



Principals as Literacy Leaders (PALL) Seven Years On: Sustainability and Impact in Victorian Schools

Tony Townsend
Griffith Institute for Educational Research
Griffith University

Acknowledgement:

The research discussed in the current paper was supported and funded by the Victorian Principals Association.

The current paper builds on the previous work by the Griffith Institute for Educational Research team that has studied the impact of the PALL program since 2010. The team includes Professors Neil Dempster, Greer Johnson and Tony Townsend, and Elizabeth Stevens from Griffith University; Anne Bayetto from Flinders University, Associate Professor Jane Wilkinson from Monash University and Associate Professor Susan Lovett from the University of Canterbury in New Zealand.



7

AS&A LEADERSHIP ROUNDTABLE 2017 | 亞太領導圓桌會議二零一七

years on: The state of the Asian knowledge base?
年以來亞太教育領導知識基礎述評

Taipei 台北



Principals as Literacy Leaders (PALL)

Seven Years On: Sustainability and Impact in Victorian Schools

Tony Townsend

Background to the Principals as Literacy Leaders (PALL) program

Data from national and international surveys of student achievement in literacy pointed to a recurring problem in Australian schools (Thomson, De Bortoli, Nicholas, Hillman, & Buckley, 2011; National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN), 2008, 2009, 2010). The overall outcome of these surveys was positive: the majority of Australian students achieved high standards, but a significant minority did not. There was also a growing body of research evidence (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Hattie, 2003; Dempster, et al., 2011) generating the conviction that the problem, while difficult to overcome, can be addressed in positive ways by schools. In fact, evidence has continued to accrue that factors such as the quality of instruction (Hattie, 2009); the quality of school leadership (particularly sustainable leadership), (Leithwood et al., 2006; Robinson, 2007; Seashore-Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010) and the impact of well-designed PD and support programs (Wei, et al., 2009; Hord, 1997) leads to the conviction that improving the quality of student learning and achievement, in a sustainable way, is feasible.

The Principals as Literacy Leaders project (PALL) was initiated in 2009 by the Australian Primary Principals Association (APPA) with 60 schools in four states of Australia. The project was originally funded by the Australian Government as part of its Literacy and Numeracy Pilots in Low SES Communities Initiative. Since that time, subsequent programs and research have also been funded by State governments and Principals' Associations. Since 2009, more than 1500 Government, Catholic, and Independent school principals have taken part in one of three projects to emerge



7

AS:A LEADERSHIP ROUNDTABLE 2017 | 亞太領導圓桌會議二零一七

years on: The state of the Asian knowledge base?
 年以來亞太教育領導知識基礎述評

Taipei 台北

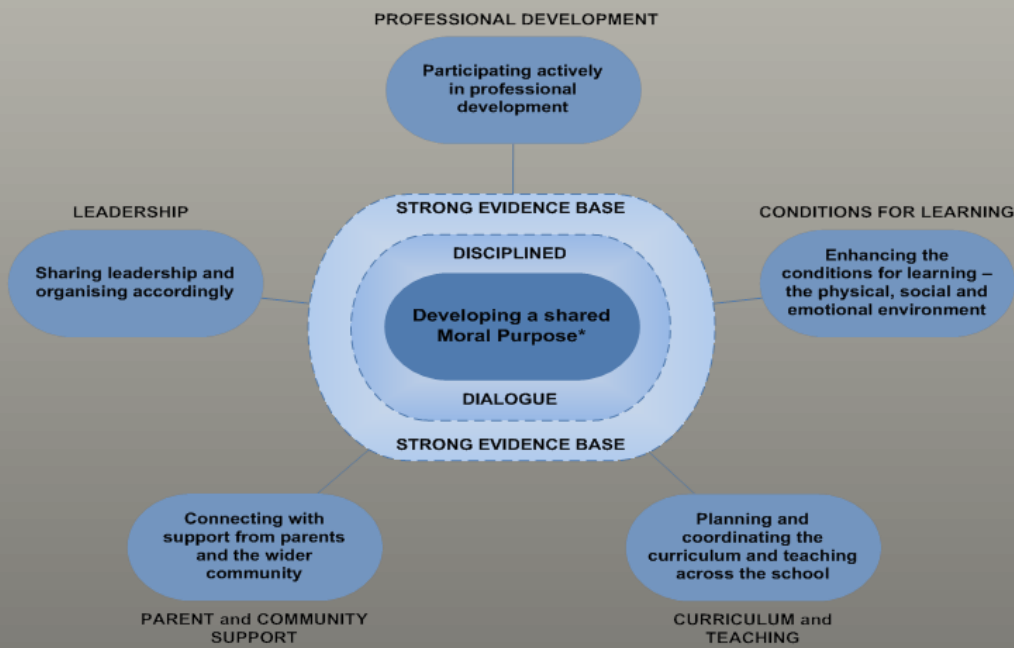


from APPA’s initiative: the original PALL program for primary principals from disadvantaged schools, Secondary Principals as Literacy Leaders (SPALL) and Principals as Literacy Leaders with Indigenous Communities (PALLIC). In 2017, two new programs, one that focused on the transition from primary to secondary school and another that focused on improving parent involvement in reading activities, were added to the list

The PALL program

There are three main elements to the PALL program. The first element is the use of the Leadership for Learning Blueprint (LFLB).

Leading Learning – A Framework



* Improving student learning and performance



7

AS&A LEADERSHIP ROUNDTABLE 2017 | 亞太領導圓桌會議二零一七

years on: The state of the Asian knowledge base?
年以來亞太教育領導知識基礎述評

Taipei 台北



The LfLB argues that central to everything is the **moral purpose** of school, which is essentially about supporting *strong learning*, in this case, of reading, for *all students*. Using school data to establish a **strong evidence base** for what needs to be done, the school uses **disciplined dialogue** to interrogate the data and to make decisions about what steps should be taken to intervene in ways that will improve reading performance, who needs to do what, and how the implementation might be resourced. Having this as the central core for reading improvements, the principal and leadership team then needs to address a series of leadership tasks that will enable the identified intervention to have the best chance of success. These include **Professional Development** of both leaders themselves and the teaching staff, where the evidence suggests that leaders that are actively involved in professional development with their staff have the best outcomes in terms of student learning. There also needs to be consideration given to establishing strong, positive **Conditions for Learning**, which take into account the physical, social and emotional environment in which both teachers and students become strong learners. A third factor is a focus on **Curriculum and Teaching** where the principal plays a role in planning and coordinating the reading curriculum to be delivered and supporting teaching practices across the school that will enable this curriculum to be developed, resourced, presented and assessed. A fourth factor is **Parent and Community Support**, where the principal develops, extends and supports connections with parents and the wider community in ways that will lead to improvements in student reading and the final element considers the development of **Shared Leadership practices**, whereby principals enable opportunities for others in the school to share leadership of the reading activity and organise ways in which the leadership of others can be developed and supported.

The second main element of PALL is the focus on improving reading through a consideration of the BIG 6 of reading (Oral Language, Phonological Awareness, Letter-Sound Knowledge (Phonemic Awareness), Fluency, Vocabulary and Comprehension).



7

AS:A LEADERSHIP ROUNDTABLE 2017 | 亞太領導圓桌會議二零一七

years on: The state of the Asian knowledge base?
年以來亞太教育領導知識基礎述評

Taipei 台北





The PALL program argues that to be truly successful a student needs to have both a strong understanding of and capability in each of these six elements of reading. Teachers would need to ensure that consideration of the BIG 6 was built into their literacy plans (and literacy blocks) to ensure that all six were covered on a consistent basis across all years of the school.

The other central element of PALL is the notion that if we are to change the outcomes of students, then this is most likely to happen through a focused and targeted intervention. We can't expect things to change if we keep doing what we have always done. It needs to be focused, so that we don't try to do too much at once, thus depleting resources directed towards the site of the intervention, and it needs to be targeted in that it is important to identify the students that most need assistance. The use of a three tier model, where around 85% of students would become successful readers if consistent and appropriate teaching of reading was accomplished (tier one), which may leave perhaps 10% of students needing further assistance in the classroom (tier two) and 5% of students needing substantial further assistance, that may or may not happen in the classroom (tier 3), allowed participants of PALL to consider what needs to be changed (in curriculum and/or pedagogy and/or assessment) in ways that will first, improve outcomes for tier one students and then, to consider what interventions might be used to specifically target improved reading for tier two and/or tier three students. What we found during the program is that many schools have focused on oral language, particularly during the early years, and more generally across the school, but that others have focused on comprehension or vocabulary development. However, it became clear to many schools that it couldn't really do justice to one of the BIG 6 elements unless the others were addressed in tandem. In this way the BIG 6 became a framework for development for many of the schools that attended PALL.



7

AS:A LEADERSHIP ROUNDTABLE 2017 | 亞太領導圓桌會議二零一七

years on: The state of the Asian knowledge base?
年以來亞太教育領導知識基礎述評

Taipei 台北



PALL Research

Prior to the current study, there have been six different studies associated with PALL (see APPA, 2013; Dempster et al., 2012; Dempster et al., 2014; Johnson et al., 2014; Townsend et al., 2015; Townsend, Wilkinson, & Stevens, 2015). The findings from these studies were used to create the book *Leadership and Literacy: Principals, Partnerships and Pathways to Improvement* (Dempster, et al., 2017). The current study continues the tradition of the Principals as Literacy Leaders (PALL) program being the focus of ongoing research. It considers additional data from three of the previous four case study schools from Victoria, reported in Townsend, Wilkinson, & Stevens (2015), together with data from two further schools that had used the principal's attendance at PALL to start an intervention program designed to improve teaching practices and student engagement and achievement in reading.

PALL in Victoria

Since 2013 approximately 350 Victorian school leaders have undertaken the Principals as Literacy Leaders (PALL) program with support from the Victorian government and under the guidance of the Victorian Principals Association (VPA). A further 90 school leaders are undertaking the professional learning in 2017. The program was originally designed for Principals by themselves, but some principals that attended in the first years soon recognised the value of having others in the school also completing the program and now more than 100 Assistant Principals or Leading Teachers have completed the program as well.

The study was designed to provide the Victorian Principals Association with data related to the sustainability of the learning that had occurred during the PALL program and its impact on the school, both in terms of changed teaching practices, changed leadership approaches and improved student engagement and learning. The key questions of the study were:



7

AS&A LEADERSHIP ROUNDTABLE 2017 | 亞太領導圓桌會議二零一七

years on: The state of the Asian knowledge base?
年以來亞太教育領導知識基礎述評

Taipei 台北





- How has the focus on PALL been sustained since it was first introduced?
- How have elements of the Leadership for Learning Blueprint been used to support this progress?
- What impact has PALL and the BIG 6 approach had on the school?
- Is there any evidence that there have been improvements in student performance in Reading?

Methodology

Each of the schools was visited once at a mutually convenient time late in 2016 and during each visit the school leader and/or the leadership team (in most cases this was the principal and deputy principal), as well as a group of teachers involved in the Reading intervention activity, were engaged in a conversation about PALL. The conversations were based around a series of questions for school leaders and companion questions for teachers that were designed to identify respondents' considerations for what impact PALL had on the school, and what changes to teaching practices, student engagement, learning and achievement had been observed.

The case study schools

School 1 had previously been a case study school in 2014 and is a small school of around 180 students in a rural setting more than 100 kilometres from Melbourne. School 2 had not previously been a case study school. The school is in an outer-Eastern, semi-rural area of Melbourne, one of the fastest growing areas of the city, reflected in the student population increasing from around 480 in 2013 to over 700 in 2016. School 3 had previously been a case study school and is a growing



7

AS&A LEADERSHIP ROUNDTABLE 2017 | 亞太領導圓桌會議二零一七

years on: The state of the Asian knowledge base?
年以來亞太教育領導知識基礎述評

Taipei 台北





school of around 280 students in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne. The school population has grown over the past five years from about 180 in 2012. School 4 had previously been a case study school and is a growing school of around 280 students in a semi-rural area about 80 kilometres south east of Melbourne. The school population has remained fairly stable over the past five years with around 240-250 children enrolled. School 5 had not previously been a case study school and is a P-12 College with enrolments of over 800 in rural Victoria. The College was formed from the amalgamation of a local high school and two primary schools. The focus of the case study was the P-4 campus that has a population of about 500 students.

Results: The Impact of PALL on the Principal and the School

It is clear that for these schools, PALL has been incredibly important to the way in which the school has approached reading improvement strategies. The PALL strategy of providing participants with research driven approaches, with readings, resources and strategies for teaching and assessing Reading, and then providing the opportunity for school leaders to reflect on what they have learned for around 6-8 weeks before the next workshop, has been a powerful professional learning experience. In addition, the PALL process, of asking people to do things back at school in between modules, kept people on task over the course of the year. The outcome was that schools established patterns, not only for Reading but for other aspects of curriculum development as well, in a way that empowered teachers and generated a school wide commitment to the process. Typical comments on the impact of PALL included:

PALL was fantastic because it just was an absolute affirmation we're actually on the right track, so that was brilliant because we'd already started a very strong push on that oral language and vocab development, which we'd identified was really lacking with the kids as they came in... PALL provided that framework and that real direction about – okay, we've been really concentrating on this, but



7

AS:A LEADERSHIP ROUNDTABLE 2017 | 亞太領導圓桌會議二零一七

years on: The state of the Asian knowledge base?
年以來亞太教育領導知識基礎述評

Taipei 台北



we've got all these other components, and how are we addressing those as well? (School 1, Principal)

It's changed the way we work. It's changed the way we were getting jobs done. It's very different to the way it was. (School 4, Assistant Principal)

Student Engagement and Achievement

There is data from both NAPLAN and school-collected information that indicates that the students that have been involved in PALL initiated interventions have improved their engagement and enthusiasm for reading, they are much more capable of articulating what they are learning and they are in fact achieving at higher levels than previously was attained. Although trying to track improvements in achievement back to a particular activity or process is fraught with danger, the evidence suggests that people in schools where principals have undertaken PALL see themselves as contributing to higher levels of student learning and achievement since the PALL/BIG 6 strategies were introduced. Comments typical of the improvements shown in engagement included:

...the level of engagement, the kids love – we've got very high levels of engagement. Over the last five to six years, we've gone from the lowest quartile to one of the higher quartiles in terms of student engagement, in terms of, "My teacher understands me, my teacher plans lessons that are interesting," that sort of thing." (School 2, Teacher)

...student engagement across the board is really very high. We were looking at a new survey just to survey student engagement from one of the schools about their wellbeing and how they feel about coming to school and I think our lowest score was 84 percent (School 4, Principal)

Engagement is only part of the equation when it comes to improving student reading. Schools are judged more on their levels of achievement than on having an engaged group of students: wanting to be at school is one thing, but actually learning



7

AS:A LEADERSHIP ROUNDTABLE 2017 | 亞太領導圓桌會議二零一七

years on: The state of the Asian knowledge base?
年以來亞太教育領導知識基礎述評

Taipei 台北





something is more important. So the case study schools are expected to provide evidence of improvement in Reading performance and one of the ultimate aims of PALL is to show this. Although national standardised tests are notorious for only providing a snapshot of where students are on a particular day, the case study schools had implemented a range of ongoing assessments of how well students were performing, and from this data, it shows that as well as students making progress in their reading, teachers are also becoming better at making judgements about student progress, as the quotes below indicate:

...we've lowered the lower than expected growth and raised the higher than expected growth and the middle's where it should be. *(School 2, Principal)*

Relative growth is good...our lower kids and our higher kids have lifted their growth. It was probably our higher kids that we used to struggle with. Our higher kids who would still be high, but the growth they've put on was low compared to some other kids, so OUR relative growth, which has been a focus, has improved across all areas. *(School 4, Principal)*

...we're making a big difference, but we're also making a difference to the teacher judgment about what's happening in the oral language field and their ability to actually identify the different levels. It's not just somebody that stands up and is confident speaking, but it's about the content and the word usage and the fluency and what the child is actually comprehending in that amount of words they've got to draw on to use as well. *(School 1, Principal)*

The Leadership for Learning Blueprint

After the more generic conversations about the impact of PALL on the school and on student achievement, more specific questions were directed towards the various elements of the Leadership for Learning Blueprint that was one of the key elements of the PALL professional learning. A brief overview of the results of these conversations is contained below.



7

AS&A LEADERSHIP ROUNDTABLE 2017 | 亞太領導圓桌會議二零一七

years on: The state of the Asian knowledge base?
年以來亞太教育領導知識基礎述評

Taipei 台北





Shared Moral Purpose

The moral purpose of the school as it applied to reading improvement was slightly different in each school but with an underlying common understanding that all students, no matter what their background was, deserved the attention they required to develop the skills they needed to become successful readers. The schools in the current study had shifted the blame for underperformance away from the students themselves, and instead looked at ways of establishing opportunities for all students to improve as readers. This was demonstrated in school 1 by parallel quotes from both the principal and a teacher:

I think the belief that every child can achieve and it's up to us to make the difference. And really my heart says that that's our job. That's what we're here for and it's not easy. And every school has got different cohorts of parents and teachers and children. So, it's up to us to find the key that's going to work within the school. Not every school has the deficit in the language, but they need to make sure that they don't because we have some big assumptions about it. (School 1, Principal)

I think it's also that everyone here has the understanding that regardless of that background, and whatever's going on at home is that absolutely every kid that walks into this school can learn and will learn if we're giving them all the right opportunities and support here as well. And that's something that I think we've been working towards for the last few years... And that was the real change. That was something that definitely changed because that outlook, if you like, wasn't there previously... I think possibly there was a little bit more blame placed on what was going on at home. We're a little bit washing your hands going, "Wow, they've got so many issues. That makes it really hard for us," rather than going, "Well, yes, they've got these issues. So what can we actually do here with the time we've got to make sure that they've still got the best opportunity possible to move on and keep learning?" (Teacher, School 1)



7

AS:A LEADERSHIP ROUNDTABLE 2017 | 亞太領導圓桌會議二零一七

years on: The state of the Asian knowledge base?
年以來亞太教育領導知識基礎述評

Taipei 台北





Strong Evidence Base

A range of student related data, together with data related to teaching practices, are used to inform and then expand teaching practices. Teachers are now much more adept at looking at data and using it in ways that enable them to make decisions about groups and single students both by themselves and within a team orientation. The focus of PALL on collecting and using good data is clearly demonstrated in the case study schools and teachers claim that this has improved since the PALL program was initiated, as the comments below suggest.

I guess it's about just refining the data, isn't it, making sure you're not just collecting data for the sake of collecting data. It has be purposeful and to make that difference. (School 4, Teacher)

And we have always collected data however how effectively we were taking on board the results of the data was probably a concern, so we needed to make sure we had a whole school approach to the data that was coming back externally and also our internal data (School 5 Literacy Leader)

We're all involved in looking at the data and making decisions in deciding how to best help students that require the help. So, no one's by themselves worrying about their little cluster. (School 2, Teacher)

Disciplined Dialogue

The evidence from the case study schools is that they are more disciplined in their approach to analysing data than previously and that the analysis is now the activity of groups rather than individuals. Decisions made are now based on strong data that has been carefully collected and considered. There are three elements of disciplined dialogue as proposed by the PALL program. First there is a complete interrogation of the data and only the data, guided by the question "What do we see in these data?" Only after that question is fully considered do we move onto the next question



7

AS:A LEADERSHIP ROUNDTABLE 2017 | 亞太領導圓桌會議二零一七

years on: The state of the Asian knowledge base?
年以來亞太教育領導知識基礎述評

Taipei 台北



“Why are we seeing what we are seeing?” and then moving to “What if anything, should we be doing about it?” There is evidence that the case study schools were focused on a much more intensive consideration of the data than previously.

...it's breaking it down. It's not like, “Oh, well, this child is not reading so well.” It's about, “Why not? And what part is lacking? What's the component there that's stopping this child from progressing?” So, they're a lot more analytical with what they're doing, really drilling down into the data a lot more, and then planning for that. (School 1, Principal)

...why is that happening in their grade, why are they experiencing that and then we share that with other teachers and we've got our four questions as part of the PLC – did everyone look at the data, what does it show us, what the students know, what do we want them to know, what do we do to improve (School 4, Teacher)

...and we talk about the kids and how they're going – where they're having difficulty, what we need to improve for them, how we need to help them. (School 3, Teacher)

The evidence from the case study schools is that they are more disciplined in their approach to analysing data than previously and that the analysis is now the activity of groups rather than individuals. Decisions made are now based on strong data that has been carefully collected and considered.

Professional Development

The data suggest that in the case study schools, Principals have accepted the need for ongoing, targeted and rigorous, research-driven professional development as a means of improving the focus on and teaching of Reading in the schools. There are different ways of providing support for professional development, but it is clear that school leaders and teachers are equal partners in the professional learning experience. A range of formal, informal and non-formal ways of developing staff skills and attitudes have been used to advance teaching practice, reflection and professionalism.



7

AS:A LEADERSHIP ROUNDTABLE 2017 | 亞太領導圓桌會議二零一七

years on: The state of the Asian knowledge base?
年以來亞太教育領導知識基礎述評

Taipei 台北



...when presented with the research, it was very clear that there were things missing from our pedagogy and practices, and I know myself. I'm a grade six teacher. I never taught vocabulary and the way I taught comprehension maybe wasn't the way that research was saying it should be. So I think for everyone – it was a good chance to reflect on our own practice. (*School 2, Teacher*)

We hang on to our planning days. We believe in them and we make them hard working days. So, we induct our new staff by letting them see how we work as a team. So if it's a planning day and everyone's fussing around with their own thing well then that's a waste - our planning days are hard work. (*School 5 Literacy Leader*)

Schools also recognised that there was quite a bit of expertise already available to them inside the school and they used this as a way of developing their own professional development activity.

I'm quite blown away. It's such a small staff, but the skill level on this staff – you don't really need always to access that via PD because there's expertise within the staff. But that has been improved because of all these things teaching and understanding – all that has really been a high priority, I think. (*School 4, Teacher*)

...staff do a lot of PD for each other... well, today, we're working on vocab. Vocab fits into the BIG 6 like this, the BIG 6 fits into the highly reliable school model like this. So, everything explains where everything else fits, so people can see this is our mission, this is our vision, this is the model (*School 4, Assistant Principal*)

It is also evident that many of the decisions made about how the school will improve reading are made by teams of teachers working together.

I think within teams we're doing it well. So, individual teams – level teams, cross school teams. It's probably happening more there even than from staff meetings (*School 3, Teacher*)

...it does come back to really working together, inquiring together – and even though we probably haven't had a set model for the way our staff inquire together, they've done a really good job with that. (*School 4, Assistant Principal*)



7

AS:A LEADERSHIP ROUNDTABLE 2017 | 亞太領導圓桌會議二零一七

years on: The state of the Asian knowledge base?
年以來亞太教育領導知識基礎述評

Taipei 台北





Conditions for Learning

In each of the case study schools, resources were specifically directed towards the Reading program. Schools provided additional books, both at school in classrooms and in the library, and for home, they resourced release time for teachers to direct attention to Reading, they supported new buildings where a reading focus was included in the plan, or changed classrooms so that students were directed to the importance of Reading on a daily basis. As well relationships in the classroom became simultaneously more relaxed and more focused and the use of a common language across the school meant that progress was continuous from one grade to the next without the need for the child to learn new terminology. Typical statements about the increase of resources include:

...we've spent a lot of money on home readers so that they can continue at home as well and that everyone has a variety of books of different levels.
(School 3, Teacher)

And we have phonics we have just purchased two new programs this year that we're now trialling. So, they're willing to invest the money into these programs where we think we need to go. They've invested money to develop innovative programs (School 4, Teacher)

Classrooms became more "reading-oriented" without the need for additional resources. Each of the case study schools had changed the way in which classrooms were structured and decorated. They became less "busy" and more focused on the important elements that teachers wanted to concentrate on.

...our classrooms have been de-cluttered. And now we have the important stuff there. Every class has certain anchor charts within it, so areas of literacy, and numeracy. And each classroom is using the learning intention for each lesson. So, the kids know specifically, we're going to be doing this at school. And to show success – this is the success criteria we are looking for. There are multiple entry points for kids with all of that. The kids can see, to be successful, these are the things they need to be achieving. (School 1, Principal)



7

AS:A LEADERSHIP ROUNDTABLE 2017 | 亞太領導圓桌會議二零一七

years on: The state of the Asian knowledge base?
年以來亞太教育領導知識基礎述評

Taipei 台北





We've got comprehensive strategies. Everyone's got the same posters up in the rooms. Again, that consists of language that teachers can understand – right through – from prep to six. (*School 2, Teacher*)

I think you'd see a lot more anchor charts we've done a lot of work with that and they're not posters that are static either...kids talk about it and they can use it as a reference in the room. We're trying not to have wallpaper, have things that the kids have been contributed to and added to. In 2013, you might've seen a very busy room ...now instead of jamming our room full of everything; we like to keep it simple. (*School 5 Literacy Leader*)

Curriculum and Teaching

Since the advent of PALL/BIG 6 in the case study schools there has been a great deal of work on changing teacher practices, selecting appropriate learning programs for reading and improving ways of assessing student achievement. They are much more careful in making decisions about what criteria should be used when forming new grades for the following year. Time is taken to ensure that grades are balanced but also take into account the interests of individual students. Teachers are much more skilled at these tasks than they were previously and teaching is much more direct, explicit and focused. Case study schools have explicit ideas about the qualities that any new teachers should have to be employed in their schools. At the same time those in case study schools recognise that there is still more work to do before they have robust ways of assessing each of the elements of the BIG 6. One of the consistent responses across the case study schools was the building of a common language, typified by the following comment:

So there's a consistency across the learning in classrooms, which means we've had a transition from grade to grade, or teacher to teacher they are not starting again... there is a continuation of the language that's being used, it helps pedagogy so it's far better for the kids because it's familiar and they know what's happening, they know the process, they know how things are going and they are not going to go to another teacher next year who just does it



7

AS:A LEADERSHIP ROUNDTABLE 2017 | 亞太領導圓桌會議二零一七

years on: The state of the Asian knowledge base?
年以來亞太教育領導知識基礎述評

Taipei 台北





differently and call them all different terms. *(School 4, Principal)*

A key feature of the PALL professional learning program is the use of the BIG 6 of reading. The PALL approach does not tell teachers what methodologies to use, but argues the need that a disciplined dialogue approach should be used when choosing both methodologies and programs to use on Reading. The BIG 6 was evident in all the schools:

It [the BIG 6] is in every week. It's in every week. It's all based around those six areas. *(Teacher, School 1)*

The BIG 6 is about filling in gaps, making sure things weren't being missed within reading development... Consistency from all levels, prep to six as well ...it flows right through from prep, and I know when I get some kids up there that the language that I'm using is the same that's being used the whole way through. They're very familiar with those sort of routine expectations, activities even, some of them. *(Teacher, School 1)*

A common response across all the case study schools was that teaching reading was now done much more explicitly. This is something that is seen by principals and understood by teachers.

It's more purposeful; teachers know why they're teaching – like it's not just sitting in a guided reading group and just listening to kids read. Actually I think they know more about what they're doing and why they're doing it, they know what they are looking for, and everyone's looking in the right direction and the same direction, and focusing on the same things to learn. *(School 2, Leader)*

...more explicit teaching – they really have nailed down what does good teaching look like and what is included ...We've got our model of explicit teaching in our school *(School 4, Assistant Principal)*

...teaching is a lot more explicit and purposeful than what it was before PALL *(School 2, Teacher)*

Everything is different [from my previous school]. I remember the first few weeks, saying, "I feel like I've died and gone to heaven," and because it is a



7

AS:A LEADERSHIP ROUNDTABLE 2017 | 亞太領導圓桌會議二零一七

years on: The state of the Asian knowledge base?
年以來亞太教育領導知識基礎述評

Taipei 台北





really very special place. *(School 4, Teacher)*

Teachers perceived that their teaching of specific areas had changed after PALL.

I think things like the vocab and the fluency are now in practice because I know myself, I wasn't doing them four years ago. Before the PALL, we didn't teach vocabulary. It came up here and there and but it wasn't that explicit teaching, and it's an important thing for students to grasp and understand and keep learning. So, I think pedagogy has changed, and we've incorporated especially vocabulary and fluency. *(School 2, Teacher)*

We have had focus on feedback and guiding the children with where they can improve, praising what they have done... that's probably the main thing for me. *(School 3, Teacher)*

The PALL approach with the use of strong evidence and disciplined dialogue places a high priority on getting assessment right when it comes to making judgements about how well students are progressing, and importantly, what to do next. PALL has had an impact on the types of discussions held about assessment and what needs to be done to make sure students are progressing in each of the areas.

So, now we talk about assessment schedule... the teacher in year three knows that in year one, this student's score in reading was, and they can go back and look in their file... it provides that common treatment *(School 3, Assistant Principal)*

...the teaching is more explicit and our testing is more precise in regards to what the kids know— it is more precise. *(School 5 Literacy Leader)*

...we never actually did any kind of running record on our senior students. PALL introduced a formal measure, which looks at your comprehension, obviously your reading accuracy, your fluency, all those kind of things tie in together... We have started using the PAT reading and PAT vocab, so the upper students are doing that in September, so using that data, hopefully we put them into trends over the next couple of years. *(School 2, Teacher)*



7

AS:A LEADERSHIP ROUNDTABLE 2017 | 亞太領導圓桌會議二零一七

years on: The state of the Asian knowledge base?
年以來亞太教育領導知識基礎述評

Taipei 台北





In summary, since the advent of PALL/BIG 6 in the case study schools there has been a great deal of work on changing teacher practices, selecting appropriate learning programs for reading and improving ways of assessing student achievement. Teachers are much more skilled at these tasks than they were previously and teaching is much more direct, explicit and focused.

Parent and Community Engagement

The case study schools recognise the difficulties inherent in encouraging parental involvement and have nevertheless used different strategies to encourage parents to be involved in reading activity, both within the school and also at home with their child. Some schools have recognised the need for establishing partnerships with other community agencies, and particularly local kindergartens and other pre-schools as a means of supporting reading improvements in their own school. There is ample evidence that schools are attempting to communicate with parents, train parents to be involved in reading with their children and have come up with innovative ways to improve this home school relationship as it applies to reading. However, as will all other studies that precede it, the current case studies recognise that this continues to be a pressure point when it comes to improving children's reading skills and are taking steps to become even more proactive in the future.

We always struggle with getting the amount of parents in. You always get the ones that don't need it so much as the ones that don't turn up... (School 1, Principal)

...overwhelmingly, when I talk to parents, that they have a whole lot of trust in our teaching staff to the point that it could almost work against us because they almost do that, "It's such a good school. They do such a good job there. I'll just pop in and smile every now and then I don't really need to be involved." And sometimes they have so much faith, they don't question, they don't get as involved but then I think when you compare it to other schools, we're probably at the higher end. (School 4, Principal)



7

AS:A LEADERSHIP ROUNDTABLE 2017 | 亞太領導圓桌會議二零一七

years on: The state of the Asian knowledge base?
年以來亞太教育領導知識基礎述評

Taipei 台北





I have great feedback from parents as in, “Wow, that was really great,” (School 4, Teacher)

Each of the possibilities listed above misses the essential nub of the issue which was identified by one teacher, namely that the problem with all the reasons identified above might be overcome by providing parents with better information about how important their role is in supporting their child to read and by then providing them with quality advice on how to do this.

I think they underestimate the power they have too, that they don't understand that even just talking to their child and asking them about things makes such a huge difference. They think – oh, well, that doesn't make any difference but it actually does and they don't understand that that can be important. (School 4, Teacher)

But schools were providing information on the BIG 6 in a range of different ways:

We also put it [BIG 6] in our powerpoint for the information for parent helpers and then they're told about components of BIG 6. (School 3, Assistant Principal)

We have parent information sessions for the start of the year and we went into the skills of reading and the phonics and the comprehension strategies. So we're trying to make them aware of what we're doing and what they can do with their child at home because they're as much part of the learning journey as we are. (School 2, Teacher)

The BIG 6, I could say in the 2014 and 2015, newsletter was prominent “BIG 6, this is what it means. This is what it's about, please talk to your kids.” (School 5, principal)

...with the parent newsletter we've insisted that at the beginning of each term there is a BIG 6 component in it and that's got better and better each time. (School 3, Assistant Principal)

Two factors, good explicit advice, and openness, may well be a starting point for any school seeking to improve relationships with their parents and local community.



7

AS:A LEADERSHIP ROUNDTABLE 2017 | 亞太領導圓桌會議二零一七

years on: The state of the Asian knowledge base?
年以來亞太教育領導知識基礎述評

Taipei 台北





We have to be more explicit. So in the IELP's to say listen to your child read out loud each night because parents have a tendency to think, "Well, they're reading, so therefore, they're okay and they're strong readers," but then when we test them, their fluency isn't at the level it should be. So it's about re-educating parents that yes, they're competent readers and they can read, but the importance of them listening to them read out loud. (School 3, Teacher)

I can say that compared to my previous school there really is just that open-door policy here where parents do feel that they can approach the teacher and also I noticed as well, particularly with the reading, they've made some comments about teacher's selection of the book that the child might be taking home. There's just a lot more element of trust, I believe. (School 4, Teacher)

But a final piece of advice from one Principal needs to be remembered. We cannot make assumptions about what people think and what they know. It is only through a genuine two-way conversation that parents will be more likely to get involved.

Don't assume that parents know. I assumed that parents knew how to read a book to the child. I don't anymore. But I assumed that. And one of the sessions when I was introducing how to use the talk and playback with the parents, at the end when I said, "Is there any question?" one of the parents said, "Am I allowed to read these books to my three-year-old as well?" And it was like the penny dropping for me because I just expected that they would and that they understood. And they said, "Because they're school books. So can we only read them to the school kids?" And I went, "No, read it to everybody". That's really important. But I just assumed that a parent would understand that. I don't, now. So, it's a continual learning journey for everyone. (School 1, Principal)

In summary, the case study schools recognise the difficulties inherent in encouraging parental involvement and have nevertheless used a range of different strategies to encourage parents to be involved in reading activity, both within the school and also at home with their child.



7

AS:A LEADERSHIP ROUNDTABLE 2017 | 亞太領導圓桌會議二零一七

years on: The state of the Asian knowledge base?
年以來亞太教育領導知識基礎述評

Taipei 台北



Shared Leadership

There is a great deal of evidence of shared leadership in the case study schools. It is clear that school leaders have accepted the understanding that leadership of the school is an activity rather than a position. It is also clear that the teachers have embraced the leadership offered to them, through teams and individual leadership of various activities within the school.

So [principal] was the initial facilitator of it. Then it became my role and then he became a support person to me through my PD and then it became a leaders of units role to help drive it in units – so it's that siphon down effect basically. *(School 5, Literacy Leader)*

But that's a partnership now rather than them telling us. *(School 4, Teacher)*

I would say that most of the teacher practice stuff – it's now coming from the teachers in the teaching team, most definitely. And a lot of the determining of where we want to go and what we want to focus on is very much coming from the teaching teams as well. *(Teacher, School 1)*

"This is our journey. These are programs we have chosen to use. So, I think we've taken ownership of the areas and then now saying this is oral language we've all seen this as the next step. *(School 4, Teacher)*

What also came across in the interviews in case study schools is that the passion shown by school leaders for improving Reading, the knowledge gained by them in how this might be done from PALL, and the mutual trust between leaders and teachers are clear elements that support the leadership for learning approach adopted by PALL.

[The principal] sort of brought of all of these things to the staff. I mean I'd never heard of any of them until she brought them in and went, "Hey, this is something I've become aware of. It seems like a great idea." What do we all think? *(Teacher, School 1)*



7

AS:A LEADERSHIP ROUNDTABLE 2017 | 亞太領導圓桌會議二零一七

years on: The state of the Asian knowledge base?
年以來亞太教育領導知識基礎述評

Taipei 台北





...they [Principal and Assistant Principal] model it. They model passion for reading for the children (*School 3, Teacher*)

[Principal]'s done a great job just putting together the leadership team just developing the new younger leaders and getting them across FISO and that then filters down to the area leaders so that is clearly happening and it has been very gentle and very supportive. (*School 3, Assistant Principal*)

I came from a school that was very regimented. Everybody did it the same way and we were all robots. So it's great here because the Principal and Assistant Principal trust the staff to go and implement it in their way knowing that it is going to get done anyway. (*School 4, Teacher*)

It is also evident that the long term focus on developing leadership within the school and the steady, stable and consistent leadership over the years between when the process started and when the interviews took place have also been a factor in promoting the PALL/BIG 6 approach in the case study schools. The school leaders are the same ones that started the process, they have maintained a commitment to PALL and the BIG 6 and they have trusted others in their school enough to let go of some of the key leadership decisions that would result in successful school improvement. It is interesting to note at this stage that the one previous case study school that did not respond to our request to be part of this conversation, is one that lost both the principal and an assistant principal in between the first case study and the current one. We therefore are unable to say that this school is even still using PALL or the BIG 6, whereas for the five schools in the current study, longevity of leadership and a passion for the program have obviously been key elements of any success.

Overall Findings

1. PALL had a positive impact on the school leaders that attended the program and the BIG 6 made sense when it came to considering ways to improve Reading.



7

AS:A LEADERSHIP ROUNDTABLE 2017 | 亞太領導圓桌會議二零一七

years on: The state of the Asian knowledge base?
年以來亞太教育領導知識基礎述評

Taipei 台北



2. The use of PALL and the BIG 6 had a positive impact on student engagement in Reading, enabled students to become more articulate about what and how they were learning to read and provided evidence from both NAPLAN and school-based assessments, that students were performing at higher levels than before PALL was introduced.
3. Each of the case study schools was able to articulate ways in which the school had considered the elements of the Leadership for Learning Blueprint, even though they might not have specifically addressed the diagram used. Case study schools were able to articulate a Shared Moral Purpose, they were more efficient in collecting and analysing data to use when making decisions about Reading and were more effective in their professional conversations related to this data. The LFLB elements of professional development, attending to the conditions for learning, making curriculum and teaching practice decisions about Reading, encouraging active parent and community engagement with the school to support reading and sharing leadership were all evident in the case study schools.
4. All case study schools recognised the important role that the Victorian Principals Association (VPA) played in supporting and promoting PALL, not only through the professional learning modules but also through the state conferences and the website.
5. Critical elements associated with improvements in Reading included:
 - Perseverance - Case study schools had been testing, adapting and using the PALL/BIG 6 for more than three years
 - Professional conversations were far more frequent and focused than had previously been the case
 - There was a high level of trust generated by all people in the school. This enabled a shared leadership approach to occur easily.



7

AS&A LEADERSHIP ROUNDTABLE 2017 | 亞太領導圓桌會議二零一七

years on: The state of the Asian knowledge base?
 年以來亞太教育領導知識基礎述評

Taipei 台北





Implications

Some implications of the study for the Department, the VPA and schools include:

- Develop longer timelines for judging success of new developments
- Value all voices
- Foster and support trusting relationships
- Share ideas about best practices
- Foster professional learning of all people in the school
- Foster the development of leadership skills for all people in the school
- Promote exemplary practices and activities beyond the school

Conclusion

The case study has demonstrated clearly that with perseverance, leadership and focus, that individual schools can develop a long term strategy for improving reading performance in their school. It is also clear that leadership has been the key in all schools. The role of the principal has not been lessened but the leadership of others has expanded. Leadership characteristics that count include:

- an absolute commitment to improving student reading and a passionate way of sharing this goal;
- the ability to develop positive trusting relationships across the school, fostering leader-teacher, teacher-teacher and teacher-student relationships based on communication, and mutual support;
- the leader has remained in the school since the project commenced, but has enabled much of the responsibility for what happens to be passed over to others, thus ensuring that the whole school is part of the process;



7

AS&A LEADERSHIP ROUNDTABLE 2017 | 亞太領導圓桌會議二零一七

years on: The state of the Asian knowledge base?
年以來亞太教育領導知識基礎述評

Taipei 台北





- the ability of the leader to "let go" and allow other people to take responsibility for some of the work done. The case study schools could be considered exemplars of shared leadership;
- leaders see themselves as fortunate to have a staff that was willing to have a go and are willing to try things, test them out and to "play with things" for a while in order to move towards best practice.

The case study schools are all exemplars of what might be done, with focus, time and commitment being used as a means of improving teaching practices, relationships and environmental conditions in ways that encourage higher levels of student engagement and achievement in reading.



7

AS:A LEADERSHIP ROUNDTABLE 2017 | 亞太領導圓桌會議二零一七

years on: The state of the Asian knowledge base?
年以來亞太教育領導知識基礎述評

Taipei 台北



References

Australian Primary Principals Association (APPA). (2013). *Principals as literacy leaders (Project Extension No 1) Final Report*. Kingston, ACT: APPA.

Dempster, N., Konza, D., Robson, G., Gaffney, M., Lock G., & McKennarley, K. (2012). *Principals as literacy leaders: Confident, credible and connected*. Kingston, ACT: Australian Primary Principals Association.

Dempster, N., Lovett, S., & Flückiger, B. (2011). *Strategies to develop school leadership: A select literature review*. Melbourne: Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership.

Dempster, N., Johnson, G., & Stevens, E. (2014). *The Principals as Literacy Leaders (PALL) Project, Final Report*. Griffith Institute for Educational Research, Brisbane: Griffith University.

Dempster, N., Townsend, T., Johnson, G., Bayetto, A., Lovett, S., & Stevens, E. (2017). *Leadership and literacy: Principals, partnerships and pathways to improvement*. New York, NY: Springer.

Hallinger, P., & Heck, R. (1998). Exploring the principal's contribution to school effectiveness 1980 – 1995. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 9, 157-191.

Hattie, J.A.C. (2003, December). *Teachers make a difference: What is the research evidence?* Keynote presentation at the Building Teacher Quality, Australian Council of Educational Research Annual Conference, Melbourne.

Hattie, J. (2009). *Visible learning: A synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement*. London, UK: Routledge.

Hord, S. M. (1997). *Professional learning communities: Communities of continuous inquiry and improvement*. Austin, Texas: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory. Retrieved from <http://www.sedl.org/pubs/catalog/11Fens/Ch34.html>

Johnson, G., Dempster, N., McKenzie, L., Klieve, H., Fluckiger, B., Lovett, S., Riley, T., & Webster, A. (2014). *Principals as literacy leaders with Indigenous communities: Leadership for learning to read – 'Both ways'*. Canberra: The Australian Primary Principals Association.

Leithwood, K., Day, C., Sammons, P., Harris, A., & Hopkins, D. (2006). *Seven strong claims about successful school leadership*. Nottingham: National College for School Leadership.



7

AS:A LEADERSHIP ROUNDTABLE 2017 | 亞太領導圓桌會議二零一七

years on: The state of the Asian knowledge base?
年以來亞太教育領導知識基礎述評

Taipei 台北



NAPLAN (2008). National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy: Achievement in Reading, Writing, Language Conventions and Numeracy: 2008 National Report. Retrieved from http://www.nap.edu.au/_resources/2ndStageNationalReport_18Dec_v2.pdf

NAPLAN (2009). National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy: Achievement in Reading, Writing, Language Conventions and Numeracy: 2009 National Report. Retrieved from https://www.nap.edu.au/_resources/NAPLAN_2009_National_Report.pdf

NAPLAN (2010). National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy: Achievement in Reading, Writing, Language Conventions and Numeracy: National Report for 2010. Retrieved from https://www.nap.edu.au/_resources/NAPLAN_2010_National_Report.pdf

Robinson, V. A. C. (2007). *School leadership and student outcomes: Identifying what works*. Winmalee: Australian Council for Educational Leadership.

Seashore-Louis, K., Leithwood, K., Wahlstrom, K. L., & Anderson, S. E. (2010). *Learning from leadership. Investigating the links to improved student learning. Final report of research to Wallace Foundation*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota.

Thomson, S., De Bortoli, L., Nicholas, M., Hillman, K., & Buckley, S. (2011). *Challenges for Australian education: Results from PISA 2009: The PISA 2009 assessment of students' reading, mathematical and scientific literacy*. Victoria, Australia: ACER Press.

Townsend, T., Dempster, N., Johnson, G., Bayetto, A., & Stevens, E. (2015). *Leadership with a purpose: A report on five case studies of Principals as Literacy Leaders (PALL) schools (Tasmania)*. Brisbane: Griffith Institute for Educational Research, Griffith University.

Townsend, T., Wilkinson, J., & Stevens, E. (2015). *Leadership with a purpose: A report on four case studies of Principals as Literacy Leaders (PALL) schools (Victoria)*. Brisbane: Griffith Institute for Educational Research, Griffith University.

Wei, R. C., Darling-Hammond, L., Andree, A., Richardson, N., & Orphanos, S. (2009). *Professional learning in the learning profession: A status report on teacher development in the United States and abroad*. Dallas, TX: National Staff Development Council.



7

AS:A LEADERSHIP ROUNDTABLE 2017 | 亞太領導圓桌會議二零一七

years on: The state of the Asian knowledge base?
年以來亞太教育領導知識基礎述評

Taipei 台北

