff from a particular school had been during the conference and talked about the value of having a number of staff attend (School 3 principal interview, 2019). A teacher at the same school noted Summer Institute as a 'great place to connect to the other schools' (School 3 teacher 4 interview, 2019). Others told us about the value of being exposed to new ideas (School 4 AVID Coordinator interview, 2019) and mentioned Summer Institute as a forum for collaborating with other teachers (School 1, teacher 2 interview, 2019). An AVID Education Coach told us that staff from one school (School 4) had commented that they were looking forward to staff attending Summer Institute in 2022 and to finding opportunities to collaborate with colleagues from other AVID schools (AVID Education Coach interview, 2022). That coach also mentioned how the AVID team offered an online national conference in 2021 as a workaround to COVID restrictions, which had provided another opportunity for schools to collaborate (AVID Education Coach interview, 2022).

Staff also shared several examples where AVID staff had facilitated additional opportunities for inter-school collaboration. In 2019, staff from one school mentioned that they had been introduced to another Victorian AVID school by a visiting expert from AVID USA who had also facilitated professional learning for them (School 4 implementation interview, 2019). An AVID Education Coach mentioned facilitating an opportunity for inter-school collaboration by offering participating schools the opportunity to be part of a separately funded project. That coach told us that staff expressed interest in collaboration but couldn't participate due to uncertainties about staffing in term 3, 2022. (AVID Education Coach interview, 2022).

These examples suggest that school staff are willing and able to collaborate with colleagues from other schools where this meets needs that they have identified themselves. Such collaborations were either facilitated by AVID staff or, as reported below, initiated by school staff themselves under the leadership of the AVID Site Team.

Formation of professional collaboration around schools' needs

Staff from all four participating schools told us about ways that they had connected with other AVID schools based around specific needs. A number of participants mentioned having valuable contact with the same Victorian school that has implemented AVID for some time (School 1 implementation meeting, 2019; School 1 principal interview, 2019; School 2 implementation meeting, 2019; School 3 AVID Coordinator interview, 2019). Interestingly, one AVID Coordinator told us that a colleague at that same school was a 'go to', mentor and support (School 2 implementation meeting, 2019).

Several principals also mentioned networking with other AVID schools (School 1 principal meeting, 2019), including for non-AVID reasons, such as language learning, with one of the participating schools (School 2 principal interview, 2019). Staff from one school reported that they went to a full day of professional learning at another project school in a different regional city (School 2 AVID Coordinator interview; School 3 teacher 4 interview, 2019). An AVID Coordinator talked about collaboration with feeder primary schools, including visits to the school to undertake professional learning, also noting that staff from other schools had visited to see AVID implementation in action (School 3 AVID Coordinator interview, 2019). Staff from the same school collaborated with the previously mentioned long-time AVID school to develop an AVID induction booklet adapted from an original developed by staff from that school. Commenting on the value of that resource, an AVID Education Coach told us that:

[A]nyone coming into the school [...] is given a copy [...] of this induction booklet. Now I think that is also a really significant step forward that says: this is again really important in our school. (AVID Education Coach interview, 2022)

The coach mentioned that the other local project school had also collaborated with the same long-time AVID school and had mentioned that they were also keen to develop an induction booklet, again by adapting the original booklet to their school context (AVID Education Coach interview, 2022).

Taken together, these accounts affirm that participants were open to inter-school collaboration but needed to see the value of making this effort. This connects with previous research that has identified connection with colleagues and the sharing of challenges and expertise as key benefits of professional learning communities for teachers in regional areas (McDonald & Merceica, 2021). It also affirms participatory value as a key motivator for participation in professional learning communities. Again this connects with research about the different cycles of value related to such participation. These relevantly include the 'immediate value' of connecting with others by sharing experiences; the 'potential value' of inspiration and sharing of artefacts and the 'applied value' of implementing new practices (Wenger, Trayner, & de Laat, 2011; Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2020).

In-house collaborative professional learning — the role of the AVID Site Team

While participants did not consistently collaborate with others, or form professional learning communities with other schools in the project, most told us how their school-based AVID site teams facilitated some additional collaborative professional learning which showed some characteristics associated with professional learning communities. Again, staff accounts reflect customisation to school needs. For example, staff from one school reported that AVID implementation was overseen by a Site Team, which met fortnightly (School 1, teacher 3 interview, 2019). This team focused on AVID strategies to promote organisation (School 1 implementation interview, 2019). Elaborating, the principal noted that the team discussed what works well, along with challenges and planning to advance the successful implementation of AVID (School 1 principal interview, 2019).

Staff told us about different collaborative activities implemented on-site. For example, staff at one school mentioned how one of their learning specialists, who had been to Summer Institute, was leading a professional learning team on writing and introducing an AVID writing strategy (School 4 implementation interview, 2019). This approach was affirmed by a teacher from that school who expressed a wish for more meetings around implementing AVID strategies to ensure that 'everyone is on the same page' (School 4 teacher 2 interview, 2019). Similarly, a colleague mentioned the importance of professional learning communities as a focus for promoting further interest in AVID (School 4 teacher 5 interview, 2019).

At another school, a teacher mentioned how teachers and leadership modelled new AVID strategies at staff meetings to promote collaboration (School 3 teacher 5 interview, 2019). The school's AVID Coordinator also mentioned sending weekly emails to all staff about AVID strategies to help boost engagement in response to an 'implementation dip' (School 3 AVID Coordinator interview, 2019).

The reported in-house collaborations share characteristics of effective professional learning communities:

- › A student learning focus
- › Shared values and vision
- › Trialling of different practice
- › Sharing of teacher experience and expertise (Scott, Clarkson, & McDonough, 2011).

Further, through AVID's focus on team-based curriculum planning and development to create a shared language and experiences around a common goal (AVID, 2019), the reported school-based teams connect with research that used the concept of communities of practice to explain such collaboration (Wallace, 2020). Participants' accounts of their professional learning teams suggest the presence of all three fundamental characteristics of communities of practice in the AVID Site Team-led activities that schools reported. Those characteristics are:

- › A 'domain' or shared interest that motivates collaboration
- › 'Community' or the relationships and shared commitment that develop around the domain
- › Shared 'practice' arising from the collaboration (Mercieca, 2017).

As with reports of implementation and professional learning, staff told us that the focus of site-based professional learning was customised according to school needs. This emphasis on customisability was also evident in participants' accounts of school improvement and its sustainability.



3

Sustainability of AVID

implementation requires alignment between AVID's underpinning philosophies and schools' strategic priorities, allocating responsibility for AVID leadership, time and committed school leadership

As noted earlier, staff engagement, workload and time were identified by one teacher as challenges for AVID implementation (School 3 teacher 2 interview, 2019). Making provision of time and responsibility for AVID implementation appear to have contributed to the sustainability of sustainability of AVID implementation at the four schools in this project.

Strategic alignment between AVID and school strategic priorities

Early on, a teacher commented that while AVID was becoming 'more embedded' at the school, there was also fatigue among some colleagues about taking on AVID based on a perception of 'teachers need to do and why bother because it will change in a couple of years anyway' (School 3 teacher 2 interview, 2019). Similarly, an AVID Coordinator at another school remarked that it was a challenge to engage colleagues with AVID and show them that, 'It is a complement to what they do, not an extra thing they have to do' (School 4 AVID Coordinator interview, 2019).

A number of staff noted the importance of strategic alignment between AVID and other school priorities for engaging staff in the AVID system (School 1 teacher 2 interview, 2019; School 2 principal interview, 2019; School 2 AVID Coordinator interview, 2019). One principal noted the challenge of explaining to staff how AVID 'fitted in' with other school requirements such as 'peer walks' and professional learning communities (School 2 principal interview, 2019). Commenting on the infusion of AVID in school curriculum, that school's AVID Coordinator noted that AVID was part of teachers' performance and development planning (School 2 implementation meeting, 2019).

At the school where 'teacher fatigue' was noted, another teacher observed that due to their AVID implementation model, 'There is a common goal, a common purpose for the school now' (School 3 teacher 1 interview, 2019). An AVID Education Coach reported that this alignment has continued, with the school's professional learning in 2022 being customised to align with its Annual Improvement Plan, or AIP (AVID Education Coach interview, 2022). The AIP documents targeted school improvement priorities annually to meet goals documented in the school's four-year strategic plan (Victorian Department of Education and Training, 2022).

Responsibility for AVID leadership

Allocating responsibility and workload appears in participants' accounts as an important aspect of AVID implementation and, by extension, sustainability. For example, a principal told us about the creation of a leadership role that combined AVID implementation with leadership of the accelerated learning program where AVID was being targeted (School 1 principal interview, 2019), while the then AVID Coordinator mentioned plans to integrate AVID with curriculum leadership shared by the assistant principal, curriculum leader and learning specialist (School 1, AVID Coordinator interview, 2019). That same AVID Coordinator noted the challenge of leading AVID 'in isolation' much of the time, despite having a supportive principal, and saw this dedicated leadership as a move towards AVID having 'more impact', noting it is important and matches what students need (School 1 AVID Coordinator interview, 2019). This also points to the importance of strategic alignment noted above and AVID's recommendation that AVID implementation be distributed through an AVID Site Team led by an AVID Coordinator (AVID Australia, 2019).

The importance of continuity in responsibility for leading AVID implementation was affirmed by an AVID Education Coach. Talking about facilitation of professional learning at one school that had repeatedly focused on induction of new staff into AVID, that coach commented that, 'when you do have a change of who's looking after AVID, that does influence how much internal professional learning occurs' (AVID Education Coach interview, 2022). As an example of effective professional learning practice, that coach told us about meeting with the outgoing and incoming AVID Coordinators at one school to plan professional learning for 2022 (AVID Education Coach interview, 2022).

Allocation of time

Early on, participants told us that time for AVID implementation and professional learning was a challenge. For example, one AVID Coordinator commented that lack of time was the biggest barrier to implementing AVID, commenting:

Staff saw that it would be beneficial, but they didn't want it to come out of their time because they had to do a certain amount of content and there was less time to tick everything off (School 1 AVID Coordinator interview, 2019).

This sentiment was echoed by a colleague at that school (School 1 teacher 5 interview, 2019) and an AVID Coordinator at another school (School 4 AVID Coordinator interview, 2019). Finding time to attend AVID professional learning activities, including Summer Institute, was also mentioned as an issue, even though participants noted the benefits of such experiences (School 1, AVID Coordinator; School 2 principal interviews, 2019). More recently, an AVID Education Coach reported that since the pandemic, scheduling timely professional learning remained a challenge for some schools. That coach also remarked on the value of engaging with all staff so that everyone has 'a greater understanding of what AVID is across the board' and gave examples of strategic allocation of time by schools (AVID Education Coach interview, 2022). For instance, one school asked the coach to facilitate a full day of professional learning for all staff in 2021, including those appointed to commence in 2022. As the coach commented, this suggests a strong commitment.

[I]f they're going to go to the trouble of making sure those staff can attend [professional learning], that's very invested. (AVID Education Coach interview, 2022).

That coach also recounted how, at another school:

[T]here were some particular incursions and different things happening on that day, and they had to really strategically set me up to be a part of that day so that I could have access to the staff alongside certain cohorts doing other things. (AVID Education Coach interview, 2022)

Time is not only important for enabling professional learning attendance, it is also important for applying that learning effectively. Research has found that teachers need dedicated time in professional learning communities to assess the effectiveness of practices with reference to shared goals and data analysis (Voelkel & Chrispeels, 2006). However, available data in this project suggests that visible, committed school leadership is the most important element in sustaining the AVID system to promote school improvement.

The importance of visible, committed school leadership

Early in the project, one AVID Coordinator reported that AVID was kept on the leadership meeting agenda. (School 2 implementation meeting, 2019). That AVID Coordinator affirmed the value of supportive leadership later that year, including those on the AVID Site Team charged with overseeing AVID implementation (School 2 AVID Coordinator interview, 2019).

Engagement of parents around AVID was reported in 2019 when one AVID Coordinator mentioned sending parents articles about why the school is an AVID school and 'making parents more aware of what they can do at home also' (School 3 AVID Coordinator interview, 2019). How AVID is positioned within school communications can be seen as an indicator of school commitment. In 2019, one principal expressed an interest in promoting AVID to feeder primary schools and 'as a marketing tool' for the school (School 2 principal interview, 2019). Currently, that school refers to AVID implementation in its parent handbook. Another school, where AVID is implemented schoolwide, also promotes AVID as a feature of the school (AVID Education Coach interview, 2022). Commenting on the value of leadership commitment, an AVID Education Coach observed:

Well, when you get the whole school in the same space, I think that the benefit is that you know that it is really valued and you've got leadership personnel in there as well, and so you know that that's really valued, and particularly when [...] your assistant principal has taken the time to help develop that day [...] running professional learning on that scale [...] there's a sense of: this is important. (AVID Education Coach interview, 2022)

Perhaps the most notable indication of school leadership visible commitment to the sustainability of AVID implementation is the fact that since the project and related funding finished, all four schools have chosen to keep implementing AVID in 2022, with three schools committing to pay for a two-year license (AVID Australia personal communication, July 25, 2022; AVID Education Coach interview, 2022).



Conclusion

Research in this project could not proceed as intended due to the Department of Education's pause on research in Victorian government schools in response to impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, reported findings are constrained by the limited data available at the time of writing this report.

Data on improvements to school culture, leadership, learning and teaching, and their contribution to improving student outcomes that were originally planned could not be collected. However, the available accounts from participants about where they collaborated with colleagues from other AVID schools offer some preliminary insights into fostering collaboration among AVID schools to enhance AVID implementation. Participants' accounts suggest that active facilitation of professional learning collaborations based on shared goals and interests is needed to intentionally foster professional learning collaboration and communities.

Further, the ongoing implementation of the AVID system beyond the funding provided by this project in all four participating schools indicates the value of the customisable AVID system, despite several years of disruptions to learning and teaching caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Finally, an AVID Education Coach's reported observations and experiences of facilitating professional learning in the participating schools from 2021 suggest the importance of dedicated and distributed responsibility for AVID leadership in schools through an AVID Site Team led by an AVID Coordinator. In particular, visible, committed school leadership, appears as a critical factor for sustaining AVID implementation and school improvement. As noted earlier, these are all elements of effective AVID implementation recommended by AVID (AVID Australia, 2019; 2021).

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Appendix 1: AVID implementation glossary of terms

AVID: Advancement Via Individual Determination (from Latin avidus, eager for knowledge)

AVID Coordinator: creates an AVID Site Team following a distributed leadership model to oversee the consistency, quality, sustainability, and fidelity of the schools' AVID implementation.

AVID Elective: Year-long elective class available within the regular academic school day on secondary sites, that adheres to the 11 Essentials concerning implementation integrity and fidelity to AVID.

AVID Essentials (secondary school sites):

1. Student selection — elective model only
2. Student and teacher participation
3. AVID models: elective and immersion
4. Rigorous, relevant, differentiated teaching for all students
5. Organisational skills (promoting academic self-management)
6. Writing to learn and Reading to learn
7. Inquiry and collaboration to learn and promote critical thinking
8. Trained tutors
9. Data collection and analysis to inform schoolwide implementation
10. School resources committed
11. Active interdisciplinary Site Team.

AVID instructional strategies: rigorous, explicit, high-engagement teaching and learning strategies that engage students socially, emotionally and academically.

AVID professional learning activities: practical and interactive and based on evidence-informed instructional practices

AVID Site Team: leads and builds support for effective implementation of AVID, led by the AVID Coordinator. The Site Team accelerates sustainable schoolwide improvement. The Site Team model and adapt the philosophy and the methodologies used in AVID specific to their school's context. They commit to being agents of change for schoolwide improvement through sustaining AVID implementation.

AVID schoolwide: AVID is schoolwide when a strong AVID implementation transforms the systems, leadership, instruction and culture of a school, ensuring tertiary and career readiness for all students. Teachers across all curriculum areas are AVID trained by attending AVID Summer Institutes or during in-State/Territory professional learning. AVID methodologies are incorporated into the content levels and classroom expectations across all curricular departments or year levels, resulting in a consistent schoolwide tertiary-going culture.

Schoolwide culture: AVID philosophy shifts beliefs and behaviours, increasing all students' capability to be tertiary and career ready.

Schoolwide instruction: All staff use AVID and other effective instructional strategies and tools to ensure tertiary and career readiness for all students.

Schoolwide leadership: Sets the vision and tone that promotes tertiary and career readiness and high expectations for all students.

Schoolwide systems: support governance, curriculum and instruction, data collection and analysis, professional learning, and student and parent outreach to ensure tertiary and career readiness.

Summer Institute: An annual professional learning and development opportunity for Site Team members to begin, refine and expand infrastructures of change for all students by transforming the culture of classrooms, sites, feeder school patterns and regions.

WICOR: AVID's teaching and learning framework is known as WICOR (Writing, Inquiry, Collaboration, Organisation and Reading). The WICOR framework includes an emphasis on collaborative activities, developing strong organisational skills, community projects, and strategies for peer and self-assessment.

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