



Principals Leading Literacy in Secondary Schools

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This paper 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 learning.

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 style project to enable Principals to take a key role in leading literacy learning. 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 paper 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.

