Principals as Literacy Leaders

Principals *as* **LITERACY LEADERS**

APPA

Australian Primary
Principals Association

MODULE 1:
LEADING LEARNING
WHAT DOES IT TAKE?

1

Revised and extended by:

Griffith University
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Principals As Literacy Leaders

Module 1

Leading Learning – What does it take?

Revised and extended by:

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From original resource material developed by:

The Australian Primary Principals Association

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as part of the Principals as Literacy Leaders Pilot Project 2009

Principles Informing the Development of PALL Modules

- Values and builds on the knowledge and experience of the principals

- Facilitates the sharing of principals' expertise, both with each other and with their school communities

- Introduces the principals to relevant theoretical understandings and classroom practices grounded in evidence-based research

- Encourages principals to critically reflect on their practice and on issues surrounding the teaching of literacy in their schools

- Includes an ICT element where relevant

- Reflects standards as appropriate

- Links to recent research, reports and policy documents

- Addresses the diverse needs of the principals (eg degree of experience, level of expertise, rural/metropolitan, high NESB population)

- Includes a variety of activities and resources (workshop activities, discussions, notes on session format, readings, powerpoint presentations, web links, video clips, lists of resources, etc)

- Written in language that is appropriate for this audience.

Overview of module

This module opens up what constitutes effective leadership for learning based on recent meta-analyses of leadership research. The purpose of participation is to arm Principals with the necessary knowledge to enable them to take action in key leadership priority areas known to help them to lead learning effectively. The outcome of discussion and activity with participating Principals should be a commitment to ascertaining how key leadership priority areas can be identified, highlighted and applied with a concentration on literacy learning in their particular school environments.

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Planned Learning Outcomes

On completion of this module, it is anticipated that Principals will:

1. understand significant outcomes of research into leadership, particularly as they apply to what leaders can do to contribute to improved student learning;
2. personalise a leadership for learning blueprint which provides a framework for organised action to enhance literacy learning in their schools;
3. analyse factors which facilitate or inhibit the application of the blueprint in their schools;
4. lead professional conversations in 'disciplined dialogue' based on qualitative and quantitative data; and
5. identify priority areas from the blueprint around which they can commence 'disciplined dialogue' on return to their schools.

SUMMARY OF SESSIONS

SESSION 1
Leadership for Learning: What the research says

In this first session, Principals will complete a Personal Leadership Profile and they will be introduced to three fundamentals of leadership, a working definition and summaries of five recent research studies into the links between leadership and learning. All of these activities highlight what contemporary research underscores as significant areas for leadership action if student learning and achievement is to be maintained and improved. The goal here is to encourage discussion about a set of leadership action domains or priority areas firmly grounded in the research. Principals will be asked to identify these domains during the presentation, noting up to five that would 'speak' strongly to them and those working with them in their schools.

In a discussion group of five or six, participants will share the 'domains' they have identified and explanations of why they are considered important for leadership in their schools, no matter their demographic characteristics. They will be asked to combine the outcomes of their discussion in a list of no more than six of these leadership 'domains'.

These will be compared with a *Leadership for Learning Blueprint* which draws heavily on the findings of Vivian Robinson's and the OECD's meta-analytical studies, but also on concepts such as a shared mission, the broad distribution of leadership and 'disciplined dialogue'. These concepts have their sources in the work of the NCSL and the Cambridge Leadership for Learning Network. The goal is to present a *Leadership for Learning Blueprint* applied to literacy learning which Principals will be asked to take on in common and apply throughout the project.

The task for Regional Leadership Consultants (RLCs) and Principals towards the end of this session, and following the workshop, is to 'personalise and contextualise' the *Blueprint*, taking into account knowledge of themselves as school leaders, the needs of their teachers and students and the existing contribution of parents and others to learning in the school.

The *Blueprint* unashamedly illustrates a position which emphasises the moral purpose of leadership, the need for leadership to be both broadly and deeply distributed in schools, the powerful influence on teachers of Principals' active participation in professional learning, curriculum coordination and monitoring, the key role played by parents and members of the wider community in supporting learning and the centrality of disciplined dialogue stimulated by finely focused and relevant qualitative and quantitative data.

SESSION 2
Applying the Leadership for Learning Blueprint to Literacy

The second session will ask Principals to enter into discussion about the nature and characteristics of their schools and the extent to which their leadership is directed towards the imperatives put forward in the *Leadership for Learning Blueprint.*

The driving questions for the discussion are:

(i)   in which of the *Leadership for Learning Blueprint* priority areas are there already well established and visible actions related to literacy in your school and what evidence would you cite in support of your claim?

(ii)   in which of the blueprint's priority areas do you consider that you have well developed capabilities and why?

(iii)   on which priority area or areas do you believe you need to take concerted action (personally or with others at school level) over the next three months? What sort of action and why?

(iv)   how might you make use of this instrument with staff members in your school?

Participants will be provided with a self-reflective assessment instrument to enable them to record responses to the four questions. These will be grounded, in part, on their analysis of the qualitative and quantitative data reported in School Profiles. Groups of two or three will be formed to discuss and determine ways in which the instrument can be used with members of staff so that self-assessments and their justifications are able to be shared. The benefits of an in-school discussion of this kind should be listed. This discussion will be included as part of Session 3 in which 'disciplined dialogue' will be practised.

The outcome of Session 2 should be a deeper understanding of the relationship between school context and leadership action as well as a sharing of possible strategies for the use of the *Blueprint.*

SESSION 3
Leading 'Disciplined Dialogue'

Session 3 will employ qualitative and quantitative data to stimulate 'disciplined dialogue' about each of the dimensions of the Leadership for Literacy Learning Blue Print.

Principals will engage in professional conversations based on sample evidence about the conditions of learning, shared leadership, the monitoring of teaching, professional development and parent and wider community involvement in literacy learning in the school.

They will practise using three central questions in constructing disciplined dialogue concentrating on being systematic or 'disciplined' while being focused or 'disciplined' about directing the outcomes of discussion towards the improvement of learning and achievement – the moral purpose of schools and school leaders.

They will develop an understanding that the term 'disciplined' is used in at least two ways:

(i)   being measured and systematic; and

(ii)   maintaining a concentration on improvements for children.

By the end of this session, Principals should feel well prepared to apply this generic leadership strategy in their schools. In other words, they should feel able to lead professional conversations using 'disciplined dialogue' in their schools, commencing with the application of strategies related to the *Blueprint* developed in Session 2.

SESSION 4
Follow-up Tasks

The final session in Module 1 sets out expectations for two follow up tasks to be negotiated and completed by each of the Principals through discussions with Regional Leadership Consultants (RLCs) and school staff.

(i)   the discussion and compilation of a School Profile using a *'School Profile Template'*;

         and

(ii)   the discussion with teachers of data gathered through the Blueprint assessment instrument encountered in Session 2.

Timelines for these tasks will be the subject of meetings between Principals and RLCs.

Relevant Standards that inform this Module

Leadership capabilities that contribute to improved student learning and achievement combine as standards to inform Module 1. These are derived from the *Leadership for Learning Blueprint* and are contained in the Principals' Personal Leadership Profile instrument referred to above.

Readings

There are seven readings included in Module 1. These are listed below. However, following the workshop, it is recommended that participants read at least Chapter 2 of the OECD Report (Reading 1, especially pp 44 to 60).

Reading 1
OECD (2008) *Improving School Leadership*, Switzerland, Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development.

Reading 2
Robinson, V. (2007) *School Leadership and Student Outcomes: Identifying What Works and Why*, Winmalee, NSW, Australian Council for Educational Leaders.

Reading 3
MacBeath and Dempster (2009) [Eds] *Connecting Leadership and Learning: Principles for Practice*, London, Routledge.

Reading 4
NCSL (2006) *Seven Strong Claims about Successful School Leadership*, Nottingham, National Council for School Leadership.

Reading 5
ACER (2009) *Highly Effective Practices for Continuous Improvement in Student Leaning*, Australian Council for Educational Research, Melbourne.

Reading 6
Patterson and Rolheiser (2009) *13 Parameters: A literacy Leadership Toolkit*, Canada, Pearson International.

Reading 7
Robinson, V., Hohepa, M. and Lloyd, C. (2009) *School Leadership and Student Outcomes: Identifying What Works and Why*, Best Evidence Synthesis Iteration [BES], New Zealand Ministry of Education, Wellington.

Relevant Reports or Policy Documents

Two recent reports prepared by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) will provide useful background on student achievement analyses. The first reports on the Program of International Student Assessment (PISA); the second on the international Trends in Mathematics and Science Study (TIMMS). References to differences in performance by students from low SES environments and of students from indigenous cultures are instructive. Web links are included below.

An address to the 2008 Annual Conference of the Australian Association for Education Research (ACER) by Professor Barry McGaw, Chair of the National Curriculum Board, helps to put the outcomes of the two studies above into context over the decade they have been conducted. Again, a web link for this resource is included below.

NAPLAN reports relevant to different state and territory contexts are important to the PALL Project and specific aspects from them will be included in School Profiles.

Related Web Links

- The Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER)
- The Australian Association for Educational Research (AARE)
- The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL)
- The National College for School Leadership (NCSL), the United Kingdom

Resources Needed

PowerPoint slides and paper copies, where appropriate, of:

(i)   a self-assessment instrument to record participants' personal leadership profiles;

(ii)   the purpose of Module 1 and its two sessions;

(iii)   three fundamentals of leadership and a definition

(iv)   summaries of the key elements of the five research reports and journal articles included in Module 1;

(v)   a *Leadership for Learning Blueprint* in diagrammatic form with explanations;

(vi)   discussion Questions for Session 1;

(vii)   a recording sheet for Session 1;

(viii) discussion Questions for Session 2;

(ix)   a recording sheet for Session 2;

(x)   examples of qualitative and quantitative data to stimulate 'disciplined dialogue' for each of the dimensions of the *Leadership for Literacy Learning Blueprint*;

(xi)   the 2 tasks on return to schools following the Module 1 workshop.

Follow-up Activity

The workshop has been designed to provide only an introduction to the *Leadership for Literacy Learning Blueprint* and the priority areas on which enhanced capabilities for leading learning in the school should be based. Locking these in will be an important task over the following three months so that Principals:

(i)   concentrate their efforts on checking and attending to their own personal leadership capabilities and those of their teachers;

(ii)   focus on improving understanding of key factors in learning in the school;

(iii)   complete the two post workshop tasks asked of them.

Principals should discuss the *Leadership for Literacy Learning Blueprint*, its priority areas and the actions they feel are necessary and justified with Regional Leadership Consultants (RLCs) and staff in a cooperative and measured way. No specific action should be taken prematurely on literacy learning until such time as there have been comprehensive discussions about the school data on student achievement. Only then should key areas for intervention action be developed. This kind of evidence-based analysis will be the focus of Module 3.

For example, if there is an acknowledged difficulty with ongoing professional development in literacy learning, then planning the practical steps to improve the situation and how the Principal himself or herself will play an active role in the process must be collectively agreed.

If there is no 'leadership density', that is, if there is no clearly defined way in which teachers are acknowledged and involved as active literacy leaders, then steps to change practice need to be determined.

If there are limited data available in the school, say, not much beyond those from national standardised tests, then determining the areas from the *Blueprint* about which added data would be beneficial is necessary if *disciplined dialogue* is to be stimulated and supported; and so on.

Each Principal will be likely to identify a different domain of the *Leadership for Literacy Learning Blueprint* to which to give attention in partnership with members of staff in the first instance. The practicalities of schools and knowledge from school improvement research (Hopkins, Mortimore, MacBeath and others) show the wisdom of focusing efforts on only a few action priorities.

Getting staff and student '**buy in**' (and parent support where necessary) is essential if commitment to action is to be high during the PALL Project.

'**Buy in**' is an intended outcome of follow up activities in all schools following the first workshop. It will continue to be prominent in subsequent workshops later in the year.

Session Format and Notes

Introductory Activity – 15 minutes

Setting the Scene
The presenter will commence the session with an outline of its purposes and a brief explanation of the way it will run. The relationship of Session 1 to Sessions 2, 3 and 4 will also be explained using relevant PowerPoint slides.

Completing a Personal Leadership Profile
The presenter should then distribute a self-assessment instrument and explain its purposes. These complement the purposes of the School Profiles which are carried in the items on the School Profiling Template. Participants should then take ten minutes to complete their personal profiles. The presenter will collect the Personal Leadership Profiles for later use by Principals in discussions with their Regional Leadership Consultants (RLCs).

The recording sheet designed to accompany the Research Input activity to follow should now be distributed. This recording sheet provides space for participants to write key leadership practices known to affect student learning.

Research Input – 20 minutes

What are the links between leadership and learning?
Input from the presenter commences with the explanation of three fundamentals of leadership, *purpose*, *context* and *agency*, why these are foundational and how they contribute to the leadership definition that underpins the PALL Project:

> *School leaders, understanding and harnessing the contexts in which they operate, mobilise and work with others to articulate and achieve shared intentions that enhance learning and the lives of learners (following MacBeath and Dempster, 2009 and Leithwood and Riehl, 2003).*

The presenter, using a series of PowerPoint slides, then explains the results of five meta-analytical studies into the connections between leadership and learning. During the presentation, participants are asked to note up to five of the findings that 'speak' loudly to them as important for leadership in their own contexts. These they should note on the recording sheet with which they have been provided.

Group Discussion – 35 minutes

What are the findings that link leadership and learning?
Participants are asked by the presenter to form groups of six, to select a 'scribe' and to undertake the following task:

(i)   spend 20 minutes going around the group to hear the five findings each participant has recorded. An easy way to do this is to ask one person to take the lead and to explain his or her five. Then others in the group follow in turn, adding findings that are different from those already raised. The scribe should record the group's overall list.

(ii)   spend the next 20 minutes in a group discussion seeking agreement on five or six findings from the overall list which seem to distill the most important aspects linking leadership and learning.

(iii)   spend the last 5 minutes refining what is to be written on the summary sheet provided, so that the scribe is ready to report to the whole group. The summary sheet uses the following stem:

> ***Leading learning to improve outcomes for students involves/ requires/ takes:***
> *………………………………………………………….………………………………………………………*
> *………………………………………………………………………………………....................................*

Plenary Activity – 20 minutes

A Leadership for Literacy Learning Blueprint
For the first 10 minutes, the presenter asks three of the scribes to read the group summaries, followed by a call for comments from the other scribes if there are particular aspects not mentioned which they believe should be included. Key domains of leadership for learning are summarised by the presenter.

In the last 10 minutes of this session the presenter uses a *Leadership for Literacy Learning Blueprint* prepared earlier on the relevant PowerPoint slide. It applies key domains or priority areas known to be important for the application of leadership for learning to literacy learning.

Session Format and Notes

Introductory Activity – 5 minutes

Setting the Scene
The presenter explains that this session starts with individual reflection on school contexts and the areas of the *Leadership for Literacy Learning Blueprint* which Principals feel are prominent or otherwise in their schools. They do this by responding to a general question, namely, **How strongly is this dimension (eg making connections with parents and wider community members) evident in my school?** Ratings on a ten point scale are recorded on an instrument distributed by the presenter. This instrument is an elaborated version of the *Leadership for Literacy Learning Blueprint* produced after Session 1.

Individual Reflection – 25 minutes

Three questions are used to stimulate personal reflection. These are included on the self-assessment instrument:

(i)   *Where are our strengths in implementing the leadership for Literacy Learning Blueprint in the school and what evidence do I have of them?*

For this question, participants are asked to record a personal judgment based on knowledge of their school context and on their personal experience of it. They should also record why they have formed the views they have. Spaces to write judgments and reasons are available adjacent to each of the conceptual domains or priority areas on the *Leadership for Literacy Learning Blueprint* recording sheet.

(ii)   *To which of the domains or priority areas should we now turn our attention?*

For this second question, participants are asked to record their responses in the box at the foot of the instrument together with the reasons for their judgment.

Note: At this point, participants should be encouraged <u>not</u> to jump forward into solutions or strategies for action.

(iii)   *How might I use this instrument with teachers back at school?*

For the third question, participants are asked to suggest ways in which the instrument they have completed themselves might be used to stimulate in-school discussions.

Group Discussion – 45 minutes

Possible Strategies to aid in-school discussion of the Leadership for Learning Blueprint
The presenter will take five minutes to call the participants together and to form groups of five or six across districts.

For the next 20 minutes, groups are asked to conduct a fairly free ranging discussion of why the domain or priority area noted at the foot of the recording sheet is so significant in the leadership of their schools, sharing their knowledge and views from personal experience.

For the last 10 minutes, participants are asked to put forward some ideas for action or strategies they believe would enable them to make use of the *Blueprint* instrument with members of staff at their schools.

Plenary Activity – 15 minutes

Priority Areas and Possible Strategies
The presenter conducts a whole group reporting session asking a selected number of participants to report on:

(i) the domains or priority areas considered in need of concerted action; and
(ii) ideas or strategies that might be used to focus discussion at school level on the Leadership for *Literacy Learning Blueprint* with a view to helping move the school forward.

The presenter will conclude the session by indicating that the *Leadership for Literacy Learning Blueprint* recording sheets should be kept by participants and used as a focus for discussion with Regional Leadership Consultants (RLCs) back in their schools. The matters on the recording sheet may be adjusted in consultation with Regional Leadership Consultants (RLCs) to become 'tools' for staff discussion to begin the process of '*buy in*' for particular ideas or strategies that will be seen as well matched to the school's context.

Session Format and Notes

Introductory 'Disciplined Dialogue' Practise

This session introduces participants to the specifics of 'Disciplined Dialogue' as the major strategy to assist them to gather and use sound evidence about aspects of children's literacy learning and achievement. The reasons why the discussion technique is referred to as '<u>disciplined</u>' are explained.

The session commences with a structured discussion, in groups of six, of sample quantitative data drawn from a context outside the school gates – a community sports club. Participants are introduced to three generic questions around which 'Disciplined Dialogue' is constructed. They follow a structured 15 minute discussion schedule to arrive at responses to the three questions:

(i)   What are we seeing here?

(ii)   Why are we seeing what we are?

(iii)   What if anything should we be doing about it?

Following the discussion, the presenter calls on different groups to respond to a question each, staring with Question 1 (10 minutes).

Having done this, the presenter points out the distinctive features of the three sets of responses (5 minutes).

Question (i) calls for accurate descriptions of what is, that is, the situation <u>now</u>.

Question (ii) calls for reasons particular patterns of data are being seen. Reasons are more likely to be forthcoming when those discussing the data are familiar with the context (a clear acknowledgement of professional experience).

Question (iii) calls for the proposal of possible actions which are focused on confirming <u>what is</u> or recommending <u>changes</u> (a clear acknowledgement of professional judgement).

The Practice Session concludes with a reprise on why the 'Disciplined Dialogue' strategy is considered central to the *Leadership for Learning Blueprint* (using the relevant PowerPoint slide).

The remainder of Session 3 (60 minutes) involves participants in structured discussions stimulated by quantitative and qualitative data about elements of the *Leadership for Learning Blueprint* as follows:

- Student achievement;
- Professional Development;
- Connections with Parents and the Community;
- The Conditions for Learning;
- Curriculum Coordination;
- Shared leadership; and
- School vision and directions.

Sample data sets are employed for each of these dimensions as are structured and timed discussions using variations of the generic 'Disciplined Dialogue' questions. Participants are allocated two fifteen minute discussions from the list above with work sheets to follow.

At the end of the discussion period, a summary of two benefits and two problems associated with the school use of 'Disciplined Dialogue' by Principals will be produced by each group (10 minutes).

The session will be brought to a close (5 minutes) by the presenter by calling on five or six groups to report their lists of benefits and problems. All summary lists will be collected and collated by the presenter for later use by the participants.

SESSION 4

Tasks Following Module 1 *(60 mins)*

Session Format and Notes

The presenter uses part of this time to outline the two follow up tasks expected of Principals on return to their schools (5 minutes). Reasons for this expectation are advanced. Both tasks are designed to be undertaken in consultation with Regional Leadership Consultants (RLCs).

Task 1: Making use of the *Leadership for Literacy Learning Blueprint* as a focus of staff discussion.

Task 2: Developing a School Profile using agreed aspects from a School Profiling Template.

Task 3: Reflecting on the results of the Personal Leadership Profile (PLP).

RLCs will lead a District group discussion (45 minutes) of the three tasks and the support they will offer their Principals for their completion. Timelines and contacts will be shared and agreed.

Closure

A brief closing summary of the four sessions is provided by the presenter using the relevant PowerPoint slide which emphasises the themes running through the Module.

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