Gateways to Leading Learning

Principals Leading Literacy in Secondary Schools

Neil Dempster, Claire Wyatt-Smith, Greer Johnson, Mary Neville, Peta Colbert
We are pleased to introduce this new series of monographs as part of the ongoing collaboration between the Asia Pacific Centre of Leadership and Change (APCLC) and the newly established Hong Kong Principals’ Institute (HKPI). Both organizations are focused on promoting deeper understanding of school leadership through innovative research and to improved leadership practice in schools. We believe that working partnerships between organizations such as ours provide fertile tracts within which ways to more successful leadership can be explored, tested, practiced and disseminated in ways that neither partner can achieve individually.

We hope that you enjoy reading the monograph and that it in some way helps you reflect on what you do as a leader, regardless of where that is.

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Abstract

This monograph reports on progress being made by secondary school principals engaged in a project designed to enhance their capabilities to lead improvements in literacy in their schools. Motivation for the project is threefold. First, in Australia, work on an inaugural national curriculum has placed the onus directly on secondary school teachers, no matter their subject speciality, to be teachers of literacy; second, the imminent movement of year seven students into secondary schools in several Australian states where this has not been the case, has increased the pressure on secondary principals to be accountable for student performance in the tests associated with the National Assessment Program in Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN). Third, while there is much in the leadership literature about the management intensity principals in secondary school face, there is little useful knowledge available in empirical research findings on the way in which they can link their daily work effectively with literacy learning.

Background

Against this backdrop, the South Australian Department of Education and Child Development (DECD), working through the South Australian Secondary Principals Association (SASPA) contracted Griffith University to design, develop and implement an action research project to enable Principals to take an informed role in leading literacy learning. The project was given the title Secondary Principals as Literacy Leaders (SPALL).
An important issue for the University researchers was to find a credible basis for the project, knowing that many secondary school principals and teachers do not see themselves as teachers of literacy. Early data from the project supports this claim. The University researchers brought into the foreground, the need to use the secondary school’s strong focus on assessment as a route into pedagogy better directed to meeting the literacy demands embedded in subject specific assessment tasks. The question driving the project then became: What do Principals need to know and be able to do in order to lead improvements in student ability to manage the literacy demands they meet in the assessment tasks set by their teachers?

The monograph provides an initial report on the outcomes of principals’ experiences of four professional learning modules used to prepare them to lead a two-stage action research project in several disciplines in their schools. To do so, first, we offer a justification for the project, drawing on some of the literature relevant to principals as leaders of learning in secondary schools to highlight the lack of empirical work in this regard. Second, the project design is described before moving to report on some of the initial experiences principals encountered as they implemented Stage One of a school-based Action Research
Project to improve literacy in their sites. Finally, a brief description of the suite of research tasks accompanying the SPALL Project is outlined.
Why study the Leadership of Literacy Learning with Secondary School Principals

Despite a growing emphasis on school principals as instructional leaders, secondary school principals’ roles as literacy leaders are not yet clearly understood. Research on principals’ literacy leadership to date, focuses predominantly on elementary or primary school principals and as Murphy warns, there are:

*limitations in the instructional leadership literature (e.g., drawing conclusions for secondary school leaders based on studies from elementary schools) (Murphy, 2004, p.66.)*

At the same time,

*Schools that are especially effective in teaching children to read are characterized by vigorous instructional leadership. The leader is usually the principal. . . . (Anderson et al., 1985, p.112.)*

While the caveats about adopting leadership approaches embraced by primary school principals must be acknowledged, we were encouraged by the indisputable findings in much of the recent research literature endorsing the primary school principal’s important contribution to improvements in learning in general and to literacy improvement in particular (Hallinger & Heck, 2011; Day, Sammons, Hopkins, Harris, Leithwood, Gu, Penlington, Mehta & Kington, 2009; Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris & Hopkins, 2006; MacBeath & Dempster, 2009; OECD, 2008; Sharratt & Fullan, 2009; Levin, 2010; Louis, Wahlstrom, Michlin, Gordon, Thomas, Leithwood, Anderson, Mascall, Strauss & Moore, 2010; Dempster, Konza, Robson, Gaffney, Lock and McKennariley, 2012).

That said, principals’ roles in leading literacy learning in secondary schools are not yet clearly defined, with some studies identifying the value of principals’ ‘support’ for literacy programs without any further role in literacy learning brought to light. The very small body of literature focusing on literacy leadership in a secondary school context includes the qualitative research of Dinham (2005) who identifies leadership behaviours related to student learning as well as touching on the principal’s role in encouraging literacy initiatives across the curriculum. Dinham found that principals’ and other school leaders’ behaviours are intertwined in secondary schools in producing outstanding student outcomes. This intertwining of leadership has been highlighted in research over recent years into the benefits of shared leadership showing that in secondary schools, it needs deliberate combinations of principal, positional leaders and teachers to be effective (MacBeath & Dempster, 2009; Levin, 2011; Hallinger & Heck, 2011).
Much more specific is the Secondary Schools Literacy Initiative (SSLI) in New Zealand (May, 2007; May & Smyth, 2007; May & Wright, 2007; Smyth, 2007; Smyth & Whitehead, 2007; Whitehead, 2007; Wright, 2007) which provides insights into secondary school literacy leadership. This New Zealand project found that the implementation of literacy strategies across the curriculum is complex in secondary schools. The following summary of SSLI findings describes five main issues for school leaders:

- the constant commitment of senior management and key personnel is necessary;
- teacher buy-in needs encouragement;
- resistance occurs;
- implications for departments and disciplines need clarity; and
- sustainability beyond project support varies.

(Wright, 2007; May, 2007)

Overall, this brief reference to literature on leading literacy in secondary schools shows that there is a limited, though emerging knowledge base about leadership behaviours in the secondary school context which makes strong connections with literacy learning and achievement. Given the lack of attention in the research literature to principals’ capacity and potential to lead secondary school student literacy, we argue that it demands further investigation. This state of affairs, coupled with the policy changes related to the national curriculum mentioned earlier, acted as the major motivation and justification for the Secondary Principals as Literacy Leaders Project.
The SPALL Project Design
The SPALL Project is an action research project about improving students’ literacy. It rests on:

1. a Leadership for Literacy Learning Blue Print for principals who adopt a commitment to disciplined dialogue using strong qualitative and quantitative evidence to support deliberate action in research-verified leadership domains or priority areas;

2. four professional development stimulus modules to promote leadership, assessment and literacy knowledge, thinking and improvement action; and

3. a commitment to in-school shared leadership activity on nominated tasks designed to connect compelling research findings to practice.

In essence, the SPALL Project concentrates on the leadership capabilities of secondary school principals but with a firm commitment to the concept of ‘leadership as activity’ rather than ‘position’. Principals are exposed to a series of professional learning modules designed to enable them, initially, to take a direct role in connecting their work on literacy with that of other positional leaders and teachers in their schools. A description of the four leadership learning modules which provide the genesis for in-school Action Research follows.
Module 1 describes what constitutes effective leadership for learning based on recent meta-analyses of leadership research (Dempster, 2009). It then applies that knowledge to leading learning in secondary school contexts. The purpose of participation is to arm

Module 2 describes a critical inquiry approach to assessment linking literacy, curriculum and assessment standards. It presents knowledge about the literacy demands of curriculum and assessment, and explores how and why these need to

Module 3 examines the leadership activity in which principals need to participate with members of their staff to plan and implement effective Action Research Projects designed to connect the literacy demands of assessment tasks with classroom pedagogy. The outcomes of

Module 4 is designed for principals to further develop their capabilities in leading the evaluation of in-school Action Research Projects or interventions focused on the literacy demands of assessment tasks in the curriculum with their leadership teams and teachers. The module
principals with necessary knowledge to enable them to take action in key priority areas known to help in leading learning effectively. These are illustrated in a Leadership for Learning Framework or Blueprint (see page 22). The outcome of discussion and activity should be a commitment to ascertaining how key leadership priority areas can be identified and highlighted, and how particular leadership actions can be shared and applied with a concentration on literacy (particularly on the literacy demands accompanying assessment tasks) in their schools.

be made explicit in efforts to improve student learning. Another focus draws principals’ attention to the features of quality assessment task design. The module then applies knowledge of how to connect literacy, curriculum and standards to lead learning improvement in secondary school contexts. It provides principals with materials for their use with staff in contributing to the later action research phase of the project. The purpose of participation is to equip principals with the necessary knowledge to enable them to take action in the two priority areas of literacy and assessment to facilitate improvement in student achievement.

discussion and activity should be an enhanced capacity to lead: (i) school action research planning based on sound evidence about the types of assessment tasks expected of students and the specific literacy demands embedded in them; ii) the identification of the curriculum and literacy demands salient to the formulation of assessment task specific criteria; (iii) the types of teaching strategies well matched to the literacy demands of assessment; and (iv) the making of connections between leadership and learning using the Leadership for Learning Blueprint (see page 22) as a reference point in applying resources to planned Action Research Projects.

assists principals to examine the implications of their evaluation for school-wide policy on cross curriculum literacy. The ways in which Action Research or intervention projects are evaluated and how particular practices can be embedded and sustained across the school are core components of the module. The module draws from research literature on evaluating intervention projects (consistent with action research theory and practice) and planning for sustainable improvement in students’ abilities to handle the literacy demands of the school’s assessment tasks (particularly in reading and writing). Approaches to evaluation and future planning that are relevant and feasible for principals and teachers are explored. Research on the role of principals in leading intervention evaluations and planning for improvement based on data about student learning and achievement is highlighted.
Each of the professional learning modules was followed by an in-school task leading to two project requirements: (i) as a consequence of Module 3, the cooperative planning of Stage One of an Action Research Project with four to six teachers focused on the identification of the literacy demands of their assessment tasks in two curriculum areas; and (ii) the cooperative planning of an evaluation of the effects on teachers’ assessment task design practice and their understanding of the literacy demands their students face. Other optional post-module tasks were also available to principals such as the conduct of a brief survey to ascertain whose responsibility the teaching of literacy is in the secondary school (see the sample instrument on page 34).

We turn now to the presentation of a summary of the Stage One Action Research Reports produced by principals following their completion of Module 3.
Principals Reports from their Stage One Acton Research Projects

As outlined above, as part of their commitment to the SPALL Project, South Australian secondary school principals undertook to carry out Stage One of an action research project designed to focus on assessment tasks and the literacy demands of those tasks as a route into the improvement of literacy pedagogy in the secondary curriculum in their schools. What follows summarises the steps taken by forty-six (46) principals as they carried out post-module tasks in their school contexts. As mentioned earlier, principals were asked to work with a small number of teachers in two curriculum areas, one of which was to be from the newly developed National Curriculum. The Action Research Project was to be framed around the examination of assessment tasks for the quality of their design, the literacy demands embedded in them and therefore, the teaching practices required to make those demands explicit for students.

Given the importance of the principal’s knowledge of his or her local context, it was understood that there would be a range of variations from this set of expectations for this first of two stages in the anticipated Action Research Project.

Our summary describes fourteen broad categories of leadership actions, many of which were undertaken by most principals, but some of which were responsive to unique school circumstances. The presentation which follows is arranged so that the actions most frequently reported in the forty-six (46) accounts appear first.
The SPALL to Date

Summary of Actions Taken
The information in the reports showed that some 27 principals reported having established distinct Working Parties to carry out the expected tasks under their leadership. The curriculum areas covered are shown in the list below with some of the combinations across year levels in different schools.

- Year 8 Humanities
- Year 9 Science
- A Year 7 to 12 team
- Science teachers only
- Home Economics, English and History
- A Literacy Reference Group
- A Working Party across two schools
- All Middle school teachers
- Year 8 English and Science
- Year 8 Arts and Science teams
- Science and Design and Technology
- Year 9 English and Science
- Learning Communities of combined faculty groups
- One Science teacher, one Studies of Society and the Environment teacher
- One teacher from Science, English and History and Social Science (HASS)
- Health, Physical Education and Science
- A Principals’ Regional Network group
- Four teachers from each of English, Humanities, Math, Science, Physical Education and Home Economics
- Two English/History teachers and a Literacy Coordinator
- A Senior Leadership Team
- The Principal, Head of Science and 3 teachers from Year 8; and a Senior Leader with 3 year 8 teachers of English
- History and Social Science (HASS)

The clear message in this list is that principals have made judgments about the people and structures they believe are necessary to carry out nominated tasks in their schools. Some have created new groupings, others have utilised existing structures and provided their members with new directions, yet others have determined to try out the approach to literacy through assessment task design with quite small groups of teachers. Indeed, as the list shows, one principal is working with three teachers only from three different curriculum areas – Science, English and HASS. At the other end of the spectrum, the Stage One Action Research Project has been made a Principals’ Network focus across one region. These differences show up the importance of principals’ context knowledge in leading changes in learning locally. They are also consistent with the shared leadership dimension of the Leadership for Learning Blueprint to which they were introduced in Module 1 (see page 22). This dimension calls for leadership decisions about organisational structures that create opportunities to engage others, enabling them to take collective action.
Staff Meeting Conducted

Nineteen (19) reports made reference to principals’ leadership of staff meetings on aspects of assessment and literacy drawn from the SPALL Professional Learning Modules. These meetings addressed matters such as the use of genre in different disciplines; a genre audit; subject related comprehension strategies; assessment as learning, assessment of learning and assessment for learning; assessment rubrics and the inclusion of literacy criteria in these rubrics; the concept of ‘salience’; deconstructing ‘persuasive language’; paragraph writing; assessment task design; individualised assessment; common genres in secondary education; and unit planning.

One principal was moved to note that at staff meetings, “Conversations were intense and fearless”, as people from different disciplines addressed assessment design issues. The analysis of the reports shows that staff meetings in many schools were conducted in addition to the discussions being undertaken by Working Parties. Furthermore, principals reported their active involvement in staff meetings thus taking into practice one of the essential research-informed dimensions of the Leadership for Learning Blueprint which, as mentioned earlier, provides the leadership framework for the SPALL Project. When used in the way described here, staff meetings became useful avenues for professional development.
Principals Leading Professional Development

The third most frequently reported action taken by principals concerns their personal leadership of formal professional development in their schools. Seventeen (17) reports contained direct reference to this. Five (5), principals recorded evidence of sessions in which the whole school staff was brought into conversations about the literacy demands embedded in curriculum assessment tasks. Similarly, five (5) principals reported the carriage of a task with staff members to align the literacy capabilities described in the National Curriculum with state policy on Effective Teaching and Learning. Seven (7) principals provided accounts of the professional development actions they had undertaken in their schools, actions such as a staff literacy training needs audit, staff discussions on changed literacy pedagogy, whole staff meetings on language and literacy in teaching and learning, attendance at outside professional development sessions on literacy learning, and the circulation of professional reading related to research on literacy learning (journal articles provided during Module presentations).
Special Attention Given to the Literacy Capabilities of the Australian Curriculum

The literacy capabilities of the Australian Curriculum were used by at least 17 principals as motivation to apply a planning template explained during Module 2. This template was designed to enable teachers to consider and identify literacy components in their assessment tasks. In personal reflections on their leadership action, the significance of the Australian Curriculum’s position that every teacher is a literacy teacher has been reported by principals as a powerful professional incentive to undertake the Action Research Project across a number of subject areas.

Plans to Support Changed Pedagogy

Fifteen (15) principals reported making plans for changed pedagogy during Action Research Stage One. These plans referred to practices such as explicit literacy teaching sessions within regular 80-minute classroom periods; planned literacy units of work; use of students’ work in classroom practice; moderation of students’ written work between teachers; and the explicit teaching of paragraph writing, to name a few.
Assessment Tasks Critiqued and Redesigned

There were twelve (12) reports saying that Working Parties had critiqued teachers’ assessment tasks leading to their redesign. This approach was confirmed in principals’ reflections as a helpful way to support the teaching and learning of literacy with teachers in secondary schools.
Ten (10) principals reported having administered the survey on ‘Whose job is literacy?’ provided in Module 1 as a tool to open up staff discussion (see Appendix). Principals judged the instrument to be useful and in most cases affirming, with the data showing that the greater bulk of secondary teachers see themselves as responsible for literacy in their curriculum areas. Each school’s data showed a minority who hold to the view that literacy is the job of the English teacher. The survey also showed that there is a lack of confidence amongst many teachers in their knowledge of the classroom strategies they should employ to help their students to meet the literacy demands they face. Another outcome of this survey was the identification of particular literacy professional development needs of school staff and the kind of support that would benefit their teaching. One principal was a little guarded about the survey results in which teachers in his school claimed confidence to teach the literacy demands of the curriculum but in his view, this confidence did not show up in actual classroom practice – a clear signal for engaging in further professional discourse.
Resources Identified to Support Explicit Teaching of Literacy Demands and Task Design

A small number of principals (six) reported that work during Stage One of their action research projects resulted in the production or identification of useful resources to help teachers in teaching particular literacy demands. Two of the schools assembled training packages for staff drawing on SPALL Project materials and other sources. One school developed a school focused application of the Leadership for Literacy Learning Blueprint for all teachers while another concentrated on strategies for assessment task design.

Whole Staff Involved

Five (5) principals worked with the whole school staff on their action research projects, undertaking a number of the actions reported in this summary. All of these schools were small.
Principals at the Planning Stage

Five (5) principals had not yet begun to implement their action research projects but their reports showed detailed plans to do so. The timing of implementation was an important matter in the thinking of these leaders.

Human Resources Decisions

Four (4) principals took steps to add to the school’s human resources to support literacy. One appointed a part-time literacy coach, another appointed two learning area co-ordinators in English and Math/Science, another initiated the training of a staff member in a Professional Development program called Literacy for Learning, to facilitate in-school professional learning; yet another approved the 0.2 release for a staff member to focus on the literacy capabilities of the Australian Curriculum.
Leadership Framework or Blueprint Discussed

The Leadership for Literacy Learning Framework or Blueprint was the focus of school staff discussion led by the principal in three (3) schools. In one case the Blueprint was used as a visual record for a staff room display of the action research strategies being implemented by teachers.

Leading Learning – A Framework

* Improving student learning and performance
Inclusion of Students
A small number of principals (3) reported extending their Stage One Action Research Project to include students. Two referred to ‘before’ and ‘after’ snapshots of student work while the other used a student checklist derived from a ‘Checking the Conditions for Learning’ survey provided during Module 1.

Data Gathered on Student Grade Bands
Three (3) principals reported gathering data on student grade bands so that they had recorded a ‘baseline’ from which changes as a result of the Action Research Project might be seen.
Principals’ Reflections

Reflections on their involvement in the first stage of the Action Research Project by principals were informative and insightful. The level of personal disclosure was engaging and indicative of measured consideration of the utility and value of involvement in the SPALL Project. So much was written by the forty-six (46) principals who returned Stage One Action Research Project Reports, that the selection of comments made here must be seen as a small sample only. A full reading of the reports underlines the depth of self-review provoked by the request for all principals to offer their personal views on the leadership actions taken in their schools. Comments covered a range of common positive and negative reactions with the positive clearly outweighing the negative.

Principals’ Positive Reflections

Principals’ positive reflections referred to their own personal growth and confidence in leading literacy, their admiration for their teachers, their improved understanding of staff professional learning needs in literacy and assessment and their return to curriculum leadership in the light of the emerging significance of the literacy requirements of the Australian Curriculum. Comments extracted from principals’ reports illustrating each of these themes are presented below.

**Personal Growth and Confidence in Leading Literacy**

- *The main issue for me was to assume a new role so that I was leading by stepping back so that our key teachers could set the agenda and feel supported by me without my steering the process.*
- *Assuming the Literacy Leadership role has not been a dramatic change in practice for me. I have found that the SPALL training has complemented my involvement [in literacy].*
Assuming literacy leadership has been challenging for me in my role as principal. This is not an area I have great expertise in but I have worked with other leaders in the school ...who do have the necessary expertise. We now have more than one leader responsible for our literacy improvement agenda.

Initial apprehension has turned to increased confidence in my ability to lead literacy improvement across the school as an active member of a core team charged with this responsibility. As principal, my core function is to lead the teaching and learning programmes across the school. The SPALL project has provided substance to the existing processes I use.

It is worth pointing out that I have especially found this experience interesting, rewarding and relevant to my school due to the clear focus on the action research and quality of the support and resources provided through Griffith University and other partners.

The PALL (an earlier Pilot Project conducted in Primary Schools) and SPALL initiatives have given me greater confidence and direction to lead literacy improvements at my site in a more strategic way.
Admiration for Teachers

- I have been impressed with the level of professionalism of our Action Research Group.
- Meetings amongst staff have been very positive.
- At this point, all middle school staff members are committed to the project. Large notice boards on paragraphs have been developed for each classroom containing examples, hints and tips and the paragraph formula checklist.
- My teachers have embraced the process acknowledging that literacy capabilities are important to include in assessment tasks for students.

Staff Professional Development

- I gained a better understanding of staff professional development needs.
- The Action Research project is using partnering as a catalyst for Professional Development.
- I am now able to engage in credible [professional development] conversations with teachers. It has been a very worthwhile process for the teachers involved but also for us as leaders. It would be great to spend more time working with groups of teachers on these processes and involve all learning areas.
- The AR [Action Research] is a good opportunity for me to work with staff. Personally it is satisfying having some responsibility for curriculum planning and programming as it is not part of my [usual] leadership role per se.
- The process of leading ‘Disciplined Dialogue’ in regard to data analysis and when engaging in discussions that require those focusing questions of “What do we see?”, “Why are we seeing this?” and “What are we to do, if anything?” has been powerful.

Return to Curriculum Leadership

- Staff have generally responded positively to the SPALL strategy. Learning communities report back at leadership meetings where a much stronger curriculum focus has developed. Our work has been more deeply focused on teaching and learning rather than school administration and management. It has been useful to link student improvement explicitly to staff improvement through a Performance Development process which is being trialed in 2012.
● Staff are seeing the connection with the Australian Curriculum requirements.

● SPALL work is timely in lifting attention to assessment and literacy teaching. We have woven this into our overall use of the TfEL (Teaching for Effective Learning) framework.

● This complemented the school improvement review and the priority of Literacy within the school, so was a natural progression to the next stage.

● The breakdown of literacy skills provided in the SPALL module booklet, broke down into language that we could all follow, gave all staff the confidence in being able to programme effectively to include literacy capabilities.

● Assessment Task design is looking and sounding different with much more explicit ‘front end’ information provided.
Principals’ Negative Reflections

Most negative reflections concerned the issue of ‘time’ – time to deal with the expectations of the Action Research Project in the face of competing demands. The other worrying matter referred to the need to assist teachers to expand their teaching repertoires to include explicit literacy strategies often in disciplines where this had not been prominent in the past. This issue is seen as particularly difficult by principals and teachers who lack literacy expertise. Extracts from the Stage One Action Research Reports follow and illustrate these themes.

Lack of Time

● All is going to plan, but slowly – time is the enemy amongst competing priorities.
● Time is of the essence.
● Finding time to spend with Action Research Groups is a problem.
● This work is very important work but it is also time consuming, both in attending to one’s own professional development in the area of literacy and working with staff. The other demand is to fit the extended periods of time needed to both negotiate the project with the Learning Area leaders as well as lead the discussions with teachers.
● Finding the time in amongst other reforms is an ongoing issue.
● Teachers are positive about using the SPALL task design template – but the time required is not sustainable; but this pressure may reduce when familiarity increases.

Lack of Expertise

● Staff need Literacy for Learning T&D (Training and Development) before we proceed – too daunting for the non-English teacher. The lack of knowledge about literacy needs lots of training and development.
● I have raised the profile of literacy even further in my school but teachers are a little overwhelmed by what they need to know about comprehension, vocabulary development, writing genres, grammar and punctuation.
Progress is being made but there is still a need to raise confidence, get staff to take a risk, and get the recalcitrant staff members to actually put their learning into practice. We will need to collect evidence that this is actually happening and is embedded across the school.

I do not feel I have the specific literacy expertise required to lead others in this area so regard myself a learner and part of a team.

At times I have felt quite inadequate in my role as ‘literacy leader’ but through this recognise that being a learner is at times uncomfortable and challenging. What I have realised is that I need to further develop my understanding of literacy through undertaking the ‘Literacy for Learning’ course with the school staff.
Summary

This analysis of SPALL Stage One Action Research Reports provided by principals has described leadership activity in schools which is very encouraging. There is clear evidence of action to attend to the quality of assessment tasks and to making explicit the literacy demands previously hidden within them. There is also evidence of attention being given to changed pedagogy to bring out into the open what is required of students with respect to curriculum content knowledge and literacy capabilities. More than this however, is the obvious attention by principals to making arrangements in their schools to take initiatives in literacy further into all curriculum areas, as there is evidence of professional learning for these leaders themselves and the staff members for whom they are responsible. The positives from the SPALL Project reports outweigh the negatives, leaving the impression that a helpful learning journey is now underway for most of the forty-six (46) principals and the teachers in the schools they lead.
SPALL Research Tasks

To conclude, we provide a description of the research tasks yet to be undertaken as principals move on to the second stage of their Action Research Projects. This has asked them to expand their leadership activity from the original groups of staff members with whom they have worked in Stage One to other subject areas and thus a greater number of teachers. Sharing leadership in the development of helpful strategies to enable teachers to work with their students on the literacy demands of their assessment tasks is the goal for at least four disciplines. A research program runs alongside the implementation of this second stage of the Action Research Project and we turn now, to the final section of the paper, to describe its intent and methods.

Research Purpose and Process

The overarching purpose of the programme of research to accompany the SPALL Project is to increase our understanding of the nature of leadership for learning in the secondary school setting, particularly as it applies to improving literacy through better teaching and learning associated with the literacy demands of assessment tasks. More specifically, the research program is designed to ascertain the impact and effect of the professional learning programme and its associated activities on leadership capability and literacy teaching and learning for students across the secondary years.

Specific questions intrinsic to this purpose are:

- What leadership capabilities do secondary principals employ in order to lead literacy improvement in their schools?
- What knowledge and understanding of assessment tasks and their literacy demands do principals need in order to lead literacy learning in the secondary school?
- What are the effects of the work of principals and others sharing leadership responsibilities on teaching practices, learning experiences and opportunities, and student achievement?

The kinds of research tools developed to investigate these questions are:

1. a pre- and post-programme survey on the leadership capabilities of the principals involved in the project;
2. interviews with principals and with school personnel (e.g., principals, middle managers, teacher leaders) associated with them in implementing in-school action research projects; and
3. a questionnaire for teachers who have direct knowledge of these Action Research Projects.

Added to these data gathering methods is the analysis of principals’ evaluative reports on their Stage Two in-school Action Research Projects to ascertain the impact and effect of their projects on leadership, teaching and student learning.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX: Whose job is literacy?

Secondary Principals as Literacy Leaders (SPALL) - Teachers’ Survey

This brief survey seeks your views on the literacy demands of the subjects you teach. It is motivated by the thrust of statements in ‘Literacy across the Curriculum’ from the Australian Curriculum (Version 3.0). The instrument uses a five point Likert Scale ranging from Strongly Agree (SA) to Strongly Disagree (SD). It includes an Unsure (U) response.

To complete the survey, please place a cross (X) in the column beside each item which best records your view.
Views on the literacy demands of subject teaching

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<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>English teachers are responsible for teaching the literacy skills for all teaching areas.</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>All teachers need a clear understanding of the literacy demands of their teaching areas.</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>Literacy skills appropriate to each learning area can be embedded in the teaching of the content and processes of that learning area.</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>I have a clear understanding of the literacy demands of the subjects I teach.</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>I am confident to teach the subject-specific literacy skills of my teaching areas.</td>
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<td>6.</td>
<td>I pay particular attention to teaching the subject-specific literacy demands of the assessment tasks I set.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>I find that teaching subject-specific literacy skills in my teaching areas has a positive influence on student outcomes.</td>
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<td>8.</td>
<td>I consider that I am entitled to believe that students doing my subjects should already have the literacy skills to manage them.</td>
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<td>9.</td>
<td>The push for teachers to teach subject-specific literacy skills is not practical.</td>
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<td>10.</td>
<td>I feel I need further professional learning on understanding the literacy demands of my teaching areas.</td>
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Gateways to Leading Learning
Principals Leading Literacy in Secondary Schools

by Neil Dempster, Claire Wyatt-Smith, Greer Johnson, Mary Neville, Peta Colbert

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