What Works.
The Work Program: CORE ISSUES 11

What Works. The Work Program is a set of resources designed to help schools and those who work in them improve outcomes for Indigenous students. The 'Core issues' series is an attempt to distil some topic-based key directions for practical action.

Principals as leaders in literacy

A strategy for literacy improvement in primary schools

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In this paper Dr Munro offers a framework for identifying, in a systematic way, 'where a school is', in terms of its capacity to improve the teaching of literacy knowledge, skills and attitudes. He asks and discusses key questions that will help school leaders guide their students' literacy learning and deliver well-planned professional learning for their teachers, to achieve improved learning and teaching outcomes.

The paper includes strategies that have proved successful in practice, as well as sample documents and checklists that leader and staff can use to support them in their school improvement process.

Introduction

NAPLAN literacy results reveal that many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students achieve as well as non-Indigenous students and that the gap for other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students can be closed. Recent research has indicated some factors contributing to the improvements in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student literacy outcomes.

The What Works Remote Schools research project, for example, indicates various common elements – of school, teacher and leader capacity – that are present in schools where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student literacy outcomes are improving. These include:

- the role of the leader;

- teacher literacy knowledge; and

- the use of systematic whole-school approaches to literacy teaching and supporting teacher professional learning.

The Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER, 2009, 2010, 2011) has also identified a range of school-level, teacher-level and student-level factors shown to contribute to improved outcomes – for example, the explicit teaching of literacy skills.

A key way of getting better results – and making optimum use of the resources directed to improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student outcomes – is to build the capacity of schools to learn professionally, in systematic, sustained ways (Munro, 2005). In this paper, as an example of how effective this approach can be, I describe the professional learning model that underpinned improved literacy outcomes in schools from Victoria's Northern Metropolitan Region, of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD). Readers wishing to explore this model in more detail can refer to an earlier paper of mine, 'Successful school improvement needs powerful professional learning' (Munro, 2011a).

The basic premise for the model is that teaching staff need to learn professionally if they are going to implement improved teaching that is more likely to enhance student outcomes. Consequently, school leaders need to know how to lead, plan for and guide this professional learning.
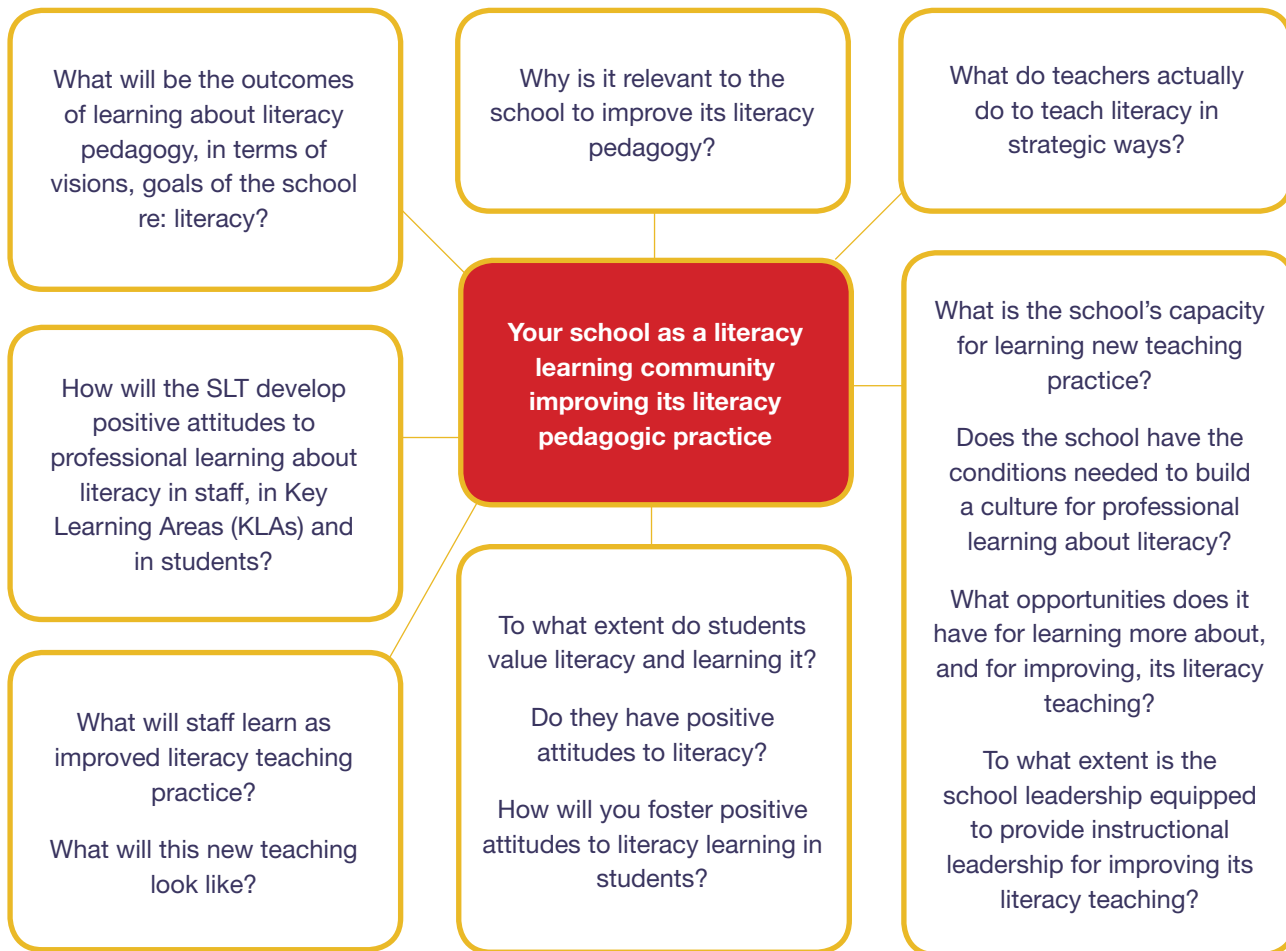
This paper provides school leadership teams with a framework for identifying, in a systematic way, 'where a school is', in terms of its capacity to enhance the teaching of literacy knowledge, skills and attitudes. It addresses some key questions **that will help guide the leadership of literacy learning**.

1. What do school leaders need to know, in order to lead literacy improvement?

    - What do literacy knowledge and skills look like?

    - What does effective literacy teaching look like?

2. How can you lead your school to improve the quality of literacy teaching by building a professional learning capacity? How will you

    - evaluate the readiness of your school as a professional literacy learning community;

    - set improvement goals for students, teachers and school leaders each term;

    - lead teachers to embed improved literacy teaching; and

    - implement an effective professional learning program?

3. What are the key features of instructional leadership that will facilitate these improvements, and how will they help you build a professional climate for literacy in the future?
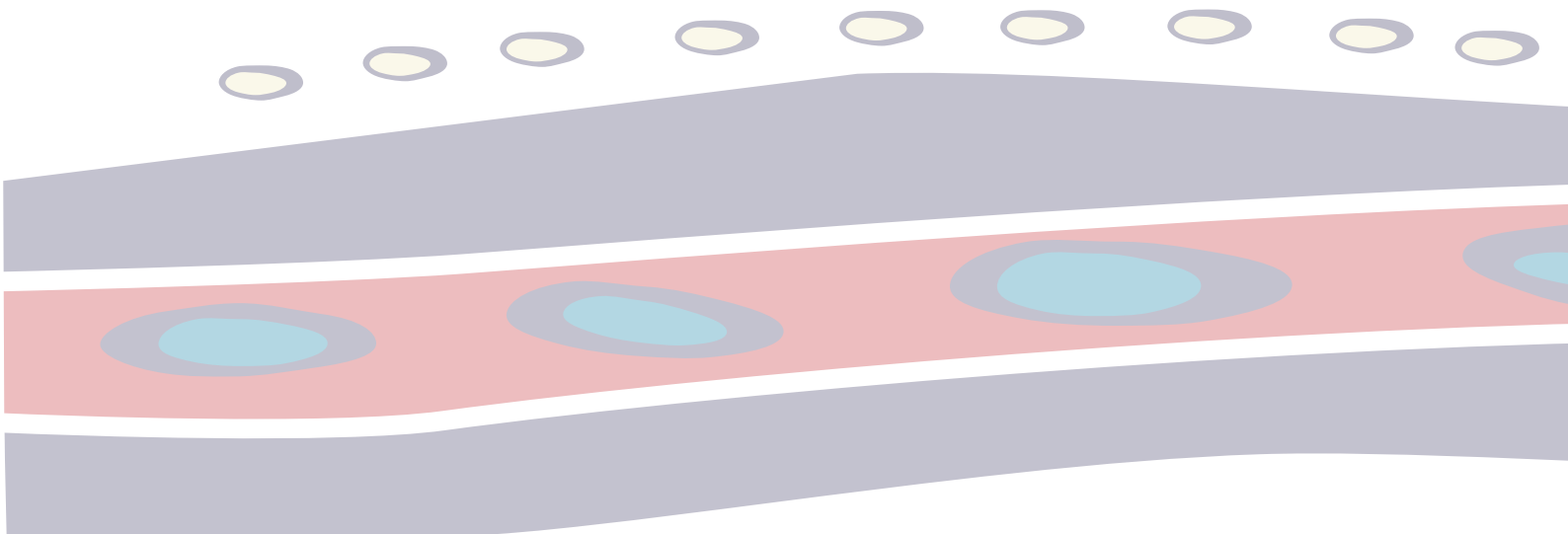
The issues that influence school level leadership of literacy learning

As a starting point, school leadership teams (SLTs) need to identify factors that influence how ready their school is to 'learn professionally', in order to improve the quality of its literacy teaching. Some guiding questions are shown in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1: HOW READY IS THE SCHOOL TO LEARN PROFESSIONALLY? SOME GUIDING QUESTIONS

What will be the outcomes of learning about literacy pedagogy, in terms of visions, goals of the school re: literacy?

Why is it relevant to the school to improve its literacy pedagogy?

What do teachers actually do to teach literacy in strategic ways?

How will the SLT develop positive attitudes to professional learning about literacy in staff, in Key Learning Areas (KLAs) and in students?

Your school as a literacy learning community improving its literacy pedagogic practice

What is the school's capacity for learning new teaching practice?

Does the school have the conditions needed to build a culture for professional learning about literacy?

What opportunities does it have for learning more about, and for improving, its literacy teaching?

To what extent is the school leadership equipped to provide instructional leadership for improving its literacy teaching?

What will staff learn as improved literacy teaching practice?

What will this new teaching look like?

To what extent do students value literacy and learning it?

Do they have positive attitudes to literacy?

How will you foster positive attitudes to literacy learning in students?

(Source: Adapted from the original diagram in Munro, 2007)

Key Question 1

What do school leaders need to know in order to lead literacy improvement?

The school, through its leadership team, needs to:

- develop and implement a clear 'visual' action plan – a pathway that shows how literacy goals will be achieved each term, where the school is at any time, how the school's literacy results fit on this pathway, and what these indicate about student learning;

- know that the literacy project is long-term and have relevant expectations;

- own the literacy enhancement program – all staff members need to have confidence that the priority will continue, even with changes in staff, policy and structure;

- identify what constitutes literacy learning, recognise successful instances of it, and know what it looks like;

- recognise effective literacy teaching, knowing what it looks like and what teachers and students would be doing when it is in place;

- show it recognises and values improvement in literacy teaching, in tangible and visible ways;

- show it values students' literacy progress;

- invite staff and Professional Learning Teams to share recent literacy teaching innovations, at staff meetings;

- know the resources that are needed;

- know the literacy goals of each school level;

- know the literacy strategies to teach each term;

- know about pitfalls that may be encountered in implementing such a literacy enhancement program;

- induct new teachers into the literacy strategy;

- lead the 'institutionalisation of knowledge' about literacy teaching, for example by ensuring there is stability in professional learning activities;

- design and implement a code of literacy teaching practice, which includes an explicit focus on student learning outcomes and explicit expectations of reasonable standards in students' literacy outputs;

- be aware of how success is to be measured, and to be aware of successes that have been made;

- use 'instructional leadership dialogue', in order to foster the growth of institutional knowledge – in particular about enhancing literacy pedagogy and positive attitudes to it;

- know how the improved literacy teaching is being implemented in specific classes – members of the leadership team need to:

  1. operate as instructional leaders;

  2. spend time in classes of more competent literacy teachers and participate in the teaching;

  3. foster informal discussion about how teachers are progressing; and

  4. act in non-judgmental and collegiate ways;

  and

- know that staff value them and the progress made in literacy progress.

(Munro, 2007, 2002)

What do literacy knowledge and skills look like?

… literacy is the knowledge, skills (or strategies, cognitive actions), and attitudes readers use to convert written text information to knowledge about the text. This assumption allows teachers to actually 'see literacy knowledge' in students' behaviours, to target it with their teaching, and to monitor and assess it. If teachers can't 'see' the knowledge they intend to teach, their teaching is less likely to be focused or directed. (Munro)

If we describe literacy as:

- the knowledge (including knowledge of details, cognitive processes, metacognitve processes, strategies …); and

- dispositions (for example, motivation, feelings of efficacy …);

... which students use to convert written text information into knowledge about the text, then this allows a focus on what students **do** in developing literacy.

In the following sections this knowledge of what students do is described as **actions**.

What does effective literacy teaching look like?

What new knowledge will staff learn: Using 'high reliability literacy teaching procedures'

One approach to literacy instruction is embodied in a set of teaching procedures that guide and scaffold students to act upon written text in ways that help them understand that text better (Munro, 2011b). These actions help students represent or 'move the text into their heads', assisting them with comprehension.

There are ten types of literacy teaching procedures. They are called 'high reliability literacy teaching procedures' (HRLTPs) because many research studies have shown that when students are taught to use them in explicit ways, their comprehension of the text improves. HRLTPs describe:

- **teaching procedures,** to guide students as they learn the corresponding comprehending strategies; or

- **actions,** which students use as conceptual tools, for understanding and learning from the text that they read.

The students are instructed, explicitly, to:

- **get their knowledge ready** for reading a text, by deciding its possible topic and stimulating and organising what they know about it in a verbal linguistic form;

- **read aloud** short portions of relevant text;

- **comprehend each sentence** in the text. This includes the students learning to paraphrase or say in their own words each sentence in the text, and then to visualise each sentence;

- **identify or speculate about meanings** of key verbal concepts in the text. They work out how to say unfamiliar words and phrase, clarify their meanings by linking them with other concepts, and suggest synonyms and antonyms for them;

- **integrate sentence meanings into paragraph meanings** and summarise each paragraph, usually by paragraph;

- **say questions** that each sentence in the text answers;

- **link each paragraph meaning with the emerging topic** and say what they know now about the topic;

- **integrate the paragraph meanings**;

- **review and consolidate** what they have read at the end of the reading session; and

- **show comprehension** of what they have read, in various ways.

These HRLTPs provide a starting point for teaching literacy explicitly. Leadership teams can use them to evaluate what their staff members already know about them, as well as the extent to which they use them in their teaching.

Key Question 2

How can you lead your school to improve the quality of literacy teaching by building a professional learning capacity?

How can you evaluate the readiness of your school as a 'professional literacy learning community'?

School leaders can use Checklist 1 to 'take stock' of what their school as a whole knows about literacy and how to teach it (Munro, 2007). Looking ahead, they can also think about how to use the second column (or additional columns) in the form, to help plan improvement goals or more explicit targets for students, teachers and school leaders – on a term-by-term or more frequent basis, as appropriate.

CHECKLIST 1: YOUR SCHOOL AS A LITERACY ENHANCING ORGANISATION – TAKING STOCK	Where is your school now? *(Use the scale of 1 to 5, with 1 = 'a little' and 5 = 'a lot')*	What steps do we need, to target this in Term …?
How aware is the staff of the relevance of literacy to student learning outcomes?	1 2 3 4 5	
Estimate what the staff know about literacy. How well can they recognise when students are 'doing literacy'?	1 2 3 4 5	
Estimate what the staff know about effective literacy teaching. How well could they recognise good literacy teaching?	1 2 3 4 5	
Estimate what the School Leadership Team knows about literacy and leading literacy growth.	1 2 3 4 5	
How adequate are the school's visions and goals related to literacy outcomes?	1 2 3 4 5	
To what extent has the school's vision for literacy been accepted by staff in terms of their shared goals?	1 2 3 4 5	
To what extent has the school mapped the vision or goals into an operational action plan or pathway for improving literacy outcomes?	1 2 3 4 5	
To what extent has the school specified clear indicators to monitor student progress?	1 2 3 4 5	
What is known about your students' attitudes to literacy, its value and use?	1 2 3 4 5	
What work has your school done to help students understand its importance for them?	1 2 3 4 5	
How available are the appropriate physical resources to support growth/improvement?	1 2 3 4 5	
To what extent have teachers examined possible activities that they could use to improve students' literacy knowledge?	1 2 3 4 5	
To what extent does the school encourage goal congruence and commitment among staff to the vision of literacy enhancement?	1 2 3 4 5	
To what extent does the school provide opportunities for staff to learn to teach literacy effectively?	1 2 3 4 5	

What do your teaching staff know about literacy, how it is learnt and how to teach it?

Since teachers can implement effective teaching better if they have a functional view of literacy, school leaders need to judge what they and their staff know about literacy and how it is taught and learnt. In addition to, and building on the questions asked in Checklist 1, the questions in Table 1 can assist them to gather this information, and to consider the related issues (Munro, 2007).

Literacy teaching is more likely to improve both when staff have a greater understanding of literacy knowledge and teaching and when students have a positive attitude to literacy and how it can be used. School Leadership Teams may need to identify procedures they can use to assist staff to improve their knowledge of literacy, as well as actions that staff could take to identify what students know and believe about literacy. These questions are typified by the following.

- What actions will you take to assist staff, at each level, to improve their understanding of literacy, its influence on learning and achievement in other areas, and how it is learnt?

- What procedures can staff at each level use to:

    – determine students' attitudes to literacy, their understanding of what it is, their beliefs about its value and use, and their readiness to engage in improving it; and

    – help students understand its importance for them?

Assessing your school's capacity to teach literacy: What does your school know about effective literacy teaching?

Given that the school's leaders need to decide their school's capacity to enhance its literacy knowledge, what further questions should they ask, when making key decisions intended to improve its literacy?

1. What is your school's agreed set of beliefs about how literacy is learnt and taught?

2. How can your school build a group knowledge of literacy teaching and a code of teaching practice?

3. What procedures does the school use to interpret assessment outcomes, in terms of its teaching?

TABLE 1: QUESTIONS ABOUT LITERACY, HOW IT IS TAUGHT AND LEARNT, AND RELATED ISSUES

Question	Related issues
What do the teachers in your school say and demonstrate that they know about literacy, and what do they think it is?	Teachers need to be able to recognise what literacy is, what it looks like (otherwise they cannot tell when students are 'doing it').
What things do they think could increase the literacy skills of their students?	They need to know what effective literacy teaching looks like; otherwise they will not know how to improve their teaching.
What do they know about how to assess literacy achievement?	They need to be able to see when students' literacy is improving.
What do they think they could do, or what teaching procedures they could use, to improve literacy achievement? What would they teach or have their students do? What would their students be doing when the teachers' aim was to improve their literacy?	For teaching to be effective, it has to focus on students actually doing things.
What are they doing in their current teaching in fostering literacy knowledge?	If teachers are to improve their teaching, they need to see what they are doing now.

4. How well does your school respond to literacy learning issues? What explicit framework does it use to:

    •   identify and analyse literacy learning issues in terms of a learning-teaching framework;

    •   implement modified literacy teaching;

    •   monitor the effectiveness of the modified teaching; and

    •   incorporate the modified teaching into its explicit literacy teaching framework?

(Munro, 2011a, 2007)

As a school leader, how will you determine what needs to be built into your school's existing literacy teaching framework, in order to improve it?

A framework for looking at a teacher's knowledge of effective literacy teaching

What does knowledge of effective literacy teaching look like? A teacher needs to know about literacy in multiple ways in order to teach it. One teacher may have a broad knowledge of the types of tea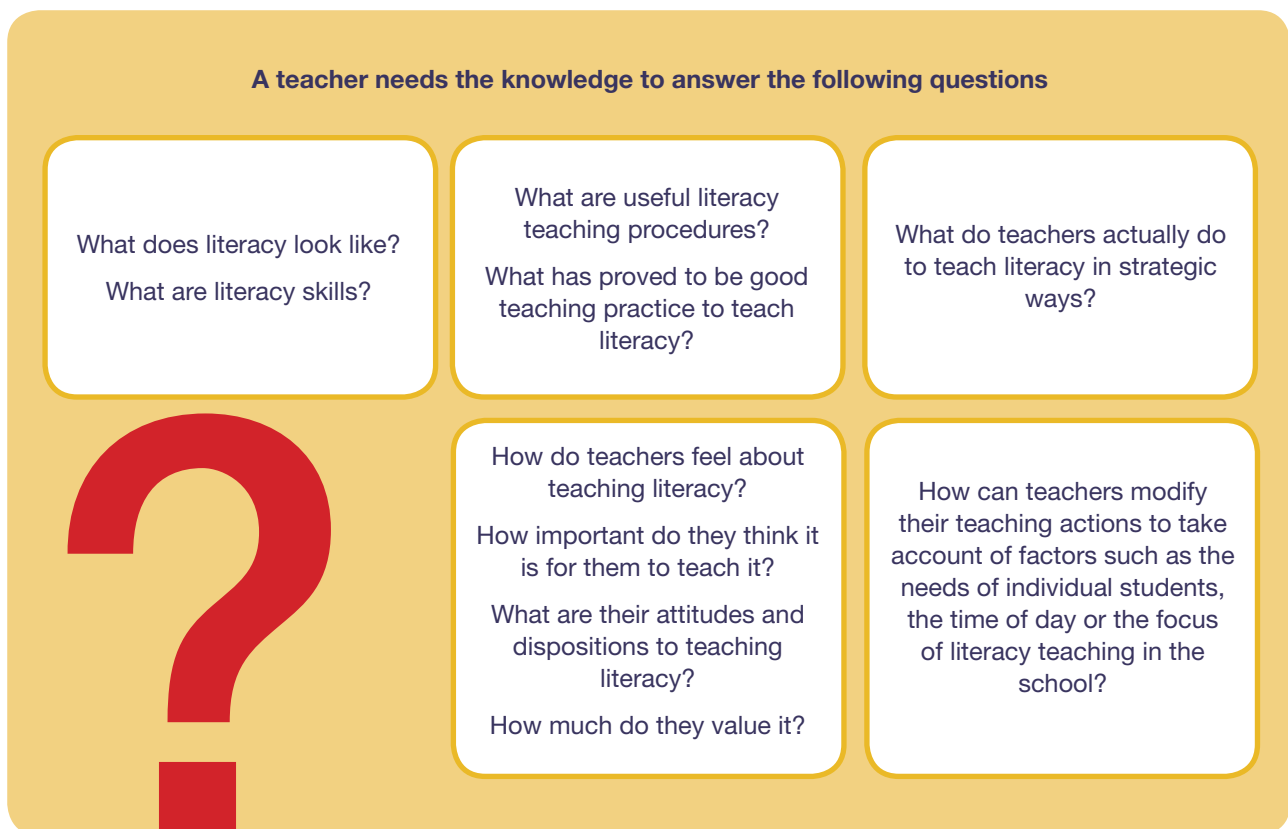ching that could enhance literacy knowledge but not know actually how to do this. A second teacher may do the teaching in a 'robotic way' and assume that everyone needs the same teaching. A third teacher may not be clear about precisely what literacy knowledge looks like.

School leaders need to be aware of these different ways, and other possible variations, so that the professional teaching that is implemented can both take account of what a teacher knows already and target what the teacher needs to learn about teaching it.

The main ways in which a teacher needs to know about literacy (Munro, 2011a, 2007) are shown in Figure 2.

These aspects of professional knowledge about literacy differ in how they are learnt. A teacher who already knows theoretically what s/he should be doing, but does not do it, needs professional teaching that is different from that required by a colleague who does not know what to do. Some teachers may need to know more about what literacy knowledge looks like, while others may need to learn how to 'do' the literacy teaching in strategic ways.

FIGURE 2: WHAT A TEACHER NEEDS TO KNOW ABOUT LITERACY

A teacher needs the knowledge to answer the following questions

What does literacy look like?
What are literacy skills?

What are useful literacy teaching procedures?
What has proved to be good teaching practice to teach literacy?

What do teachers actually do to teach literacy in strategic ways?

How do teachers feel about teaching literacy?
How important do they think it is for them to teach it?
What are their attitudes and dispositions to teaching literacy?
How much do they value it?

How can teachers modify their teaching actions to take account of factors such as the needs of individual students, the time of day or the focus of literacy teaching in the school?

A professional learning program is more likely to be effective if the leadership team knows what individual teachers and groups need to learn about literacy. When the team has an understanding of each teacher's knowledge of each aspect of literacy, it can see where and how to target its professional learning opportunities.

A strategy for embedding the new literacy knowledge in the context of the school

A leadership team also needs to have a strategy for embedding new literacy teaching knowledge into their school in a sustained way. Many school leaders know that it is insufficient, for real improvement, either to run school-based professional development or to send staff to off-site professional development activities.

The strategy needs to

1. indicate how the new teaching modifications will 'be done' in classrooms, in a strategic way;

2. show how teachers will have the opportunity to learn gradually the various aspects of the modifications;

3. provide the opportunity for the leadership team to learn how to lead literacy and to provide instructional leadership for literacy at the school level.

How will you lead teachers to embed improved literacy teaching?

A gradual 'digestible' embedding of the new teaching

One approach, which many schools have used successfully, is to train a group of teachers to lead the professional learning about literacy in the school (Munro, 2011a). These 'middle leaders of professional learning about literacy', as they are sometimes known, effectively 'drive' the literacy improvement (and are referred to as 'Drivers', by way of abbreviation, in the following discussion). They provide the means by which the new teaching

procedures are brought into the school, embedded in its context and gradually introduced to colleagues in a systematic and digestible way. This helps the school to build a 'group professional knowledge' of literacy and to develop an effective data monitoring and support base, as well as providing the means by which the leadership team members can learn to be instructional leaders of literacy.

The 'Drivers', in their middle leadership role:

- learn the literacy teaching knowledge that is needed to scaffold improved student outcomes;

- learn procedures for guiding the professional learning of their colleagues;

- lead the professional learning of Professional Learning Teams (PLTs) that target literacy improvement;

- guide the School Leadership Team members, to build their knowledge of instructional leadership for literacy; and

- guide and scaffold their colleagues to monitor and modify their classroom teaching.

An example of an embedding strategy is shown in Figure 3. It illustrates the case of a school that is learning two of the literacy strategies: teaching students to 'get their knowledge ready' for reading; and learning to work out word meanings in text. It shows how

1. first the Drivers embed the new teaching procedures in their classrooms, develop a broader dissemination plan and plan professional learning for their colleagues;

2. the leadership team members learn about the two new teaching procedures, by working in with the Drivers in their classes as they embed the new teaching; and

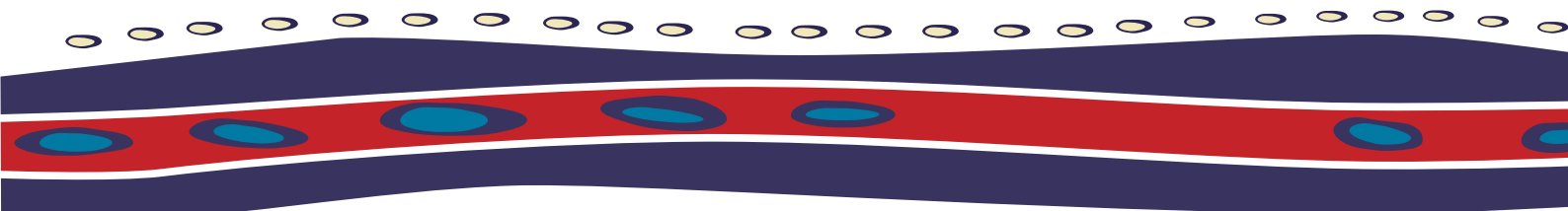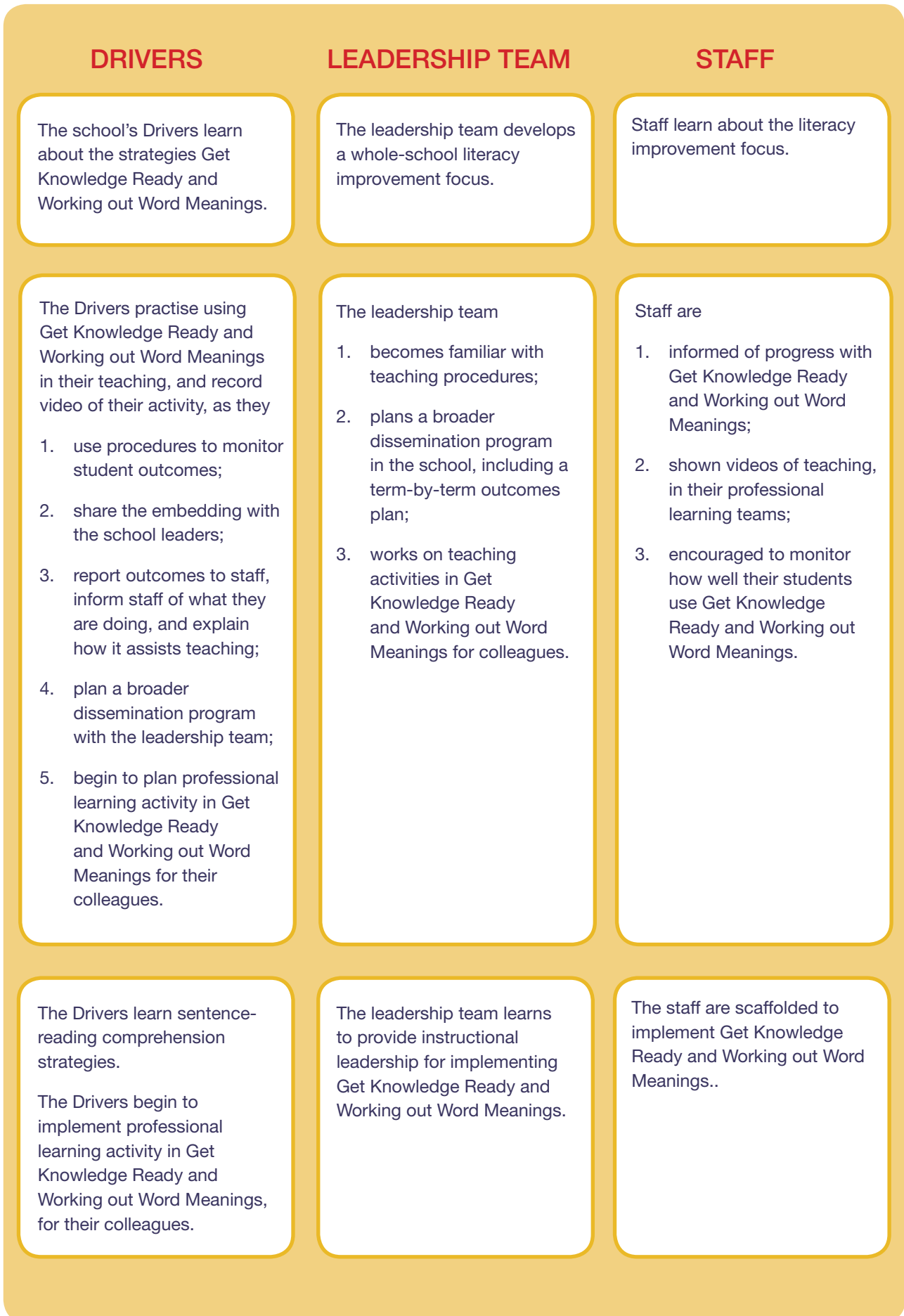3. the new teaching procedures are taught to the staff.

FIGURE 3: ILLUSTRATION OF A SCHOOL LEARNING TWO LITERACY STRATEGIES

DRIVERS	LEADERSHIP TEAM	STAFF
The school's Drivers learn about the strategies Get Knowledge Ready and Working out Word Meanings.	The leadership team develops a whole-school literacy improvement focus.	Staff learn about the literacy improvement focus.
The Drivers practise using Get Knowledge Ready and Working out Word Meanings in their teaching, and record video of their activity, as they 1. use procedures to monitor student outcomes; 2. share the embedding with the school leaders; 3. report outcomes to staff, inform staff of what they are doing, and explain how it assists teaching; 4. plan a broader dissemination program with the leadership team; 5. begin to plan professional learning activity in Get Knowledge Ready and Working out Word Meanings for their colleagues.	The leadership team 1. becomes familiar with teaching procedures; 2. plans a broader dissemination program in the school, including a term-by-term outcomes plan; 3. works on teaching activities in Get Knowledge Ready and Working out Word Meanings for colleagues.	Staff are 1. informed of progress with Get Knowledge Ready and Working out Word Meanings; 2. shown videos of teaching, in their professional learning teams; 3. encouraged to monitor how well their students use Get Knowledge Ready and Working out Word Meanings.
The Drivers learn sentence-reading comprehension strategies. The Drivers begin to implement professional learning activity in Get Knowledge Ready and Working out Word Meanings, for their colleagues.	The leadership team learns to provide instructional leadership for implementing Get Knowledge Ready and Working out Word Meanings.	The staff are scaffolded to implement Get Knowledge Ready and Working out Word Meanings..

How will you implement an effective professional learning program?

The types of planning and professional learning needed to support the embedding

Schools are complex organisations and need plans to guide and build the professional learning for literacy improvement. There are at least three major levels at which the professional learning activity needs to be planned, in order to facilitate contextualisation of the new literacy teaching knowledge in a school (Munro, 2011a, 2002). The professional learning pathway for this is shown in Figure 4.

Plans that specify what will be achieved each term

The school's Drivers lead the staff members to plan what they expect to achieve for each term, and then identify the procedures or actions they can take to achieve the outcomes for each term. To help in this process, they might use a grid such as the one shown in Checklist 2.

In addition it is important to note what will be seen as indicators of success, which will be used to measure progress each term. The indicators need to target

- what students have learnt to do, both with support and independently, each term;

- changes in teaching practice; and

- changes in effective instructional leadership.

FIGURE 4: THREE-LEVEL PROFESSIONAL LEARNING PATHWAY

The term-by-term outcome for each class in school: what will students, teachers and leadership teams be doing differently at the end of each term? → The professional learning plan for each teacher: how will teacher learning for each term-by-term outcome be implemented? → The week-by-week implementation plan for each teacher and student group: how will literacy learning develop over each term?

CHECKLIST 2: PLANNING AND MONITORING OF ACHIEVEMENT OF TERM-BY-TERM OUTCOMES

	Outcomes for students	Outcomes for teacher	Outcomes for leadership team member
Term 1			
Term 2			
Term 3			
Term 4			

The professional learning plan

The professional learning plan for each teacher or Professional Learning Team (PLT) needs to target particular aspects of teachers' knowledge in a systematic way (Munro, 2011a, 2002). The school's Drivers can lead each teacher or PLT through the sequence of professional learning activities shown in Figure 5.

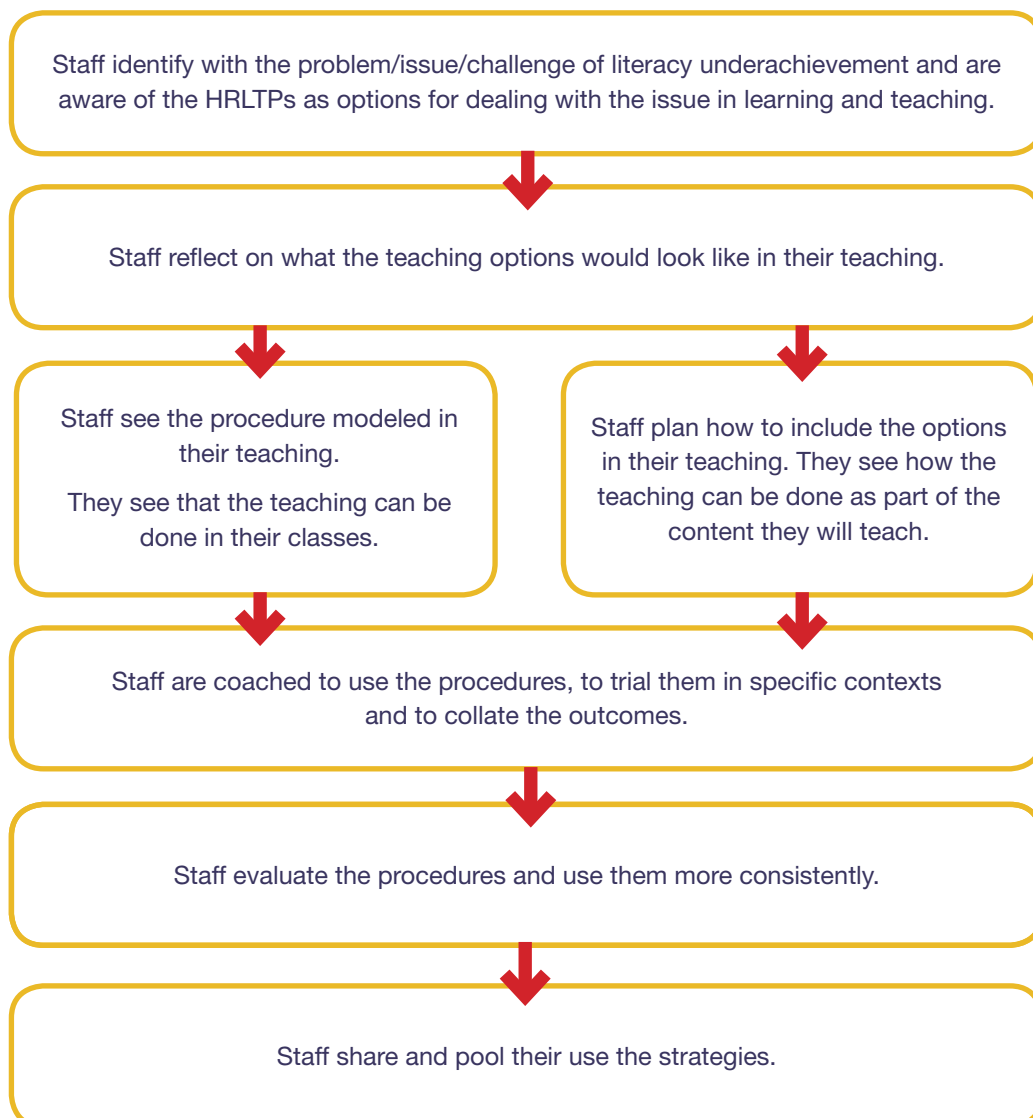The professional learning plan covers each stakeholder in the school, with the professional learning opportunities for each teacher being implemented as follows.

- The teaching procedures to be trialed by each teacher are identified, and embedded in topics that each one will teach. Every teacher prepares 'annotated lesson plans' that show how they

will use the HRLTPs in their teaching. This is managed through PLTs. Each teacher practises this embedding and then teaches the modified lesson to the PLT.

- The Drivers demonstrate, model the teaching and implement coaching in class.

- The teachers trial the teaching procedures and monitor their effectiveness.

- Group knowledge in the PLTs is shared and pooled, as reflective professional practice.
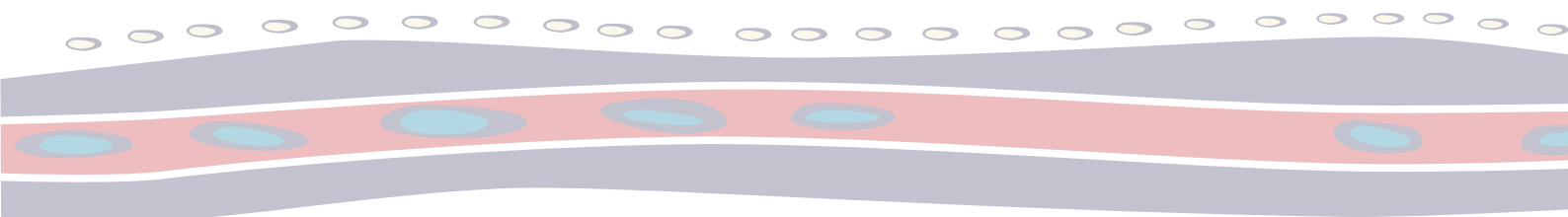
For an example of a professional learning schedule for a particular staff member, see Checklist 3. This provides a grid to record the types of professional learning in which the staff member will be engaged, for each fortnight where the teaching procedure or procedures are being implemented.

FIGURE 5: SEQUENCE OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Staff identify with the problem/issue/challenge of literacy underachievement and are aware of the HRLTPs as options for dealing with the issue in learning and teaching.

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Staff reflect on what the teaching options would look like in their teaching.

↓

Staff see the procedure modeled in their teaching.

They see that the teaching can be done in their classes.

Staff plan how to include the options in their teaching. They see how the teaching can be done as part of the content they will teach.

↓

Staff are coached to use the procedures, to trial them in specific contexts and to collate the outcomes.

↓

Staff evaluate the procedures and use them more consistently.

↓

Staff share and pool their use the strategies.

CHECKLIST 3: SAMPLE SCHEDULE FOR TYPES OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING UNDERTAKEN

Week	Analyse and evaluate procedures in PLTs	Build procedures into topics to be taught	See teaching procedures modeled and coached	Share and pool new knowledge about teaching	Trial procedures in the classroom	Undertake instructional leadership activities
1–2						
3–4						
5–6						
7–8						
9–10						

Key Question 3

What are the key features of instructional leadership that will facilitate these improvements, and how will they help you build a professional climate for literacy in the future?

The focus of instructional leadership

Instructional leadership can be provided both by the leadership team and the school's Drivers. The focus of the instructional leadership can differ (Munro, 2011a). As examples, in practice:

1. the leadership team guides staff explicitly towards improved teaching practice, by encouraging each staff member to improve her/his knowledge of literacy teaching and to evaluate how it works for students in the teacher's class. This includes the leader engaging in probing dialogue about the teaching procedures used by a teacher to meet the learning needs of a student. The leader can initiate and model both backward and forward reflection on particular instances of practice.

2. The school Drivers guide staff explicitly in how to do the literacy teaching. They guide professional learning within the context set by the principal's instructional leadership practice. Among the key features of their instructional leadership are that they:

   • guide their colleagues to evaluate their teaching, problem solve possible improved procedures, and perhaps suggest teaching options for a colleague who has yet to understand a particular strategy;

   • guide progress along the professional learning pathway;

   • model novel teaching strategies, and coach and support new teaching;

   The direction of the instructional leadership is to achieve automatised, independent learning by students. This is evident when students can learn new ideas independently and say how they will work through tasks to completion.

Evidence of instructional leadership by principals and Drivers is shown through the strategic actions that they take and the explicit decisions they make. To evaluate the extent to which a leadership team is having an effect on the quality of teaching in

their school, imagine asking any staff member the following questions.

1. When was the last time your principal discussed with you the literacy teaching procedures you would be using in your class this morning, and what you would be expecting as student outcomes, or recommended some follow-up reading, or suggested that you discuss with Miss Y how she teaches that skill?

2. When was the last time your principal asked you: What do you expect your students to do for reading comprehension at the end of this week that they can't do now? How will you know which students have achieved this week's outcome? What will you do for the students who haven't reached it? What help will you request from the leadership team for those students?

Until staff members are able to acknowledge that leadership activity is guiding them explicitly to improve their teaching practice, the quality of instructional leadership in the school is probably negligible or non-existent.

How will you build a professional learning climate for literacy?

Finally, for professional learning to operate in a school, the school needs a culture and climate that fosters professional learning (Munro, 2011a). The two basic elements of a climate for professional learning are trust and respect. Professional learning is facilitated when the learners, in this case the staff, trust and respect each other's knowledge and believe that they will be supported for risks they take.

A positive climate that is consistent with the culture of the school, and which allows the professional learning to be embedded in the context of the school, is important. In such a climate it is recognised that professional learning:

• needs to take account of the culture of the school;

• is student-referenced;

• can follow a chaotic path;

- requires a systematic set of learning opportunities;
- involves valuing and distilling past professional experiences;
- involves thinking innovatively about possibilities and options;
- involves professional collaboration;
- acknowledges that individuals differ in how they learn;
- involves building and drawing on the relevant group knowledge;
- involves identifying what has been learnt about how to learn professionally; and
- needs to allow mutual professional trust and respect to evolve and grow.

Where to now?

This paper began with the observation that schools are more able to improve the quality of their literacy teaching when they know how to learn – that is, when they have the capacity to learn professionally. Various aspects of this were then unpacked.

The assumption has been made that it is the responsibility of the school leadership team to guide, lead and direct the professional learning agenda of the school. The ease with which a school can respond to an issue or challenge, with modified and enhanced teaching, indicates the effectiveness of the leadership.

Improvement in student learning outcomes is a complex process, particularly when the spotlight is on what students have learnt over two years. This paper argues the need for planning for enhanced student outcomes, and for improved teaching to match needs, each term. It is much more manageable, both for students and staff, when the leadership encourages its staff members to ask themselves: *What will my students know in five minutes time that they don't know now? ... and ... What will my students be able to do independently by the end of the week that they can't do now?*

Similarly, when teachers encourage their students to ask themselves: *What can I do now that I couldn't do earlier today? ... and ... What do I know now that I didn't know yesterday?*, the learning pathways become real and the successes more obvious, both to teachers and to students.

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Munro, J K (2011a) 'Successful school improvement needs powerful professional learning', in D Hopkins, J Munro and W Craig (Eds) *Powerful Learning: A Strategy for Systemic Educational Improvement*, Australian Council for Educational Research, Camberwell, p 49–64.

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Munro, J (2007) *Pedagogic capital: An essential concept (and tool) for effective school leaders*, Seminar Series Paper 176, Centre for Strategic Education, Melbourne.

Munro, J (2005) *Building the capacity for professional learning: A key component of the knowledge of effective school teachers in the twenty-first century*, Seminar Series Paper 148, IARTV, Melbourne.

Munro, J (2002) *Leading learning communities*, IARTV Seminar Series Paper 119, IARTV, Melbourne.

Additional reading

Although not cited explicitly in the paper, the following papers were consulted in its preparation and may be of interest to the reader.

Munro, J (2003) 'Facilitating effective learning and teaching: Snapshots', *The Specialist Schools Trust Journal of Innovation in Education*, **1**, 1, p 29–32.

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What Works. The Work Program

The What Works materials are based on a three part analysis of the way teachers and schools generally work to improve outcomes for Indigenous students.

Building awareness– Forming partnerships – Working systematically

The website (www.whatworks.edu.au) provides resources to support all of these.

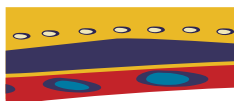The **Workbook** is the central support for targeted, systematic action.

The '**School and Community: Working Together**' series supports the development of partnerships between schools and their Indigenous communities.

The '**Core Issues**' series, includes

- *Core Issues 1: Setting Up For Success* suggests ways in which schools might best be set up to maximise success for Indigenous students.

- *Core Issues 2: Reducing Suspensions* explores positive alternatives to suspension and ways they can be implemented in schools.

- *Core Issues 3: Literacy* explores questions about what it means to develop genuinely effective literacy.

- *Core Issues 4: Numeracy* tackles important questions about the meaning and importance of numeracy.

- *Core Issues 5: Student Engagement* discusses attendance, participation and belonging.

- *Core Issues 6: Boarding* looks at current practice in this small but growing area of Indigenous education.

- *Core Issues 7: International Perspectives* is a report of the DEST/OECD seminar held in Cairns in May 2007.

- *Core Issues 8: Education and Student Health: The Big Picture* looks at some of the health issues affecting Indigenous students and the part schools and teachers can play in dealing with them.

- *Core Issues 9: Using Data to Close the Gap* is designed to help build the capacity of schools to take action informed by evidence.

- *Core Issues 10: Using Personalised Learning Plans* aims to assist teachers and schools to deliver effective personalised learning to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

All these and other print materials are available for download through the 'Publications' link on the website, where you can also sign up for **What Works eNews**, to keep in touch with the What Works project.

Experienced What Works consultants are available free of charge to work with schools on the materials.

What Works.
The Work Program