

Implementing Literacy Leadership: A Case Study

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The purpose of this paper is to report on the effects of a program of professional learning called Principals as Literacy Leaders (PALL) in Primary Schools in Australia (Dempster, Konza, Robson, Gaffney, Lock & McKennarney (2012). This leadership project commenced with a professional learning program for principals working on five modules combining two areas of knowledge and understanding: (i) what it takes to connect leadership with learning and (ii) what it takes to learn to read. Each of the modules was research-based and aimed at creating shared understanding of the strategies needed to enable leadership teams to take action in their local contexts. The specific focus of the paper is the impact of work undertaken in one Australian school with a very low socio-economic index, by the Principal, his Deputy and two teachers to improve early years' children's reading during 2014.

A process of research and development was undertaken in the Case Study school using interviews conducted by University researchers with the Principal and Deputy Principal together, and similarly, with the two teachers involved in implementing agreed action to improve children's Oral Language as an essential foundation for children struggling to read. These data gathering methods were supplemented with student surveys, pre- and post-program Oral Language screening results as well as samples of early and later Oral Language inspired work samples. The University researchers made four visits to the school, one each term to gather data which they returned in report form to the school after each visit. The school team then discussed the reports and undertook to adjust or modify their Oral Language program in the light of the information provided.

In writing up the case, three research questions were addressed:

- i. What were the effects of the school's planned leadership actions on teachers and their teaching?
- ii. What were the effects of the school's planned leadership actions on students and their learning?
- iii. What were the effects of the school's planned leadership actions on student achievement?

Findings are presented for each of these questions, showing the leadership actions taken by the principal and teachers using the outcomes of the research and development process. These included research informed long-term planning for oral language development across the school, enhanced teacher knowledge about oral language development and its links with reading, increased enthusiasm and improved confidence to engage in verbal exchanges by at risk children, the use of more sophisticated language in conversation, notable improvement in language screening results, enhanced exchanges about the importance of oral language and reading with parents and encouraging evidence of conversations at home between children and their parents about their school experiences.

Overall, it is clear from the data analysed, that there was a direct impact of the PALL program and its research and development process, on the way leadership was shared amongst the Case Study team. To conclude the paper, a series of implications that principals and teachers keen on pursuing improvements in reading might well consider, are offered.



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