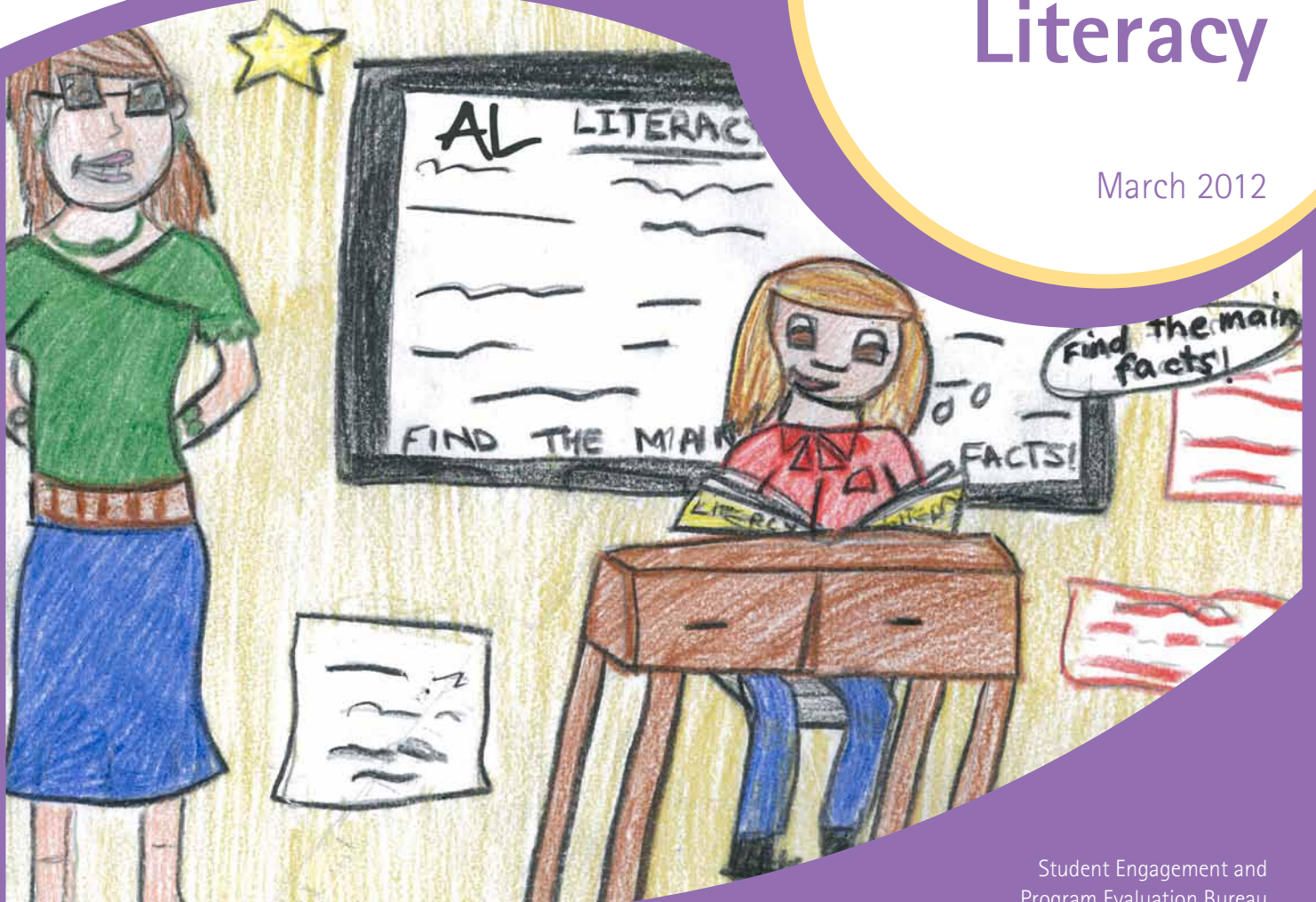


Report of the Program  
Evaluation of

# Accelerated Literacy

March 2012



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# Contents

Executive summary .....	1
<b>Part 1 Introduction .....</b>	<b>5</b>
1 Evaluating <i>Accelerated Literacy</i> .....	5
1.1 Policy context .....	5
1.2 <i>Accelerated Literacy</i> .....	7
1.3 Evaluating the literacy and numeracy programs .....	7
1.4 Terms of Reference of the evaluation .....	7
1.5 Methodology .....	8
1.6 Presentation of the evaluation findings .....	12
2 <i>Accelerated Literacy</i> program details .....	13
2.1 Aim .....	13
2.2 Background .....	13
2.3 Features of <i>Accelerated Literacy</i> .....	14
2.4 Development of <i>Accelerated Literacy</i> in New South Wales .....	15
2.5 Training requirements .....	16
2.6 Resources .....	16
2.7 Previous evaluations .....	17
<b>Part 2 Evaluation findings .....</b>	<b>19</b>
3 Implementation of <i>Accelerated Literacy</i> .....	19
3.1 NPLN program selection .....	19
3.2 Professional learning .....	20
3.3 Resources .....	25
3.4 Support for <i>Accelerated Literacy</i> across the school .....	27
4 Effects for students .....	29
4.1 External performance measures .....	29
4.2 Local assessments by staff, students and parent community .....	34
4.3 Outcomes for Aboriginal students .....	40
4.4 Other Literacy outcomes for students .....	42
4.5 Student engagement with reading .....	44
4.6 Other influencing factors .....	46

5	Teacher perspectives.....	47
5.1	Teachers' overall views of <i>Accelerated Literacy</i> .....	47
5.2	Teacher views on specific aspects of literacy .....	52
5.3	Effect on teacher workload and commitment .....	54
5.4	Effect on teacher practices.....	55
6	Impacts in schools.....	60
6.1	Whole-school benefits .....	60
6.2	Commitment to staff training.....	63
6.3	Culture change.....	64
6.4	Involving parents.....	65
6.5	Sustaining <i>Accelerated Literacy</i> beyond the NPLN .....	66
7	Summary of findings and conclusions.....	69
7.1	Assessment of the effectiveness of <i>Accelerated Literacy</i> .....	69
7.2	Assessment of efficient achievement of goals .....	71
7.3	Addressing the mandatory reform elements of the NPLN.....	73
7.4	Improving educational outcomes of Aboriginal students .....	75
7.5	Supporting schools to participate in the evaluation .....	75
7.6	Support for reforms to be incorporated into school practice.....	75
7.7	Sustainability .....	77
	Glossary .....	78
	References .....	79
	Appendix 1 - Evaluation instruments.....	81
	Appendix 2 - Online teacher survey responses .....	93
	Appendix 3 - Online survey response statistics .....	103

# List of tables and figures

## Tables

Table 1.1: Summary of participation in school interviews.....	9
Table 1.2: Student performance assessment data sets .....	10
Table 1.3: Aggregate data sets.....	11
Table 4.1: NAPLAN Reading, 2008 Year 3 <i>Accelerated Literacy</i> cohort .....	30
Table 4.2: NAPLAN Reading, 2009 Year 3 <i>Accelerated Literacy</i> cohort .....	30
Table 4.3: NAPLAN Reading, 2010 Year 5 <i>Accelerated Literacy</i> cohort .....	31
Table 4.4: NAPLAN Reading, 2011 Year 5 <i>Accelerated Literacy</i> cohort .....	31
Table 4.5: NAPLAN Reading for <i>Accelerated Literacy</i> , comparison with NMS .....	32
Table 4.6: <i>Accelerated Literacy</i> NAPLAN gain scores and differences from Year 3 to Year 5.....	33

## Figures

Figure 1.1: National Partnership on Literacy and Numeracy implementation model.....	6
Figure 2.1: <i>Accelerated Literacy</i> teaching sequence (Cowey, 2007) .....	15
Figure 3.1: Participation in formal professional learning (PL).....	20
Figure 3.2: Understanding of <i>Accelerated Literacy</i> .....	21
Figure 3.3: Teachers' understanding of principles of <i>Accelerated Literacy</i> .....	24
Figure 3.4: Teachers' use of training modules .....	25
Figure 3.5: Use of recommended texts.....	25
Figure 3.6: Use of suggested resources .....	26
Figure 3.7: Material resources .....	26
Figure 3.8: Assessment strategies.....	27
Figure 3.9: Team leader support.....	28
Figure 3.10: Team member support .....	28
Figure 3.11: Human resources.....	28
Figure 3.12: Regional support .....	28
Figure 4.1: Effect of <i>Accelerated Literacy</i> on reading skills .....	35
Figure 4.2: Improvements for Aboriginal students .....	41
Figure 4.3: General literacy improvement .....	42
Figure 4.4: Student engagement with reading .....	44
Figure 4.5: Effectiveness of <i>Accelerated Literacy</i> .....	46
Figure 5.1: Improved literacy teaching.....	47
Figure 5.2: Teachers' recommendation of <i>Accelerated Literacy</i> .....	48
Figure 5.3: Student participation in sequence .....	48
Figure 5.4: Capacity to scaffold.....	50
Figure 5.5: Text choice based on student needs and backgrounds .....	51

Figure 5.6: Need for continued individualised intervention.....	52
Figure 5.7: Reading assessments .....	52
Figure 5.8: Planning in a team .....	54
Figure 5.9: Time spent teaching <i>Accelerated Literacy</i> .....	55
Figure 6.1: Literacy promoted in school by principal .....	60

## Executive summary

### Program evaluation: *Accelerated Literacy*

NSW Department of Education and Communities<sup>1</sup> commissioned the Student Engagement and Program Evaluation Bureau to conduct an evaluation of *Accelerated Literacy*, one of several initiatives being funded under the National Partnership on Literacy and Numeracy (NPLN).

The Terms of Reference for the program evaluation of *Accelerated Literacy* required that the evaluation:

- assess the effectiveness of the program
- assess the extent to which the program achieves its goals in an efficient manner and where applicable, addresses the mandatory reform elements of the National Partnership on Literacy and Numeracy, which are:
  - effective and evidence-based teaching of literacy and numeracy
  - strong school leadership and whole-school engagement with literacy and numeracy
  - monitoring student and school literacy and numeracy performance to identify where support is needed
- assess the extent to which the program has improved the educational outcomes of Aboriginal students
- investigate the most effective ways for schools to be supported to participate in the evaluation and for the reforms to be incorporated into school practice.

The evaluation was conducted over a twelve-month period, during 2011. Given this short timeframe, it was determined that the evaluation should focus only on achievement in the reading component of literacy.

Twenty-eight National Partnership schools chose to implement *Accelerated Literacy* as their whole-class intervention. Many of these schools have a high proportion of Aboriginal students.

### *Accelerated Literacy*

*Accelerated Literacy*, developed by Brian Gray and Wendy Cowey (Gray, 2007), is a research-based K-12 literacy teaching methodology designed to be implemented with whole-class groups. It claims to improve the literacy outcomes of Aboriginal students at an accelerated rate, while improving outcomes for all students in the class.

*Accelerated Literacy* leads learners through intensive exploration of rich, age-appropriate texts using an explicit and systematic sequence of teaching strategies. The program developers stress the importance of using narrative texts as the starting point to engage students, particularly Aboriginal students.

### Evaluation Methodology

The evaluation methodology comprised the following components:

- knowledge review - a review of program documentation relating to *Accelerated Literacy*
- stakeholder interviews with program developers and program funding directorates, including the Department's Aboriginal Education and Training Directorate (AETD)
- online survey of teachers in all 28 schools that implemented *Accelerated Literacy* as their whole-class intervention
- visits to seven of the 28 schools, to conduct interviews and focus groups with school principals, leaders, teachers, students, parents and community members
- analysis of school documentation including school Literacy Plans and Annual School Reports
- analysis of National Assessment Program - Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) and NPLN assessment data.

<sup>1</sup> On 3 April 2011, the NSW Government changed the name of the Department of Education and Training to the Department of Education and Communities. In this document, a reference to the Department of Education and Training is to be construed as a reference to the Department of Education and Communities.

The methodology was developed in consultation with, and approved by the NPLN Program Evaluation Reference Group (PERG).

## Key Findings

Evidence from all data sources indicates that student learning outcomes have been observed to improve for all or most students. This is more strongly supported by teachers', parents' and students' impressions of effective learning than by broad-scale testing measures.

In all but one school, *Accelerated Literacy* was not the sole literacy intervention. It is acknowledged that it is difficult to attribute any improvement to the *Accelerated Literacy* approach alone.

Other major findings relate to the implementation of the program, impacts on teacher work practices and on the school as a whole, and issues of sustainability. These are detailed in the following sections.

## Implementation of *Accelerated Literacy*

Principals highlighted the importance of being able to choose the program to be implemented within the school. This was the first step in building strong support for the intervention, both amongst teachers and throughout the school community.

In cases where the decision was made at a regional level there was more likelihood of teacher resistance to the intervention, at least initially.

### Training model

The majority of schools implementing *Accelerated Literacy* opted to train all teachers in the school. Class teachers were involved in up to six days of program training, facilitated by certified Department of Education and Communities regional trainers or by private training providers. A number of schools chose to train relief teachers, temporary and long term casual staff, as well as School Learning Support Officers (SLSO). Occasionally parents were also involved in a level of training.

The training was offered in blocks of two days with a number of weeks between each block, usually over a term. Teachers commented that this approach was helpful, in offering a combination of training days and in-school practice and support.

Organising attendance at the training days presented several challenges: the anticipated disruption to classes if all teachers attended training at the same time; locating sufficient casual teachers to provide relief; and the cost of relief. To minimise these difficulties, some schools opted to train all teachers on school development days or on Saturdays. Others chose to train small teams, over a longer period of time. This staged approach resulted in some classes or stage groups being targeted early in the partnership whilst others did not receive exposure to the program until much later.

Teachers were generally very satisfied with the training received through the Department's regional trainers. Private trainers, on the other hand, were found to be costly and rigid in their approach. The differences in provider training in individual schools led to differences in attitudes towards *Accelerated Literacy* and affected the cohesiveness of the implementation.

Most teachers indicated that the formal training provided a good introduction to the approach, irrespective of the training model they experienced. They suggested that continued in-school professional learning was just as important in equipping them to achieve effective results with their students.



## Ongoing support

Some schools chose to train in-school tutors which decreased cost and organisational difficulties for initial training, and set up an effective ongoing support system for teachers. Partnership resources were frequently used to provide relief from class for tutors, to support teachers in class, and for stage groups of teachers to work collaboratively on programming and resource development.

## Resources

The recommended resources were seen as valuable assets to school literacy programs. Principals and teachers particularly appreciated the flexibility granted to schools to use the NPLN funding to meet local needs. Some schools chose to invest in computer equipment, others chose assessment materials, class sets of texts and consumables required for student activities.

## Effects for students

Both data sets (NAPLAN and NPLN assessments), demonstrated gains for all student cohorts at *Accelerated Literacy* schools. Limitations on the reliability and validity of results observed in these data sets have been outlined in this report; this should be considered when drawing conclusions from the results discussed.

Principals, school leaders, teachers, students and parents were all extremely positive about the impact of *Accelerated Literacy* on student reading outcomes.

- Approximately two thirds of teacher respondents to the survey said *Accelerated Literacy* has improved reading and comprehension skills for most or all students. In the remaining third, most said some have improved while very few respondents said no students improved.
- Two thirds of teacher respondents to the survey said *Accelerated Literacy* has also improved general literacy outcomes for most or all students.
- Two thirds of teacher respondents to the survey said the program overall is effective or extremely effective. Almost all of the remainder said it is somewhat effective.

Students were also able to identify these improvements. Parents commented mainly on the increase in their child's reading confidence and enjoyment, as well as benefits observed with general engagement with school.

## Outcomes for Aboriginal students

Aboriginal students responded positively to *Accelerated Literacy* lessons with most asserting they had made improvements in their reading. NAPLAN data indicates that gain scores for Aboriginal students involved in *Accelerated Literacy* were higher than those for non-Aboriginal students. NPLN assessment data also indicates that improvements for Aboriginal students were higher than those for non-Aboriginal students.

Analysis of teacher comments suggests that they consider *Accelerated Literacy* to be as effective for Aboriginal students as for non-Aboriginal students. A number of teachers commented that texts suggested by the *National Accelerated Literacy Program* website (NALP, 2007, 2009) were culturally appropriate for their Aboriginal students, promoting greater connection with the texts and with literacy lessons in general.

Several principals indicated that attendance rates for Aboriginal students had improved since the introduction of *Accelerated Literacy*.

## Teacher perspectives

In schools where all staff were trained in *Accelerated Literacy* there was a common feeling of being able to share, support, collaborate and plan towards the same goals. Overall, teachers commented about the effectiveness and benefits of incorporating the *Accelerated Literacy* approach into their teaching practice, across the curriculum.

Key points found in the evaluation:

- Generally teachers understand the principles of the approach extremely well.
- Almost all respondents said the *Accelerated Literacy* training modules are a useful reference.
- Most teachers have increasingly collaborated in planning units of work with other *Accelerated Literacy* teachers.
- Nine out of ten respondents said that *Accelerated Literacy* has improved the way they teach literacy in their classes. Seven out of eight respondents would recommend the *Accelerated Literacy* program to a colleague.
- Many teachers felt there was a degree of flexibility with the approach whilst still maintaining the fidelity of the *Accelerated Literacy* methodology.

School staff consistently reported positive outcomes following from their participation in *Accelerated Literacy* training and delivery.

## Impacts on whole-school practices

The introduction of *Accelerated Literacy* is reported to have an effect on practices across the school as a whole. The key impacts identified by principals were:

- increased commitment and enthusiasm by teachers
- high levels of consistency in literacy teaching across all classes
- increased leadership capacity throughout the school
- use of quality assessments by teachers and understanding of SMART data to assist in identifying appropriate support
- increased staff collaboration, planning and collegial trust
- improvements in student behaviour and engagement with school.

The most pleasing outcome noted by many principals and teachers was the influence of the overall changes in school culture and tone, on improving community attitudes towards the school.

## Sustainability

The factors identified as being critical to the sustainability of *Accelerated Literacy* in schools beyond the funding period include:

- ongoing commitment and support from the school principal and leadership team
- embedding changes in teacher practice, with support for ongoing collaboration, planning, unit development and lesson study
- a whole-school (P-6) approach leading to ease of transition from year to year for students, and consistency for teachers
- ensuring a strategy for ongoing professional learning and training of new teachers, including indication of ongoing support for the program from Department of Education and Communities regions.

The majority of schools and school staff were confident that *Accelerated Literacy* could be sustained beyond the funding period, and a number of schools were able to articulate plans for doing so.

# Part 1 Introduction

This evaluation report is presented in two parts:

- Part 1 provides the background to the *Accelerated Literacy* program evaluation and to the *Accelerated Literacy* program itself.
- Part 2 details the findings and conclusions of the evaluation.

## 1 Evaluating *Accelerated Literacy*

*Accelerated Literacy* is one of four literacy and numeracy programs evaluated by the Student Engagement and Program Evaluation Bureau of the NSW Department of Education and Communities (DEC), under the National Partnership on Literacy and Numeracy (NPLN).

### 1.1 Policy context

The NPLN aims to bring about sustainable improvements in the reading and numeracy achievement of students in NSW schools. 'Closing the Gap' for Aboriginal students, and for individual students experiencing difficulty in reading and literacy, are specific program targets.

The partnership operated over the four-year period from 2009 to 2012, to facilitate and reward literacy and numeracy models or approaches that support teachers and clearly demonstrate evidence of accelerating improvement in student learning achievement.

The focus is on development of:

- effective, evidence-based teaching
- strong leadership and whole-school engagement in literacy and numeracy
- effective use of student performance information to identify where support is needed.

Schools in all three education sectors in NSW (government, independent and Catholic) were identified for participation, using a range of criteria including:

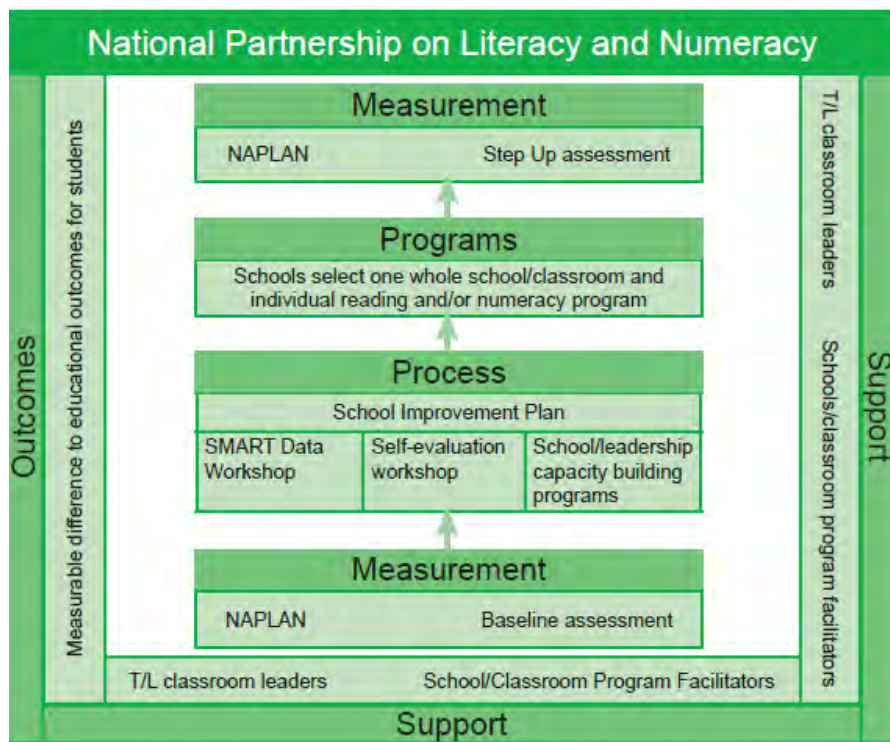
- the 2008 National Assessment Program - Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) data: schools where the percentage of all students in Years 3 and 5 achieving at or below minimum standard is above the state percentage in reading and numeracy
- the school's suitability and readiness to participate in the NPLN, as advised by regional and diocesan offices
- each school's student background characteristics, including: enrolment; student language background; student enrolment data, for instance, proportion of refugee students or Aboriginal students; and the degree of 'disadvantage' of the school or group of schools.

Participating schools were allocated funding, tied to the reform priorities, to review and refine their school improvement plan. Schools were expected to use their funding to:

- undertake a self-evaluation on reading or numeracy
- involve the school leadership team in a leadership capacity-building program
- implement an intervention program targeting individual students in Years 3 to 6 who are experiencing difficulty in reading or numeracy
- implement an intervention program at a whole-class level in Years 3 to 6
- focus on improving teaching and learning in Years 3 to 6, by having teachers participate in a sustained professional learning program on reading or numeracy.

Each school was required to complete professional learning in the use of SMART data and school leadership capacity building as part of the NPLN. Teachers were expected to complete the online Data Analysis Skills Assessment (DASA) to gauge their own development of skills in analysing data and using results to inform practice.

**Figure 1.1: National Partnership on Literacy and Numeracy implementation model** (NSW Government, 2009a)



Within the context of the school improvement plan the funding could also be used to:

- support staff to participate in a local Aboriginal cultural awareness program
- provide release for collaborative programming, resource development, shared reflection and team teaching
- work with school *Accelerated Literacy* tutors or teaching and learning leaders
- purchase equipment or resources essential to the implementation of the professional learning program, or
- employ teacher aides where they are essential to the implementation of an intervention.

A total of 147 schools in NSW participated in a range of programs offered under the NPLN. Some of these programs have been developed internally by NSW Department of Education and Communities, others by the Catholic education sector, and others by external developers. Each program targets literacy or numeracy, taking either an individual student or a whole-class approach, and has been included on the basis of a sound evidence base that supports its potential to achieve the intended improvements.

Literacy programs were selected that take a balanced approach to teaching literacy and include a range of strategies to develop students' phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension (NSW Government, 2009b).

## 1.2 Accelerated Literacy

*Accelerated Literacy* was nominated within the NPLN Agreement as one of the programs to be evaluated by the Program Evaluation Unit of the Department's Student Engagement and Program Evaluation Bureau (SEPEB). Twenty-eight public schools, across seven regions, implemented the *Accelerated Literacy* program through participation in the NPLN. Of these, seven schools participated in the qualitative field visit component of the evaluation.

No Catholic Education Commission (CEC) schools chose *Accelerated Literacy* as their whole-class intervention.

A description of the *Accelerated Literacy* program is provided in Section 2.

## 1.3 Evaluating the literacy and numeracy programs

The NPLN Cross-sectoral Working Group determined that eight of the available programs would be formally evaluated. It was agreed that only programs with seven or more participating schools would be involved in the evaluation.

The following criteria were used to determine whether each program evaluation would be conducted within the DEC or by an external evaluator:

- The four literacy and numeracy programs developed by organisations outside education systems were evaluated by the Program Evaluation Unit.
- Literacy and numeracy programs developed within education systems (three programs) were evaluated by an external evaluator, Urbis Pty Ltd.
- *MultiLit* was evaluated by Urbis Pty Ltd.

Independent sector schools were not involved in the NPLN program evaluations.

The purpose of the program evaluations is to assess the effectiveness of the selected literacy and numeracy programs, as defined in the Terms of Reference, below.

## 1.4 Terms of Reference of the evaluation

The Terms of Reference for the program evaluation of *Accelerated Literacy* required that the evaluation:

- assess the effectiveness of the program
- assess the extent to which the program achieves its goals in an efficient manner and where applicable, addresses the mandatory reform elements of the NPLN, which are:
  - effective and evidence-based teaching of literacy and numeracy
  - strong school leadership and whole-school engagement with literacy and numeracy
  - monitoring student and school literacy and numeracy performance to identify where support is needed
- assess the extent to which the program has improved the educational outcomes of Aboriginal students
- investigate the most effective ways for schools to be supported to participate in the evaluation and for the reforms to be incorporated into school practice.

Given the short time frame for completion of the suite of evaluations, the NPLN Cross-sectoral Working Group determined that each literacy program evaluation should focus on reading, rather than trying to assess the full range of literacy activities and outcomes.

*Accelerated Literacy* program developers strongly maintain that literacy skills in reading and writing are developed in unison (refer to program details provided in Section 2). Throughout the evaluation, frequent reference was made, by both teachers and students, to aspects of literacy learning beyond reading. These have been included in the evaluation findings, as appropriate.

## 1.5 Methodology

The *Accelerated Literacy* program evaluation employed a mixed-method design drawing on both quantitative and qualitative components, as described in the following sections.

The evaluation was undertaken during the second full year of implementation of the *Accelerated Literacy* program. At this early stage in the program, the most credible data comes from the experiences of participants and results of in-school assessment of student achievement. In addition to a survey of teachers, qualitative methods were employed as they allow greater depth of enquiry, placing value on the accounts of teachers, school executive members, students and parent representatives.

The NPLN Program Evaluation Reference Group (PERG) was established to provide advice and guidance to the evaluation team. The evaluation methodology was approved by the PERG and each of the interview and observation schedules was developed in consultation with the expert members of the PERG.

### 1.5.1 Qualitative component

The qualitative component of the evaluation comprised a review of program documentation for *Accelerated Literacy*, an interview with one of the program developers, Wendy Cowey, and visits to seven of the 28 schools implementing the program.

#### **Background document review**

Prior to the commencement of the evaluation, Program Evaluation team members undertook a thorough review of program materials and associated literature, to better inform their understanding of the program itself, and their interpretation of the evaluation data, especially that drawn from conversations with school staff and students.

#### **Interview with Wendy Cowey**

Evaluation team members met with Wendy Cowey at the commencement of the evaluation. Ms Cowey provided insights into the philosophy underpinning the development of both the *Accelerated Literacy* program and the professional learning model. She also provided recommendations on the types of questions to direct to teachers and students.

#### **School visits**

The evaluation team engaged in a purposive selection of schools for fieldwork. A random selection of schools was not possible given the multiple literacy and numeracy programs in use across NSW, the small numbers of schools in some program cohorts, and the other commitments of some participating schools.

Schools to be visited were selected to provide a range of implementation contexts, in terms of:

- the size and location of schools, ensuring demographic diversity within the sample
- characteristics of the student population, including the proportions of Aboriginal students and students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- the mix of NPLN programs undertaken in each school
- schools' engagement with other initiatives under the Smarter Schools National Partnerships, including the Low Socio-economic Status School Communities National Partnership, to avoid logistical difficulties for the school.

Every attempt was made to ensure that selected schools were not involved in multiple other learning initiatives or funded programs.

In most cases, two members of the evaluation team visited each school for one day. Each visit included:

- an interview with the principal and relevant school leaders
- classroom observation of local program implementation, to allow students to meet evaluators prior to participation in the focus group
- focus groups with students
- group interviews with teaching staff
- group interviews with the local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG) and Parents and Citizens group representatives (where available)
- document review including the school plan and the school literacy plan.

Table 1.1 provides a summary of sources of data collected across the seven schools.

**Table 1.1: Summary of participation in school interviews**

Methods	No of interviews	No of participants	Aboriginal representation
Principal/ school leaders	7	14	
Classroom observations	7	n/a	in 5 out of 7 observations
Student focus groups	7	44	in 5 out of 7 interviews
Teacher interviews	14	62	
Parent and community interviews	8	25	in 6 out of 8 interviews

The inclusion of Aboriginal parents and local community members was seen as an important part of the qualitative data gathering. Schools and local AECGs were contacted well ahead of time, and provided with information flyers regarding the evaluation, for distribution to members of their community.

### Data recording and analysis

All interviews and focus group sessions were recorded using both audio recording and note taking. Field notes and recordings were consolidated into a single record of interview, which was quality-reviewed before analysis commenced.

Systematic coding commenced with an initial set of categories generated from the Terms of Reference and the background document review. Original categories were soon expanded and refined based on common issues and themes emerging from participants' responses. Counter-examples were sought, with recognition given to dissenting opinions, particularly from within teacher group interviews.

The narrative responses to the teacher survey were included in the consolidated data set for each program. In the case of *Accelerated Literacy*, this coded data amounted to 2,100 individual thematic records. It is this material that has been used to provide the majority of the qualitative evidence of the evaluation.

### 1.5.2 Quantitative component

The quantitative component of the evaluation included an online survey for teachers, and analysis of the available student assessment data provided by the Department's Educational Measurement and School Accountability Directorate (EMSAD).

## Teacher online survey

An online survey was made available to teaching staff in all 28 schools, to capture teachers' experiences and views on the effectiveness of *Accelerated Literacy*. **The survey was developed with input from the *Accelerated Literacy* Expert (ALE) group.**

The online survey was completed by a total of 294 school staff, from 26 of the 28 schools implementing *Accelerated Literacy*, including some principals and school executive. Full results of the online survey are attached in Appendix 2.

The charts and graphs used throughout this report present responses to the teacher survey.

## NAPLAN and NPLN assessment data

An essential component of an evaluation of a literacy program is consideration of the affected students' quantitative results in broad-scale testing, against common standards.

While broad-scale testing can deliver useful information about the effects of a student's school experience on test performance, it is a more complex matter to attempt to link one intervention, which is part of that experience, to test performances. This section of the report considers test data and how it was used in the evaluation.

A data model developed by EMSAD provided the quantitative analysis for the program evaluations. The Department holds data for both government and Catholic schools. The NSW Catholic Education Commission (CEC) authorised the preparation of this analysis by the Department for the purpose of this evaluation. This data model included NAPLAN and NPLN assessment data.

For NAPLAN assessments which occur only for Years 3 and 5 in primary school, a pre-NPLN benchmark was established using results for students in Year 3 in 2008 and 2009, for comparison with results of the same classes in Year 5 in 2010 and 2011, as shown in Table 1.2. Individual students cannot be identified and a significant turnover of students in some schools makes comparisons between students uncertain.

**Table 1.2: Student performance assessment data sets**

NAPLAN results		NPLN assessment results			
Cohort 1	Cohort 2				
2008	Year 3				
2009	Year 3	April, 2009	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
2010	Year 5	August, 2010	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
2011	Year 5	August, 2011	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6

The preliminary NAPLAN data sets provided by EMSAD are provided as:

- test means and standard deviations
- gains in mean scores from Year 3 to Year 5
- percentages below, at and above National Minimum Standards.

The results are provided as aggregated for all NPLN program schools, separated by NPLN program, and by various cohort groups of students, as shown in Table 1.3.

ESL data are not provided, due to a change in the use of that cohort group in the NAPLAN test data in recent years.



The key analysis in the use of the NAPLAN data is the effect size measure. Effect size is an indication of the meaning attached to a difference between the mean of a sample and the mean of the population from which the sample is drawn. Numerically it is the difference between the sample mean and the population mean, expressed as a proportion of the standard deviation for the population. It describes the effect of being in a program school on student performance.

**Table 1.3: Aggregate data sets**

Data set	Program comparison groups	Student comparison groups
NAPLAN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Program schools (aggregated data for all NPLN schools implementing a given literacy or numeracy program)</li> <li>All NPLN schools (literacy/numeracy)</li> <li>All NSW</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All Students</li> <li>Boys</li> <li>Girls</li> <li>Aboriginal</li> <li>Non-Aboriginal</li> <li>LBOTE</li> <li>Non-LBOTE</li> </ul>
NPLN assessments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Program schools (aggregated data for all NPLN schools implementing a given literacy or numeracy program)</li> <li>All NPLN schools (literacy/numeracy)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All Students</li> <li>Boys</li> <li>Girls</li> <li>Aboriginal</li> <li>Non-Aboriginal</li> <li>LBOTE</li> <li>Non-LBOTE</li> </ul>

In this analysis the population is 'all the students in the state' in most cases, but in other cases it is the students in schools in the NPLN program group, as will be evident in the tables and text throughout this report. The sample is, in most cases, 'all NPLN program schools' but it may be a cohort only, such as boys or Aboriginal students only.

An effect size of zero to 0.2 or -0.2 indicates that the means are virtually the same and as such, the measure of performance is the same for sample and population. An effect size greater than 0.2 or less than -0.2 indicates that the mean of the sample is different from the population mean and the performance is different.

Positive effect sizes indicate a sample performance above the population performance, while negative effect sizes indicate that the performance of the sample is below the population performance. An effect size greater than 0.5 or less than -0.5, in other words a difference of half a standard deviation or more, indicates that the mean of the sample is very different from the population mean and the sample performance is well above or well below the population.

### 1.5.3 Limitations of the methodology

The major limitation in the design of this program evaluation comes from the short period of time between the commencement of the interventions in late 2009, and the points of data collection, both quantitative and qualitative, to mid 2011.

The NAPLAN data can only be viewed as a preliminary and incomplete set because of the program timeframe. For Cohort 1 (Table 1.2) the period of program implementation prior to the May 2010 NAPLAN testing in Year 5, allows an effect time of, at most, one full term of the program intervention. Cohort 2 also will have had limited experience using the program, at best for five or six terms. The youngest cohort did not do a NAPLAN test until students were in Year 3 in 2010, so growth in NAPLAN scores will not be able to be assessed until they are in Year 5 in 2012.

The variation in length of time students have been exposed to the program is accentuated by the staged introduction of the program, and teacher training, that took place in many schools. In this context it is problematic to treat program schools as if students have all had substantial experience of the program.

EMSAD has advised that further caution should be exercised in interpreting the results of NAPLAN and NPLN assessments. A number of limitations impact on the validity of findings from the analysis including:

- the variation in the focus of tests each year
- considerable student mobility in schools
- small sample sizes for some comparison groups
- the impact of other literacy and numeracy initiatives operating in NPLN schools
- the use of these same programs in other NSW schools (not funded under the NPLN), and
- the lack of a comparable control group against which to benchmark results for NPLN schools.

The NPLN tests are adequate for whole-cohort assessment but are too brief to use for diagnostic assessment of individual students. As the NPLN tests are half the length of the Basic Skills Test (BST) on which they are based, they cannot be used to compare with state-wide performance on the former BSTs. As NAPLAN and the NPLN tests are presented on different scales the results of these two assessments cannot be compared.

The use of qualitative methods, as well as performance measures or surveys, provides a balancing effect, allowing the experiences of teachers, students and parents to be presented for interpretation by others. Qualitative methods do not seek to identify a simple consensus or give extra weight to frequent comments or repeated evidence of similar experiences. It is the 'atypical' that also provides insight into the educational situation, especially if events are experienced differently in different contexts, or by a variety of participants.

While this may suggest a limitation in the ability to provide general conclusions, what it does offer is recognition of the diversity of experiences within and between school situations.

#### 1.5.4 Attribution

Finally, concurrent with the introduction of *Accelerated Literacy* as the whole-class literacy program, each school was required to implement a literacy program targeting individual students in greatest need of support. In several cases existing literacy programs were also maintained even after *Accelerated Literacy* was introduced.

A challenge exists in attributing effectiveness to any one program or intervention, and in isolating that effect from other influences in classrooms and schools.

## 1.6 Presentation of the evaluation findings

Section 2 provides an overview of the *Accelerated Literacy* program, including its goals, major features and proposed model for teacher professional learning.

The evaluation findings are presented in Part 2 of this report, in the following sections:

Section 3. Implementation of *Accelerated Literacy*

Section 4. Effects for students

Section 5. Teacher perspectives

Section 6. Impacts in schools

Section 7. Summary of findings and conclusions.

The interview and observation schedules and the teacher survey results are included in three appendices.

## 2 Accelerated Literacy program details

This section provides an overview of the *Accelerated Literacy* approach and has been drawn from the *Accelerated Literacy Teacher Training Modules* (AETD, 2008), the *National Accelerated Literacy Program* website (NALP, 2007, 2009) and the interview with Wendy Cowey undertaken by the program evaluators (Dione-Rodgers, 2011).

### 2.1 Aim

*Accelerated Literacy* aims to remove the educational divide faced by students who can't read, by improving the literacy outcomes for students at an accelerated rate (NALP, 2007, 2009).

*Accelerated Literacy* takes a whole-class approach, leading learners through intensive exploration of complex grammar using age appropriate, 'literate texts' in contexts across the school curriculum. The approach has application across the curriculum and across all achievement levels in a class (NPLN, 2009).

### 2.2 Background

*Accelerated Literacy* was originally developed by Dr Brian Gray and Ms Wendy Cowey at the University of Canberra. Both Dr Gray and Ms Cowey have school teaching backgrounds.

In 1992 Brian Gray and Wendy Cowey developed a local after-school program called *Literacy for Parents* at the University of Canberra, to provide assistance for school students struggling with reading. Cowey stated that the students were "grabbing at reading" (Dione-Rodgers, 2011) by sounding words out phonetically, but had no understanding of the meaning of the text. Gray and Cowey believe that educators were looking at students' backgrounds (attendance, home environment, ESL, hearing concerns, etc) as the cause of poor literacy skills, but were not examining the teaching methodologies being used.

Following their analysis of the teaching and learning practices being utilised in Canberra schools, Gray and Cowey concluded that teaching methods played an important role in developing students' capacity to learn how to read. In developing *Accelerated Literacy*, three concepts were identified as being fundamental in providing the theoretical foundation for the approach:

- the objective of teacher and student participation in literate discourse
- teaching within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1962)
- scaffolding student learning through a teaching sequence focusing on in-depth analysis of 'literate texts'.

The program was trialled in a small number of schools in Western Australia, South Australia and the Northern Territory. It was subsequently adopted by the Northern Territory government in 2005 making *Accelerated Literacy* an approved program within the Northern Territory Department of Education.

Further development was undertaken at Charles Darwin University (NT) including:

- codifying the methodology and providing published material to inform teaching practice
- developing support resources
- developing and delivering *Accelerated Literacy* training through practitioner professional development workshops
- developing and maintaining the *National Accelerated Literacy Program* website (NALP, 2007, 2009)
- contributing to longer-term workforce development through graduate teacher training.

The approach, according to Wendy Cowey, works extremely well with all students, but particularly with Aboriginal students because of the rich 'literate' narrative texts and the associated activities.

Teachers are provided with recommended literate texts which have been well researched and chosen by literacy educators and benchmarked to suit each stage of learning. Originally, factual texts were utilised. Gray and Cowey then began to focus on narrative, literate texts following research that indicated this was the best genre for teaching children who are beginning to read. The use of narrative is seen as being particularly effective with Aboriginal students who often learn through storytelling, within their communities.

*Accelerated Literacy* developers and DEC trainers now recommend the use of all text types, depending on the class and syllabus requirements.

## 2.3 Features of *Accelerated Literacy*

The program developers and trainers refer to *Accelerated Literacy* as a 'pedagogy', as it focuses on a method of teaching literacy rather than providing an 'off the shelf' worksheet-based reading program. Some teachers refer to the program as a teaching 'methodology'. This report will use the word 'approach'.

The *Accelerated Literacy* approach requires teachers to take on an alternative way of teaching literacy; one that aims to create a supportive and structured learning environment, and assists the most marginalised students to learn in a positive way. It is an explicit and systematic way of teaching.

### 2.3.1 Whole-class approach

Cowey states that using a whole-class approach rather than individual withdrawal intervention leads to greater skill development and higher engagement in the reading process. Withdrawal often results in students falling further behind as they continue to miss class activities. Cowey asserts that *Accelerated Literacy* can be implemented with all students, at all levels so that everyone can be successful.

Cowey stresses the importance of all students in the class working on the same text. For example, a grade 6 student being taught with a grade 1 text is inappropriate and counter-productive for the student. Even 'grouping' students according to ability levels will not lead to progress in reading. Students need to know what others know and learn the 'how to' from their more literate peers (Dione-Rodgers, 2011).

### 2.3.2 Using scaffolding and 'literate texts'

The *Accelerated Literacy* approach is built on the theory of scaffolding students' learning so they may successfully participate in discussion around 'literate texts'. Literate texts are seen to be complex and rich in language, allowing the reader to actively construct meaning beyond the words on the page.

Sets of literate texts that have been researched by literacy educators, benchmarked and levelled to suit each stage of learning, are recommended for teachers to use with their classes. Suggested working materials are also recommended for each text (NALP, 2007, 2009), although teachers are not restricted to these materials.

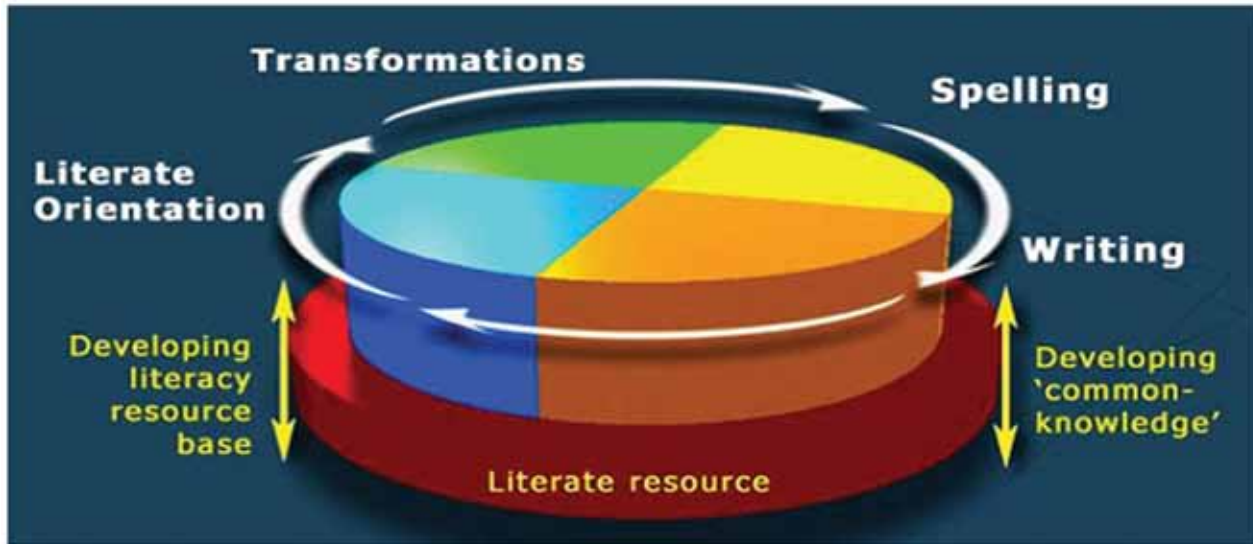
The teaching sequence (elaborated below), is applied to a single text at a time. The text is examined in detail with the whole class. *Accelerated Literacy* strategies are used to develop oral skills, explore the author's purpose, make links between text and illustrations and promote deep comprehension, vocabulary development and transferral of shared knowledge to a new context.

*“The Accelerated Literacy teaching strategies are designed to teach students both how to enjoy and interpret books, particularly narrative, in an educational context, as well as how a literate person thinks and acts to be successful in school” (Cowey, 2005, p. 6).*

Students are taken through the examination of a text by reading, deconstructing what the author has written, and reconstructing ideas in their own writing. This enables them to read with greater understanding. The cycle then continues as each part of the sequence is applied to different passages within the same text.

The teaching sequence, shown in Figure 2.1, is intended to be a ‘fluid model’ encouraging teachers to move in and out of stages, as needed.

**Figure 2.1: Accelerated Literacy teaching sequence (Cowey, 2007)**



The teaching sequence comprises five key elements:

- text selection: texts selected are age and class appropriate
- literate orientation: discussion of themes, characters and author's intent, as well as questioning techniques that encourage students to answer successfully
  - *low order* orientation involving background knowledge and an overview of the text. Once completed the teacher reads the text aloud to the class.
  - *high order* orientation involving an examination of the author's use of words and text construction
- transformations: the student moves from being a reader to being a writer by deconstructing and reconstructing sections of text as well as discussing the author's use of grammar, punctuation and language choice
- spelling: words are broken down into chunks, known as 'chunking'
- writing: teachers and students jointly rewrite passages from the text followed by independent student writing using techniques learned.

*“Each Accelerated Literacy stage can contribute to the development of skills in the other stages. For example, as students’ decoding skills develop in the spelling stage so does their competence with reading. This in turn improves students’ writing skills as they are able to write more fluently and read their writing more accurately.”*  
(NALP, 2007, 2009)

## 2.4 Development of Accelerated Literacy in New South Wales

In 2005 the NSW DEC's Aboriginal Educational and Training Directorate (AETD) made the decision to fund developments of *Accelerated Literacy* for NSW. Raylene Saunders, Relieving Principal Education Officer Schools, AETD, stated that *Accelerated Literacy* was selected by AETD and the Literacy Team at the Curriculum K-12 Directorate, because of the strong indications that the program is effective with Aboriginal students.

A number of schools began implementing *Accelerated Literacy* from 2008, utilising the modified training package developed by Cathy Welsford (Effective Teaching Australia, 2011) and funded by AETD.

A number of DEC regional Literacy Consultants and regional *Accelerated Literacy* tutors formed a working group during the National Partnership period, known as the *Accelerated Literacy* Expert group (ALE). The ALE group worked together to provide consistent support for *Accelerated Literacy* implementation, including the development and sharing of resources for use with schools.

During 2011 the ALE group developed region-based training packages, in consultation with Wendy Cowey, for accreditation with the NSW Institute of Teachers. Costs have yet to be identified.

## 2.5 Training requirements

In NSW, *Accelerated Literacy* has generally been delivered using the modified modules developed by AETD.

Several models of training were used:

1. The recommended model was delivered by both regional tutors and the private provider, and entailed a total of six days' training delivered in three blocks of two days. Training was spread over several months so that teachers were able to apply and evaluate their learning between workshops.
2. Local conditions occasionally required a modified or intensive course, delivered by regional or in-school tutors, varying in length between four to six days, delivered over a shorter time span due to the timeframe of the National Partnership.
3. Some schools chose to train their own teachers as *Accelerated Literacy* tutors, who could then provide all the schools' training, around local needs. Professional learning sessions could take place on days where no casual relief was necessary, with the added benefit of reducing overall costs.

Additional support was available in the form of *Accelerated Literacy* mentor training, available to teachers who have already received *Accelerated Literacy* basic training and who want to gain a deeper understanding of the approach. Mentors provided an extra layer of in-school support for teachers.

Tutor and mentor training was provided at extra costs to schools.

## 2.6 Resources

The *Accelerated Literacy* training package comprises modules detailing:

- the theoretical background to the approach
- the teaching sequence and strategies
- assessments for reading, comprehension, spelling and writing (NALP, 2007a)
- support materials, including a list of over two hundred recommended texts provided through the NALP website (NALP, 2007, 2009).

Schools are advised to obtain class sets of recommended texts, teaching notes, class sets of individual whiteboards and activity resources including transformation boards (one for each class) and transformation strips.

Use of either interactive whiteboards or overhead projectors is recommended for text analysis.

### 2.6.1 Monitoring student progress

As part of implementing *Accelerated Literacy*, it is suggested that teachers complete the regular assessments contained within the program package (NALP, 2007b).

The measures of student performance include pre- and post-testing on the focus text. Observation reading assessments, known as Individual Level and Working Level tests (NALP, 2007, 2010), were used to gather data about the reading accuracy of students (their ability to decode and use meaning), on both unseen texts and texts which have been worked on in class. Test results are used to identify areas for additional attention. Six-monthly *PM benchmark* assessment (Nelley & Smith, 2005) is also recommended.

## 2.6.2 Program support

For DEC schools *Accelerated Literacy* support may be provided by regional consultants or *Accelerated Literacy* trainers. The level and availability of support is determined by each region.

## 2.7 Previous evaluations

Prior to 2004, *Accelerated Literacy*, then known as *Scaffolding Literacy*, was piloted in approximately 30 schools in Western Australia, South Australia, Queensland and the Northern Territory, under a federal grant received from the Inclusive Community Education Program (IECP) *What Works* (McRae et al, 2000). Student outcomes from these pilots were said to be promising.

High student achievement levels were also reported in the evaluation conducted by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) (Cresswell, 2002). In 2004, based on these results, the Northern Territory government made the decision to adopt *Accelerated Literacy* as its core literacy initiative to improve literacy teaching practices. Cresswell (2002) concluded that the program is an effective means of improving the literacy skills of the targeted students and that these students consequently achieved at a much higher level than they may have, following the normal course of study.

The National Accelerated Literacy Program (NALP) involved the implementation of *Accelerated Literacy*, in 100 primary and secondary schools across the Northern Territory. In particular, NALP attempted to address the literacy outcomes of the Northern Territory's Aboriginal population. An evaluation of NALP was carried out by the School for Social and Policy Research at Charles Darwin University (Robinson et al., 2009), covering the period from the program's inception in 2004 to its system-wide delivery in 2008. The evaluation examined the program's implementation, teacher practices and student outcomes.

The NALP report noted positive signs that *Accelerated Literacy* is able to contribute to closing the literacy gap for Aboriginal students in the major centres of the Northern Territory. However, it had yet to demonstrate the achievement of substantial accelerated gain in reading skills for all Aboriginal students.

Several other limited evaluations report similar outcomes (Tyler, Robinson & Bartlett, 2008; Walsh & Barnett, 2005).





## Part 2 Evaluation findings

Part 2 presents the findings of the program evaluation, organised in terms of priority areas identified in the Terms of Reference for the evaluation, and in response to issues that emerged through the data collection.

### 3 Implementation of *Accelerated Literacy*

Section 2 provided an overview of the *Accelerated Literacy* program as it is intended to be implemented. In the context of the National Partnership on Literacy and Numeracy (NPLN), some variations were observed, especially in the professional learning model. Across the 28 schools where the program was implemented, it became apparent that school differences had a significant impact on how the program was received, how it operated and perhaps even how it may be maintained.

This section sets out the major implementation influences that made a difference to schools' experiences of *Accelerated Literacy* in practice.

#### Key findings:

- Training in *Accelerated Literacy* for staff in schools was undertaken by a number of providers. Staff claimed that the training varied between providers and sometimes had an impact on teacher understanding and delivery practice of *Accelerated Literacy*.
- Training by DEC regional trained tutors was efficient and cost effective as opposed to the high cost of the private providers.
- Many teachers commented that training as a group was effective in promoting collegial support, as the program was introduced across the school.
- Most principals and teachers agreed that training all staff in the school in the literacy approach led to greater consistency, embedding of effective practice and better results for students.
- Most principals, teachers and parent communities agreed that the implementation of the literacy approach across the whole school was far more effective than using it exclusively with particular stages.
- Most principals and teachers agreed that in-school trained tutors and mentors provided the most effective continued support.

#### 3.1 NPLN program selection

*Accelerated Literacy* was nominated within the NPLN Agreement as one of the whole-class programs schools could adopt to improve students' literacy achievement.

A number of factors influenced schools in their choice of program to implement. Principals indicated that the choice of *Accelerated Literacy* as their whole-class intervention was based on factors such as:

- prior knowledge of the program; for example, individual teachers had been previously trained in *Accelerated Literacy* (e.g. at another school)
- availability of regional or other local support; for example, whether schools would need to go out of region for training and support
- local needs; based on teacher quality;

- school needs; for example, whether the program could be implemented across the whole school from Kindergarten to Year 6
- identification of student needs; for example, indications that the program worked well with Aboriginal students, and included strategies that targeted specific areas of need
- cost; for example, a cluster of four schools pooled funding in order to share resources and expert personnel.

Several principals and school leaders indicated that their rationale for program selection needed to be understood and supported by staff, promoting a whole-school approach from the very beginning so that any resistance would be minimised.

### 3.2 Professional learning

Schools were advised to access training in *Accelerated Literacy* through their regional Literacy Consultant, who would determine the availability of an *Accelerated Literacy* trainer. When a regional trainer was not available, schools were referred to the private provider, Effective Teaching Australia (2011).

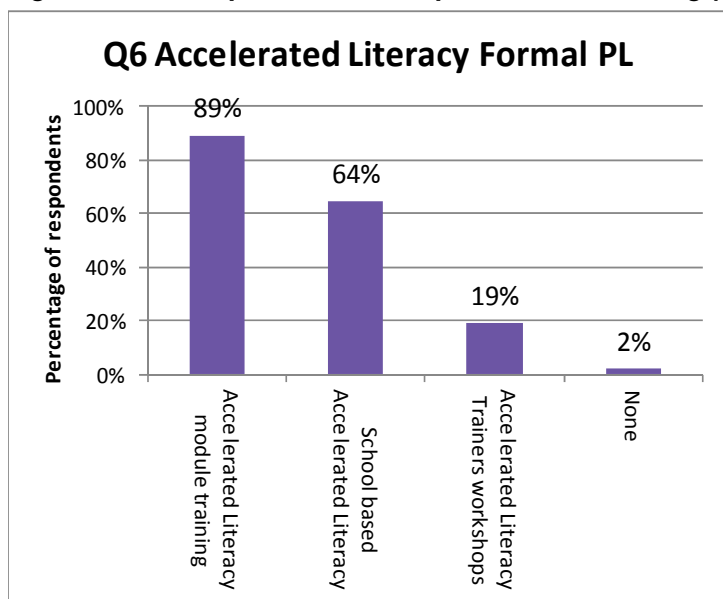
Training was offered to NPLN schools in a flexible mode involving a combination of training days and in-school practice and support. Schools were able to negotiate with DEC *Accelerated Literacy* trainers regarding the training schedule depending upon their school's requirements. In some cases training took place on school development days or on weekends.

If schools chose to adopt a model of training staff to be in-school tutors, further flexibility was provided in determining the length and schedule of training days. Some schools developed their own professional learning packages based on the modules developed by NALP and AETD.

Those schools that opted to use the private provider could choose either a six-day training package or five-day intensive course.

As shown in Figure 3.1 almost all survey respondents had specific *Accelerated Literacy* training; some had several forms and some were trainers themselves. Only 2% of teachers surveyed had no formal *Accelerated Literacy* training.

**Figure 3.1: Participation in formal professional learning (PL)**



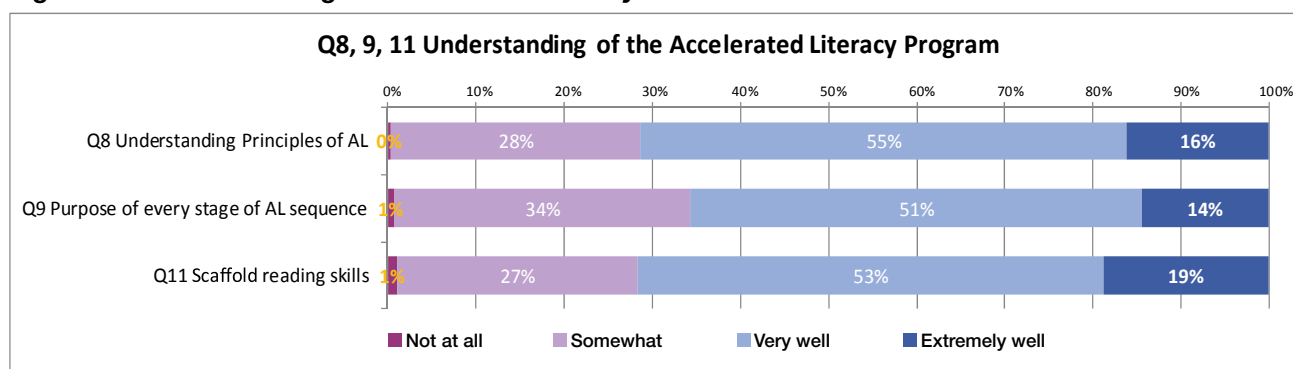
Nine out of ten teachers participated in training in the *Accelerated Literacy* modules, while two thirds have had some form of school-based professional learning and one in five participated in the trainer workshops. Further analysis shows that almost half had two forms of professional learning and about one in six participated in three forms of training.

In both the survey and interviews, most teachers indicated that training was vital to understanding *Accelerated Literacy*. Most also indicated that the five or six days of formal training provided a good introduction to the approach, but they felt that continued in-school professional learning was also important for them to be able to achieve effective results with their students.

The professional learning model allowed teachers to learn about an aspect of the teaching sequence, and then apply it in their classes for a number of weeks before returning for more training. The ability to evaluate their understanding and reflect on the process before moving on to the next part of the sequence, was particularly valued.

Figure 3.2 shows survey responses indicating that over two thirds of teachers report high levels of understanding of all aspects of the program, irrespective of the training model they experienced. A remarkable 0-1% report not understanding at all.

**Figure 3.2: Understanding of *Accelerated Literacy***



### 3.2.1 Cost and timing of *Accelerated Literacy* training

*Accelerated Literacy* training was offered through DEC regional consultants, where available, or by the private provider, with associated costs as follows:

- Regional training model: \$360 per teacher for six professional learning days plus \$135 for training materials.
- Private provider training: \$1500 for six days, including materials.

In each case schools had to pay casual relief costs for training days attended by class teachers.

Teachers could undertake additional training to achieve *Accelerated Literacy* Mentor and then *Accelerated Literacy* Tutor status, as follows:

- *Accelerated Literacy* mentor: additional two days, at \$99 per day, plus casual relief
- *Accelerated Literacy* tutor: additional four days, at \$99 per day, after teacher completes mentor training.

There were variations and inconsistencies in costs associated with training for *Accelerated Literacy* across regions: for example, one region does not charge for teacher or tutor training, and schools only have to pay for their in-school relief; another region provides initial training at a fee and follows up basic training with additional network meetings once a term.

Most schools opted for six days' training in total, for all staff. The training was offered in blocks of two days with breaks, usually over a term. Teachers commented that this approach was valuable in that they were able to implement what was learned, and return to discuss their experiences at the next workshop. The Deputy Principal at one school commented that:

*“Having training spaced out like that allowed us to practise the implementation process in a supported way. We knew we were going to training again. The process allowed us to have a taste of aspects of the sequence, try it, and then come back and report, and then move on to the next part of the sequence.”*

Teachers generally felt that the length of training was appropriate; any shorter and they would not have time to bring strategies into their classroom and reflect on their practice.

Most schools opted to train all teachers in the school. A number of schools also chose to train their 'regular relief teachers' as well as temporary and long term casual staff so that continuity of experiences for students was promoted, even if their class teachers were on leave. Where this took place, there was a common feeling of being able to share, support one another, collaborate and plan towards the same goals.

It is noted from survey comments that where schools did not train all staff, those teachers who had not been trained felt at a disadvantage, such as:

*“Those of us who are not trained seem to suffer.”*

*“Not everyone has been trained so it is a bits and pieces implementation of this program.”*

Organising attendance at the training days presented several challenges: the anticipated disruption to classes if all teachers attended training at the same time; locating casual teachers to provide relief; and the cost of relief.

Training all staff at the same time was seen as desirable by several schools. As one teacher noted, *“it was essential and far more effective since everyone learned together”*. In order to do this with minimal disruption, some schools opted to train all teachers on school development days or on Saturdays, with the added benefit of eliminating the need for casual relief.

In some instances schools chose to fund additional training for one or two teachers to qualify as *Accelerated Literacy* in-school tutors (see Section 3.2.3). This again enabled training to be organised according to local needs, rather than relying on regional training timetables and availability of regional tutors. Significant cost savings resulted, as schools did not have to pay for individual training for every teacher. In-house venues and catering also reduced training expenses.

Finding *sufficient* casual teachers to provide relief was seen as the other major inhibitor to training all staff at the one time. Principals stressed that this, in combination with the impact on school organisation, resulted in decisions to train staff in teams, spread over time. Teachers appreciated the team approach as it meant that at least they had support from other colleagues.

The length and time span of the training resulted in some classes or stage groups being targeted early in the partnership whilst others did not receive exposure to the program until the teachers had received training. As a result, a number of school staff commented that the full impact of the program had not yet been realised due to the short time frame of whole-school implementation, especially as some staff were still undergoing training during 2011.

### 3.2.2 Training provided by regional *Accelerated Literacy* tutors

A number of regions trained or employed accredited *Accelerated Literacy* tutors to provide training for teachers. Some regions chose to have their literacy consultants trained as tutors by the program developers in the Northern Territory, at Charles Darwin University.

Teacher training was provided by the region at a cost to each school, as detailed in section 3.2.1.

Generally, teachers who had been trained by regional *Accelerated Literacy* tutors were very positive about the approach, appeared to have a thorough understanding of the sequence and were confident in applying it in their classrooms. Teachers spoke highly of the training received by regional tutors, as demonstrated by the following statement:

*“Training with the Regional AL facilitator was excellent. The training was so good, and support after the training was so good. She gave extended support – not just in for a day. I email her during the holidays and show her my notes and ask for feedback.”*

Regional tutors presented *Accelerated Literacy* as having enough flexibility to allow the incorporation of other teaching strategies which many teachers knew worked with their students. As a consequence most teachers trained by regional tutors felt motivated and committed to the approach and saw that students were engaged and learning from the process. One teacher stated:

*“The AL Program facilitator came out and did a snapshot of AL: scaffolding and author’s purpose. Even the most hardened entrenched people said ‘Wow! I want to do this’.”*

### 3.2.3 Training provided by in-school tutors

A number of schools chose to use their NPLN funding to train teachers as *Accelerated Literacy* tutors who could then train staff in their schools. At the time of the survey (September 2011), 19% of teachers indicated that they had been trained as in-school tutors. Five out of seven schools visited had trained in-school tutors in *Accelerated Literacy*. In-school tutors were released from normal duties so they could train and support staff in learning about the *Accelerated Literacy* approach. Generally this option was seen as a cost-effective and sustainable method of implementing the program within the school.

Training delivered by in-school tutors was regarded by teachers as particularly beneficial as modules could be tailored in response to each school’s unique situation. Timing of workshop sessions could be flexibly organised without having to fit in with regional offerings, costs were significantly reduced and ‘expert’ ongoing support was available on demand.

The *Accelerated Literacy* coordinator in one school undertook tutor training with the program developer Wendy Cowey. This tutor developed a manageable and condensed introductory training package for the school. Teachers appreciated the additional introduction to *Accelerated Literacy* that was provided over several staff meetings, before formal training began.

Having a trained tutor in the school was seen by teachers as highly desirable.

*“It has been good in training and in class support/mentoring. She was willing to help and go into each classroom and model the approach for teachers. Then she watches the staff and gives them feedback.”*

Training a selection of teachers as *AL mentors* provided further local expertise for teachers to call on throughout the program implementation.

### 3.2.4 Training by the private providers

Significant differences were reported in the training undertaken with the private providers. The first and most obvious difference that principals noted was the substantially higher fees charged, compared with in-school or regional training.

Throughout the school visits, strong differences in attitudes emerged as teachers and principals spoke of the training provided by the private provider. It became clear that teachers who trained with the private provider received very different messages, especially about the rigour required in using the *Accelerated Literacy* teaching sequence. In several schools teachers described the teaching sequence as very restrictive and rigid. They were less enthusiastic about the approach as a whole and felt that their years of experience were not recognised.

In one school, teachers experienced DEC regional training as well as that delivered by the private provider, so were able to compare the approaches. The principal explained that the regional *Accelerated Literacy* tutor provided the first two-day workshop but was unavailable for the four further days due to commitments to other schools. For the next workshop session the school went to the private training provider. The principal clarified:

*“This proved ultimately ineffective due to cost and their [private provider] own private agenda of training requirements. We were finally able to move away from them and back to the regional AL trainer to provide tutor training for the school. As a result of private provider training, some teachers felt they didn’t ‘own’ the program and it was being forced on them in a particular way. Teachers blamed AL if the kids were not engaged - forgetting that the teacher is the one who makes the program work. Teachers wanted flexibility with the program but the private provider training emphasised the necessity of implementing the program according to a specific regimen. Their training was self serving, very rigid, inflexible... and expensive.”*

Similar ideas were expressed by a number of other principals and teachers. In particular teachers stated that the private provider training was itself too rigid and that teaching *Accelerated Literacy* “by script” was ineffective. It was noted by a teacher in another school that newly trained colleagues received very different information:

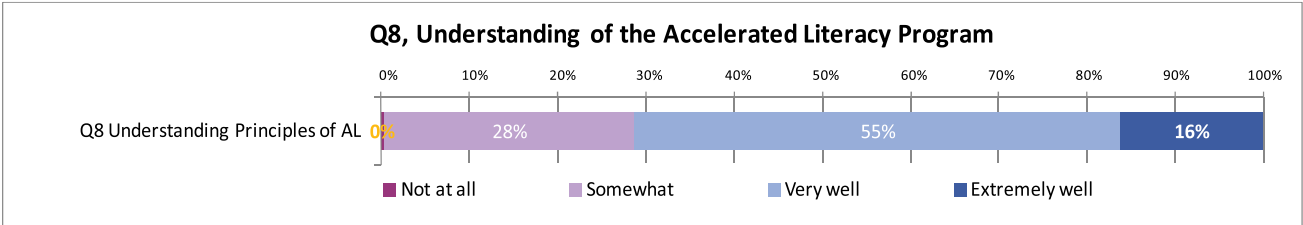
*“A couple of teachers who were trained recently by the AL consultant came back with a new folder - with new ideas on how to implement the whole program. It is not so rigid as indicated by private providers. It is much more flexible. Previously we understood you had to focus on narrative but now we know we can use factual texts. We know we can use any texts. Originally we were told by the private providers that we couldn’t send home a spelling list... but now we know you can ‘own it’ and make it yours.”*

One teacher stated that her stage team consists of a diverse group of people: early career teachers, experienced teachers, OC teachers; and not having the same training resulted in very different feelings about the program, “There was enthusiasm versus less enthusiasm”.

### 3.2.5 Implications of differences in training

Irrespective of the source and methods of training, teachers reported that the principles of the *Accelerated Literacy* approach are well understood, with only about one quarter of respondents saying they understand less than very well, as shown in Figure 3.3.

**Figure 3.3: Teachers’ understanding of principles of *Accelerated Literacy***



However, the differences in training models and providers, led to distinct differences in understanding of the details of the methodology and teachers’ attitudes towards the *Accelerated Literacy* approach as a whole. In some cases this also influenced the consistency of implementation throughout a school.

One principal was aware of the Institute of Teachers accredited training modules and suggested that the development of such modules will ensure greater consistency both within and between schools, in addition to providing recognition for teachers' efforts.

### 3.3 Resources

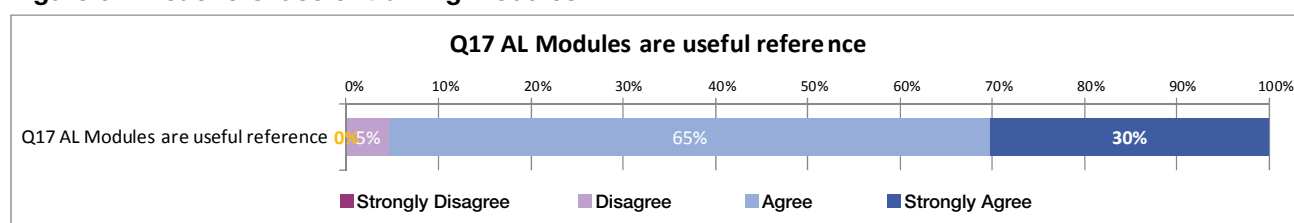
The *Accelerated Literacy* program mandates the teaching sequence to scaffold students' learning. The strongly recommended set of resources forms the other central component of the program.

#### 3.3.1 Training materials, class texts and resources

The teacher survey canvassed views on the usefulness of the *Accelerated Literacy* training modules, the recommended texts and class resources. Respondents were generally very positive about the suitability and ease of use of the materials.

Almost all respondents were enthusiastic about the *Accelerated Literacy* training modules, as demonstrated in Figure 3.4.

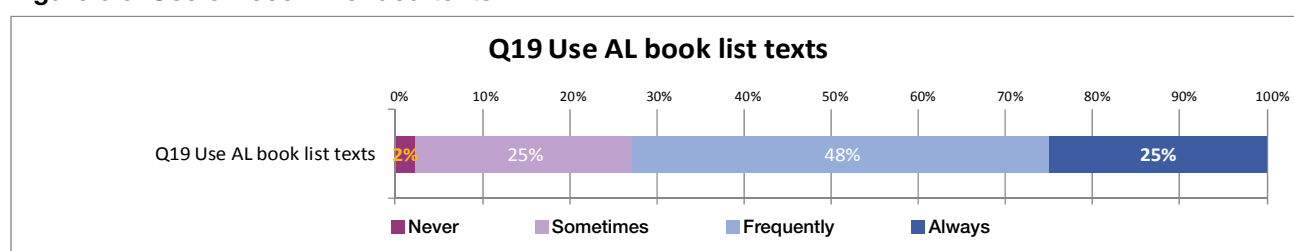
**Figure 3.4: Teachers' use of training modules**



Some surveyed teachers noted that the module resources were, as one teachers suggested “*vital in establishing a starting point in the classroom*”. Many teachers commented that whilst the modules were a good reference, ongoing professional learning was needed to ensure that teachers continue to focus on the approach.

The recommended resources available on the NALP website (2007, 2009) were highly valued by teachers and school communities. As shown in Figure 3.5, almost three out of four respondents use the suggested *Accelerated Literacy* texts always or frequently, while almost all other respondents use the texts sometimes. Very few respondents report never using the texts. Many teachers indicated that having a large range of texts at appropriate stage level from which to choose, saves time and makes planning easier.

**Figure 3.5: Use of recommended texts**

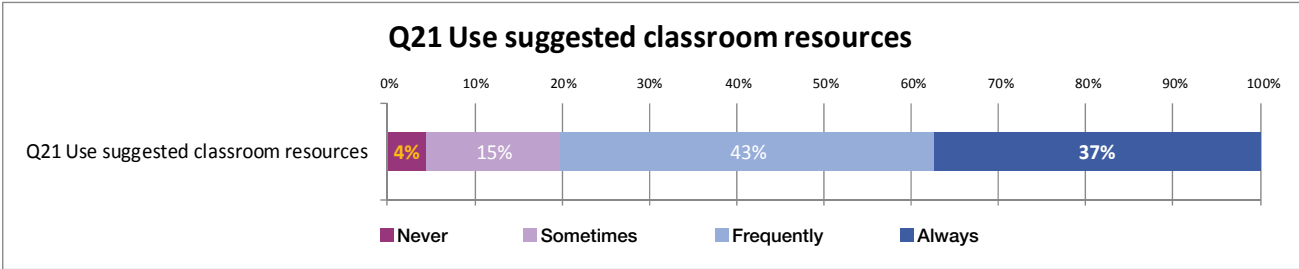


The NALP website not only assisted with text choice, but also provided teaching guides developed to align with individual texts, significantly reducing the time required for teachers to create class activities.

One deputy principal indicated that their decision to take on *Accelerated Literacy* was strongly influenced by the availability of resources, especially the class sets of literate texts and accompanying lesson plans detailing the teaching sequences and strategies.

The suggested classroom materials (e.g. transformation boards, student whiteboards) are used to some extent by most teachers. Very few never use them. Figure 3.6 shows that more than a third always use the suggested classroom resources.

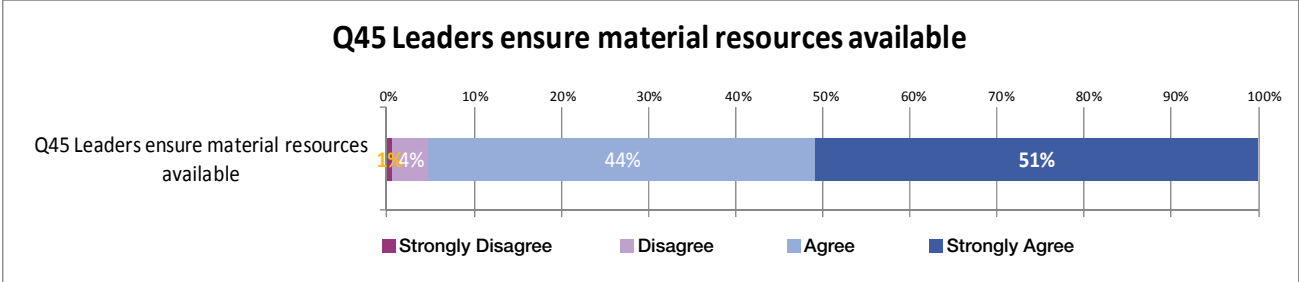
**Figure 3.6: Use of suggested resources**



Whole-school implementation of the program presents new sets of costs, particularly in the form of individual whiteboards for students and consumables such as highlighters, cardboard and marker pens. While these materials are seen as valuable and necessary parts of *Accelerated Literacy* lessons, it was frequently acknowledged that this expense would have to be built into future class budget allocations.

The importance of providing these additional resources was appreciated by school leaders, with almost all teacher respondents agreeing that material resources were made available (Figure 3.7).

**Figure 3.7: Material resources**



Many teachers indicated there were benefits to student engagement, provided through the use of interactive whiteboards, particularly with Stage 2 and 3 classes. Some schools chose to use NPLN funds to purchase interactive whiteboards for classrooms, with the added benefit of reducing ongoing costs for consumables. One school made the decision to equip all classrooms with interactive whiteboards (IWB) as part of their implementation of *Accelerated Literacy*.

Great variation existed in how schools chose to resource the implementation of *Accelerated Literacy*, depending on local needs. While some schools chose to invest in ICT equipment, others chose to buy assessment materials, and others chose to train teachers as mentors or tutors. An example from the budget for a Primary Class 3 school for *Accelerated Literacy* training and resources follows:

- \$1000 printing resources
- \$790 website development
- \$1000 *PM Benchmark Kit 2* (Nelley & Smith, 2005)
- \$5000 *The Lexile Framework for Reading* (MetaMetrics, 2012)
- \$2160 *Accelerated Literacy* training materials
- \$5760 *Accelerated Literacy* workshops
- \$1050 *Accelerated Literacy* tutor training.



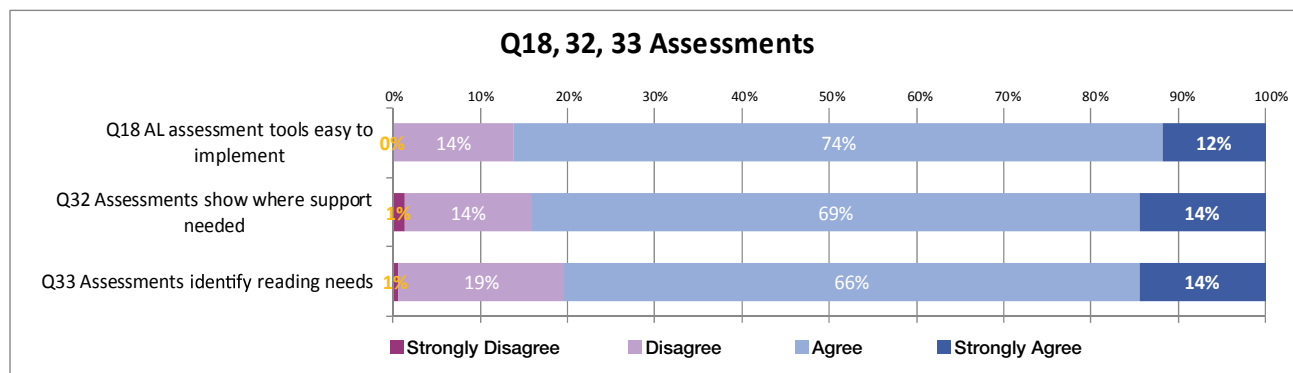
### 3.3.2 Assessment

The *Accelerated Literacy* training modules contain recommended assessment strategies for teachers to use in monitoring progress in reading, comprehension, spelling and writing. Some are developed as part of the program while others make use of familiar, well-regarded assessment instruments. Templates are provided for teachers use with:

- Tests of Reading Comprehension (TORCH), (ACER Press, 2003)
- *PM Benchmark Kit 2* (Nelley & Smith, 2005) - used for pre- and post-testing for each class text
- Early Reader Checklist (*Accelerated Literacy*), (NALP, 2007a)
- Stage Rubrics for Writing Narratives (*Accelerated Literacy*) (NALP, 2007a)
- Word Recognition and Spelling Checklist (*Accelerated Literacy*) (NALP, 2007a)
- SA Spelling Test: Approaches to teaching and assessment – Second Edition (Westwood, 2005)

As shown in Figure 3.8, at least four out of five survey respondents found the assessment tools easy to implement and useful in regularly monitoring student progress. They were seen to provide feedback on where learning support is needed by both individuals and across the class.

**Figure 3.8: Assessment strategies**



A large number of teachers in schools visited provided evidence of use of *TORCH* (ACER Press, 2003) and *PM benchmark* assessments (Nelley & Smith, 2005). Not only were they able to identify where individual student skills needed work, but also the class skills that needed developing.

Regular use of agreed assessment strategies, implemented across the school, boosted teachers' willingness and confidence to monitor their students' progress and share the results with colleagues.

### 3.4 Support for *Accelerated Literacy* across the school

Many teachers commented that the support received from colleagues, including in-school mentors and tutors was most valuable in enhancing their understanding of the *Accelerated Literacy* approach.

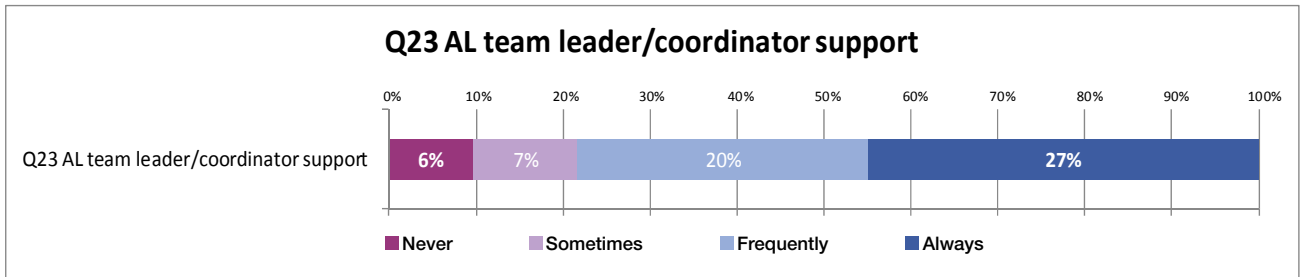
As part of the team leadership component of the NPLN, many schools established an *Accelerated Literacy* team or appointed a designated *Accelerated Literacy* coordinator, to support and manage implementation across classes.

The NPLN funds enabled schools to release teachers from usual class duties to provide support for staff, augmenting the initial training and further building teacher capacity across the school. In schools where this occurred, teachers were overwhelmingly appreciative of the support given by school leaders to ensure support people were available when required. This was reinforced in the survey, where there is strong evidence that teachers received the assistance they needed from team leaders and other teachers, especially in planning lessons, as show in Figures 3.9, 3.10 and 3.11. Only a very small proportion of respondents to each question suggested they were not supported.

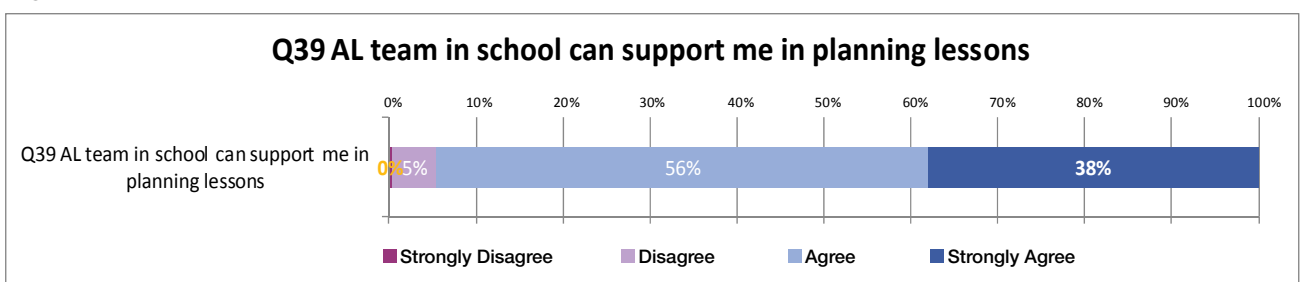
Having colleagues that “*speak the same language of literacy*” was seen by many teachers as a major benefit, as it assisted with planning and programming and sharing ideas and class resources. It also highlighted where teachers felt most vulnerable, as identified by one school mentor:

*“Ongoing training is necessary for teachers as AL also exposes weaknesses in a teachers’ own understanding of texts so ongoing support to up-skill teachers is necessary.”*

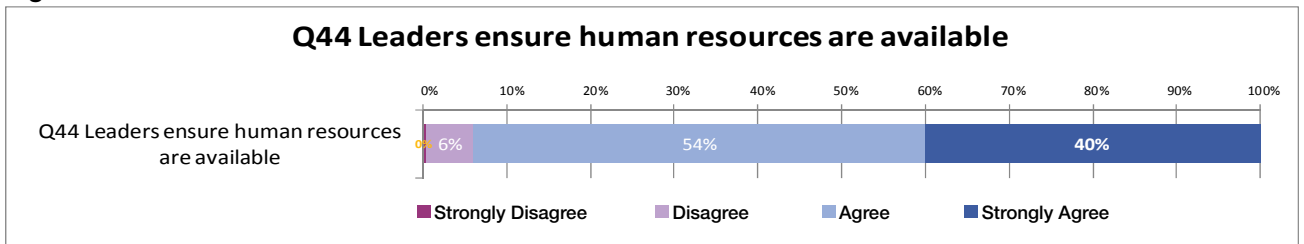
**Figure 3.9: Team leader support**



**Figure 3.10: Team member support**



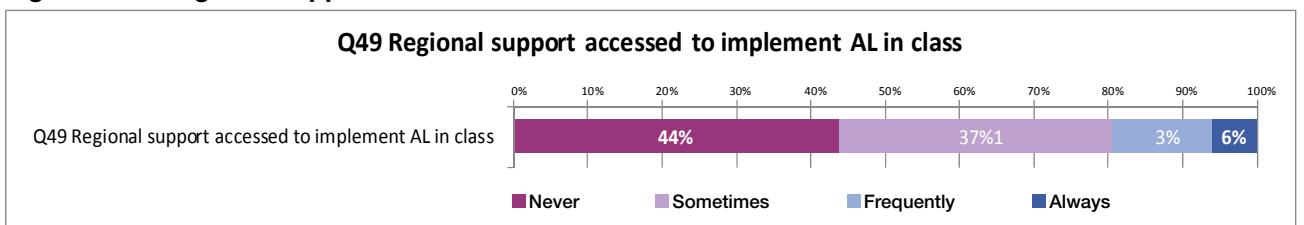
**Figure 3.11: Human resources**



In both teacher interviews and survey responses, school-level assistance was demonstrated to be of the greatest value, and most frequently used. While ongoing support from regional tutors was appreciated by those that made use of it, very few survey respondents reported having sought out such assistance, as shown in Figure 3.12.

During school visits, teachers reported that due to the whole-school implementation process, they felt that collegial support was available on site, and at much greater convenience.

**Figure 3.12: Regional support**



Building capacity of the whole school was seen to be particularly effective in those schools that budgeted for the training of mentors and in-school tutors.

In summary, by embedding practices, including resourcing and provision of collegial support, within the day-to-day functioning of the school, there is far greater likelihood of the program being sustained beyond the life of the partnership.

## 4 Effects for students

In determining the effectiveness of the *Accelerated Literacy* program, the impacts on students figure most prominently, both in terms of learning achievement and associated attitudes to reading.

With teachers' primary focus on assessing achievement of syllabus outcomes, a range of strategies is used to gather information about the performance of their students, including school- and class-developed assessments, program-specific strategies such as the *Accelerated Literacy* assessments, and observations and student self-assessment. National Assessment Program - Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) and other external measures form just one part of overall student assessment.

Findings in this section are drawn from analysis of the NAPLAN and NPLN assessments, responses to the teacher survey and most importantly, information reported through interviews with students, parents and teachers.

### Key findings:

- NAPLAN and NPLN data indicate that minor gains in reading scores were observed at *Accelerated Literacy* schools for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students.
- Majority of teachers concluded that *Accelerated Literacy* is effective for students, regardless of ability, gender or cultural background.
- Teachers concluded that reading improvement could be attributed to background knowledge scaffolding, text selection, examination of author purpose and scaffolded questioning techniques.
- Most students stated that their reading skills had improved through *Accelerated Literacy*.
- Parents commented that their children's text selection was now more thoughtful and age appropriate and enjoyment had increased.

Evidence from all data sources, indicates that student learning outcomes have been observed to improve. This is more strongly supported by teachers', parents' and students' impressions of effective learning than by broadscale testing measures.

### 4.1 External performance measures

To fulfil NPLN expectations, schools were required to regularly administer and analyse the NPLN Assessments, in addition to the annual NAPLAN tests.

As mentioned earlier, it is premature to expect to see dramatic gains in results in external performance measures. The variations in implementation patterns across schools mean there is little consistency in students' exposure to *Accelerated Literacy*. Teachers and principals agreed that improvements in student reading outcomes may not be reflected in NAPLAN results for a few years.

#### 4.1.1 National Assessment Program - Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN)

In NAPLAN testing, gains in mean reading scores were observed for all student cohorts at *Accelerated Literacy* schools. In both NAPLAN cohorts (students in Year 3 in 2008/Year 5 in 2010, and Year 3 in 2009/Year 5 in 2011) students at *Accelerated Literacy* schools achieved slightly higher reading score gains than for students across all NPLN literacy focus schools.

NAPLAN data indicates that gain scores for Aboriginal students at schools involved in *Accelerated Literacy* were higher than those for non-Aboriginal students in both cohorts.

The schools in the *Accelerated Literacy* program over all the NAPLAN test years and cohorts generally have effect sizes of about half a standard deviation below the whole-state mean for reading performance, when compared with the state mean for the 'All students' cohort. This shows a general performance below state.

The NAPLAN data is presented in the four tables below for Year 3 in 2008 and 2009, and Year 5 in 2010 and 2011.

The reading results for Aboriginal students show relatively high effect sizes in the four cohort/year groups, indicating performance similar to, not below, that of all Aboriginal students across the state.

The reading results in Table 4.1 are for 2008 Year 3 in the schools in the *Accelerated Literacy* program. The effect size of -0.53 when compared with the state mean for the 'All students' cohort, shows a general performance well below state, with the NPLN mean a little more than half a standard deviation below the whole-state mean.

**Table 4.1: NAPLAN Reading, 2008 Year 3 Accelerated Literacy cohort**

2008 Y3 AL Cohort	Cohort No.	Cohort %	AL Mean	State mean	AL effect size
<b>All Students</b>	<b>1175</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>367.3</b>	<b>412.1</b>	<b>-0.53</b>
Boys	616	52%	359.0	405.0	-0.53
Girls	559	48%	376.6	419.5	-0.52
Aboriginal	129	11%	335.8	348.6	-0.16
Non-Aboriginal	1017	89%	372.0	414.7	-0.51
LBOTE	176	15%	366.5	414.0	-0.58
Non-LBOTE	965	85%	368.3	412.3	-0.51

The proportion of Aboriginal students in the *Accelerated Literacy* sample schools in Year 3 2008, at 11%, was close to three times that for the state as a whole. In all other respects the *Accelerated Literacy* schools have similar cohort proportions to the state as a whole.

In Table 4.2, the 2009 Year 3 cohort shows similar performance to the 2008 cohort, with the all students mean well below state, having an effect size of -0.54.

**Table 4.2: NAPLAN Reading, 2009 Year 3 Accelerated Literacy cohort**

2009 Y3 AL Cohort	Cohort No.	Cohort %	AL Mean	State mean	AL effect size
<b>All Students</b>	<b>1258</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>374.7</b>	<b>423.7</b>	<b>-0.54</b>
Boys	654	52%	365.9	414.7	-0.53
Girls	604	48%	384.3	433.1	-0.55
Aboriginal	159	13%	335.2	357.3	-0.27
Non-Aboriginal	1090	87%	380.7	426.2	-0.50
LBOTE	232	18%	382.2	422.9	-0.45
Non-LBOTE	1025	82%	373.0	423.1	-0.55

The performance in Year 3 in 2009 was below state or well below state for all cohorts except Aboriginal students, whose performance was below that for all Aboriginal students across the state but much closer to the state than for the other cohorts.

Table 4.3 shows the performance in Year 5 2010 was below state for all cohorts except Aboriginal students, whose performance was similar to that for all Aboriginal students across the state.

**Table 4.3: NAPLAN Reading, 2010 Year 5 Accelerated Literacy cohort**

2010 Y5 AL Cohort	Cohort No.	Cohort %	AL Mean	State mean	AL effect size
<b>All Students</b>	<b>1222</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>463.3</b>	<b>496.9</b>	<b>-0.40</b>
Boys	622	51%	458.9	490.2	-0.38
Girls	600	49%	467.9	503.8	-0.44
Aboriginal	135	11%	429.7	435.4	-0.08
Non-Aboriginal	1077	89%	467.3	499.2	-0.39
LBOTE	245	20%	459.0	496.5	-0.46
Non-LBOTE	977	80%	464.4	496.6	-0.39

As shown in Table 4.4, the reading performance in Year 5, 2011 was below state but for Aboriginal students the effect size was 0.22, showing their performance was much closer to that for all Aboriginal students across the state than for all other groups.

**Table 4.4: NAPLAN Reading, 2011 Year 5 Accelerated Literacy cohort**

2011 Y5 AL Cohort	Cohort No.	Cohort %	AL Mean	State mean	AL effect size
<b>All Students</b>	<b>1240</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>456.7</b>	<b>496.1</b>	<b>-0.48</b>
Boys	638	51%	450.6	489.3	-0.47
Girls	602	49%	463.2	503.1	-0.48
Aboriginal	153	12%	418.8	435.4	-0.22
Non-Aboriginal	1083	88%	462.1	498.5	-0.44
LBOTE	232	19%	456.0	492.1	-0.44
Non-LBOTE	1005	81%	456.9	497.2	-0.48

### Comparison to NAPLAN National Minimum Standards

The comparison of mean percentages of students who performed below, at or above National Minimum Standard (NMS) in NAPLAN reading is shown in Table 4.5.

**Table 4.5: NAPLAN reading for Accelerated Literacy, comparison to National Minimum Standard**

Comparison to National Minimum Standard (NMS)						
	Change in % below NMS		Change in % at NMS		Change in % above NMS	
	2008-2010	2009-2011	2008-2010	2009-2011	2008-2010	2009-2011
Year cohort:	2008-2010	2009-2011	2008-2010	2009-2011	2008-2010	2009-2011
AL schools	4.4	7.6	-0.9	0.3	-3.6	-8.0
NPLN schools	5.6	7.6	-1.6	1.4	-4.0	-9.0
State	3.1	4.1	1.0	1.8	-4.0	-5.9

The cohorts listed are students in *Accelerated Literacy* schools and the NPLN program schools as a group and the state as a whole, for the 2008-2010 Year 5 and 2009-2011 Year 5 cohorts. The numbers are the changes between the Year 3 NAPLAN percentage and the Year 5 NAPLAN percentage for each group of schools. However, there is strong uncertainty about how much meaning to attach to the size of the change in Year 5.

In Table 4.5, the changes for percentages below NMS, at NMS and above NMS are shown separately. For the changes in percentages below NMS, shown on the leftmost two columns of the table, a positive number is a worsening performance (such as 4.4 increase in percentage below NMS for the 2008-2010 cohort in *Accelerated Literacy* schools) while a negative change is an improvement in performance.

For the change in percentage above NMS shown on the right side of the table, a positive change is an improvement in performance and a negative change is a worsening performance (such as a change of 8.0 for the 2009-2011 cohort in *Accelerated Literacy* schools).

It is clear that the percentages below NMS increased in Year 5 for all three cohorts and in both years. The percentages above NMS decreased in Year 5 for all three cohorts and in both years. The shift in percentage at NMS varies by a small amount only. This is a general picture of worsening performance in comparison to NMS. This picture applies to *Accelerated Literacy* schools, the NPLN schools as a whole, and the state as a whole, so there seems to be no difference between the *Accelerated Literacy* schools' drop in performance and the general shift to lower performance compared with NMS.

The utility of the comparison to NMS is limited also by the somewhat arbitrary nature of the way NMS is defined as performance at the second Band in the NAPLAN test. There are only small proportions of students who achieve in the first and second Bands of the NAPLAN test and changes in those proportions may be more random than systematic. No firm evidence can be drawn from this data, about the effectiveness of the *Accelerated Literacy* program.

### Trends from Year 3 to Year 5

The *Accelerated Literacy* gain scores and differences in effect size (ES), between Year 3 and Year 5, are shown in Table 4.6.

**Table 4.6: NAPLAN gain scores and differences in effect size (ES) from Year 3 to Year 5**

Accelerated Literacy	Gain Score		Difference in ES	
	2008-2010	2009-2011	2008-2010	2009-2011
All Students	96.0	82.0	0.12	0.06
Boys	99.9	84.7	0.16	0.06
Girls	91.3	78.9	0.08	0.07
Aboriginal	93.9	83.6	0.08	0.06
Non-Aboriginal	95.3	81.4	0.12	0.06
LBOTE	92.5	73.9	0.12	0.01
Non-LBOTE	96.1	83.8	0.13	0.06

The measures of change between Year 3 and Year 5 are all positive, and both measures indicate some improvement in reading performance from Year 3 to Year 5, more so in the 2008-2010 cohort than in the 2009-2011 cohort. The effect size measure, being the more standardised measure, shows improvement in the 2008 cohort when compared with the improvement over the whole state, with a smaller change in the 2009 cohort.

However, the validity of such a comparison is problematic, as:

- the timing and fidelity of program implementation in each school is unknown; and
- many students are at the low end of the test score scale and their scores have been scaled by exaggerated amounts, possibly affecting the gain scores.

The data *may* support the proposition that AL improves NAPLAN reading scores. However, if it were possible to interrogate the data in such a way as to relate program implementation to NAPLAN scores at the student level, the data may prove to *not* support the proposition.

Further data gathering in subsequent years, including attention to measures of program implementation related to NAPLAN scores at the student level, would provide stronger evidence for effectiveness.

#### 4.1.2 National Partnership on Literacy and Numeracy assessments

In NPLN assessments, gains in mean reading scores were observed for all student cohorts at *Accelerated Literacy* schools.

NPLN assessment data also indicates that the gain scores for Aboriginal students were higher than those for non-Aboriginal students.

The NPLN baseline assessment is developed from the Basic Skills Test, and was first administered at the beginning of the *Accelerated Literacy* implementation (pre-test 2009, Years 2, 3 and 4). It was administered again in August 2010 (midway test, Years 3, 4 and 5), and a final test was administered in August 2011 (end, Years 4, 5 and 6).

As detailed in Section 1.5.3, EMSAD has noted a number of limitations to using this data for evaluation of the literacy and numeracy programs, particularly in terms of the length of the tests and the degree of student mobility.

For both NAPLAN and NPLN assessments, comparisons across different groupings of schools (i.e. *Accelerated Literacy* schools, NPLN literacy focus schools, all State schools) should be interpreted with caution due to limitations with attribution and consistency. For NPLN schools implementing a particular literacy intervention, the literacy outcomes will be influenced by how well different schools implement the program and whether the school has concurrently implemented other programs targeting literacy.

Likewise, whilst comparison with the state as a whole (for NAPLAN data) provides a reference point for interpretation of NPLN program results, the State is not a valid control group due to the broad range of literacy programs used in schools across the State, including in some cases, the same programs as those funded through the NPLN.

Given these limitations, EMSAD has advised that considerable caution should be taken in the interpretation of these data sets.

## 4.2 Local assessments by staff, students and parent community

Across the range of schools visited as part of the evaluation, staff, students and parents were generally consistent in their positive appraisal of the *Accelerated Literacy* approach in producing improved student reading outcomes.

Reading skills enable readers to turn writing into meaning and achieve the goals of independence, comprehension and fluency. Reading skills are specific abilities which enable a reader:

- to read the written form as meaningful language
- to read anything written with independence, comprehension and fluency, and
- to mentally interact with the message.

*Accelerated Literacy*, according to most teachers, develops comprehension skills which help students predict the next word, phrase, or sentence; fluency skills which help students see larger segments, phrases and groups of words as wholes; word attack skills which allow students to figure out new words; and critical reading skills which help students see the relationship of ideas and use these in reading with meaning and fluency.

*Accelerated Literacy*, according to teachers, helps students to explicitly see, hear and learn about how efficient readers read. Teachers stated that the various strategies implemented throughout the teaching sequence allow all students to access the information in the text and succeed in developing and using a variety of reading skills.

### 4.2.1 Reading outcomes for students

Teachers report that the explicit teaching of the *Accelerated Literacy* strategies has contributed to improvement in reading skills for most students as follows:

- increased sight word recognition, through persistent work with chosen texts
- improved comprehension skills, by focusing on sentence structure and meaning
- improved fluency and accuracy, as phrasing and general reading strategies are continuously reinforced, and the text is examined in context, on a regular basis
- better response to punctuation and expression, again by focusing on sentence structure
- enhanced vocabulary and meaning, through literate orientation strategies that focus on background and contextual information, before reading the text.

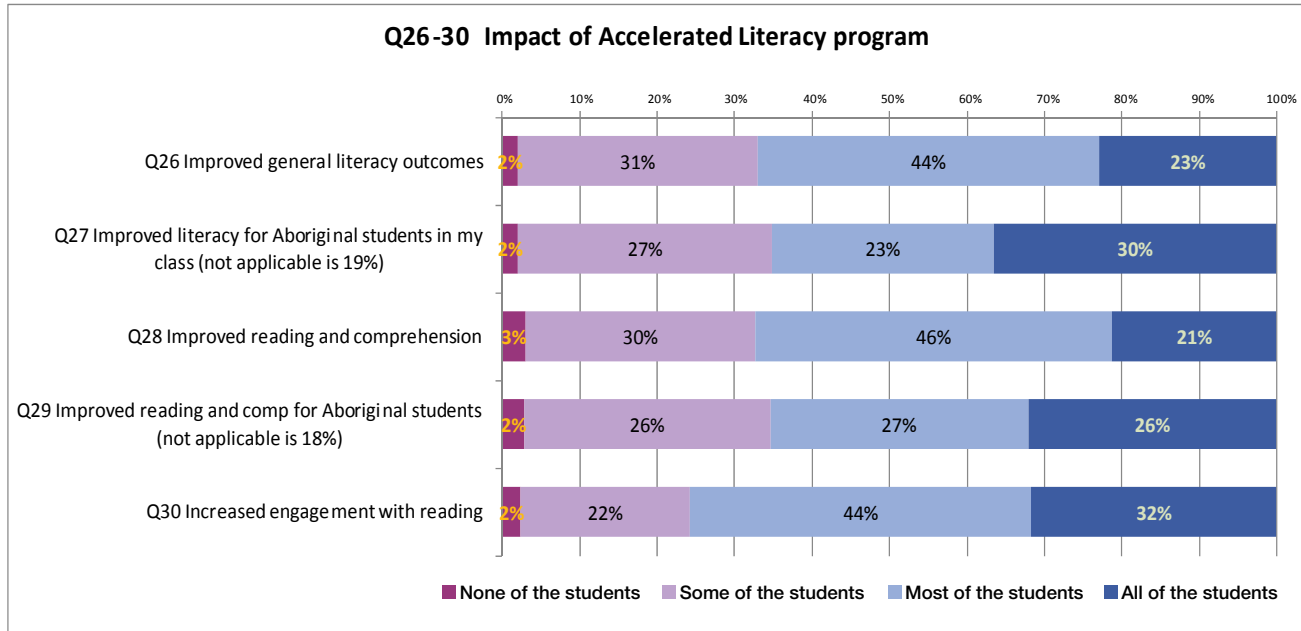
Teachers also frequently described students' increased willingness to answer questions or take part in reading activities, as an additional, significant change in their classes.



### Teachers' insights

Most teachers believe that *Accelerated Literacy* has resulted in improved reading skills for their students. About two thirds of survey respondents said *Accelerated Literacy* has improved reading and comprehension skills for most or all students. The remaining third said some students have demonstrated improvements, while very few respondents said no students improved (Figure 4.1).

**Figure 4.1: Effect of *Accelerated Literacy* on reading skills**



Teachers emphasised the effectiveness of specific strategies, as well as the sequence as a whole, in assisting students with reading improvement. The explicit nature of the strategies is seen to support students effectively. One teacher stated that:

*“This is a very inclusive program that promotes learning in the often neglected ‘Learning About’ outcomes from the NSW syllabus. Students acquire a much deeper understanding of the choices authors use to engage and position readers.”*

#### *Increased reading skills as a result of text selection*

Most teachers indicated the text selection was the first vital element in engaging students in the reading process. One text, chosen specifically to suit class needs at a stage- and age-appropriate level, was seen to be able to cater for all class members. As all students study the same literate text the teacher is able to model reading behaviours for all, and scaffold skills at each level as required. Students are able to act as mentors within the class, using the common text.

Teachers saw text selection as important in providing students with literature that was rich in vocabulary, text construction and meaning, encouraging students to have higher expectations of themselves. As one teacher stated:

*“You want the kids reading at their level – not ‘dumbing’ down – not saying you’re at that level so you read that dumb one – you’re giving them texts based on what is expected of them to be reading at that time.”*

Most teachers stated that the literate orientation phases of *Accelerated Literacy* increase students' understandings of each individual text, and different types of text. It supports them in reading a variety of texts and allows them to feel confident in applying skills when attempting a new text, as they have had a solid introduction before commencing.

## Comprehension

Teachers indicated that the *Accelerated Literacy* explicit teaching and learning strategies support students in developing a deeper understanding of texts, in order to make both literal and inferential interpretations.

Comments from many teachers indicated that *Accelerated Literacy* is particularly useful in establishing background knowledge and understanding for those students who do not have a wide general knowledge or range of experiences. As one teacher noted:

*“A good teacher can take student learning to places that we would never have gone before through the use of quality literate and factual texts.”*

Overall teachers agreed that *Accelerated Literacy* promotes students' understanding and comprehension of texts at a deeper level. The literate orientation strategies, including background knowledge, focus on author and illustrations, enabling students to understand the skills and knowledge of English in context.

One survey respondent concluded the literate orientation promotes students' confidence when reading. The *low order* sequence allows all students to gain a much better understanding of the text, combined with the *high order* sequence which allows teachers to narrow in and examine particular aspects of grammar and language use. The benefits of literate orientation are exemplified by the following teacher comment:

*“For our students it is giving them the background knowledge and scaffolding they require to succeed. It has allowed students to form a love of reading. With explicit instruction and incorporating all reading and comprehension strategies into the AL sequence it is very effective. It is definitely a balanced literacy session.”*

Comments such as this were frequently heard. The early stages of promoting understanding and building confidence for struggling students, were seen to have significant impact on rapidly improving skills.

Teachers also noted that the literate orientation reinforces the fact that the words on the page do not give students all the information that is needed to fully comprehend the text. One student commented that:

*“The drawings in the book help you understand. In some books you don't understand without the pictures.”*

Focus on the illustrations, the author and author's intent is seen by many teachers to assist students in understanding different aspects of the reading process. As noted by one teacher:

*“They understand different techniques that authors use, the authors intent and what effect it has on us – even little things that the author does to make you want to read on.”*

## Word recognition, language and vocabulary

One strength of the approach, according to teachers, is that it gives a great deal of support to those students who have difficulty with their reading. The tools to analyse the specific and systematic structures of reading and grammar components are learnt from the transformations sequence. Discussion of the text with a focus on understanding the vocabulary; repetition in reading passages of text; and persistent manipulations through transformations of sections of the chosen text, all result in increased sight word recognition and understanding of language structures.

In understanding how sentence structure works in creating meaning, students respond better to punctuation, and read with more expression. One survey respondent stated that:

*“Accelerated Literacy has provided my students with the skills to comprehend and understand texts more confidently. It has shown them how they can apply the strategies they knew about the syntax of reading to more demanding texts with a higher interest level. They are able to analyse themes more confidently and with the background knowledge already given to them, they are able to recognise grammar, spelling, writing techniques in relation to a known text.”*

### Fluency

The majority of teachers indicated that because *Accelerated Literacy* enables all students to access the same age appropriate text, students achieve a high level of fluency through continuous exposure to the same text being read by their peers.

Students' fluency and accuracy improve, according to teachers, because phrasing and general reading strategies are continuously reinforced, and the text is examined in context, on a regular basis.

### Student observations of their achievement

Student focus group interviews were conducted as part of the school visits. In most cases the groups comprised a variety of students: high achievers, confident readers, as well as those who described reading as difficult, or of lesser interest to them than other school activities.

Across the range of schools, most students commented that they knew they had improved in their reading. Their judgements were based on how well they believed they had done in the NAPLAN and NPLN tests, as well as on class assessments.

A number of students commented specifically that *Accelerated Literacy* helped them with their NAPLAN tests. One Year 5 student stated that *“we did way better than we did back in Year 3.”* Equally frequent were comments suggesting they had improved by a number of 'reading levels' since engaging with *Accelerated Literacy*. One student stated that he:

*“was high and above average now, but [only] sound at the beginning of the year.”*

At several schools, students indicated that they had a literacy portfolio which contained successive assessment activities, showing the progress they were making.

When asked how *Accelerated Literacy* helped with reading, one Year 3 boy stated that he could provide a metaphor example of how it worked:

*“As our teacher said, if you give someone a fish, they will be fed for a day; but if you teach someone how to fish, they will be fed for life.”*

All students in this focus group joined in and completed the saying after he started a few words. The students said they knew they were being taught *“how to learn”*, and as a result they were able to improve their skills continually.

Students could clearly articulate the learning taking place in the classroom. Many spoke about 'transformations' as being an effective strategy for them to improve their skills. The explicit use and knowledge of literacy language assisted students in understanding what the author had written. Knowledge of the mechanics of sentences authors use to create a feeling in the reader, enabled students to identify author intent and make informed judgments as to the writing quality.

Many students commented that that they were reading more at home. One student stated that he was reading one or two chapters at night before bed now because he enjoyed reading. A Year 5 student recounted that she was reading:

*“some classics now like ‘Pride and Prejudice’ and ‘Little Women’. I like thick books.”*

Another student said he was now taking a chapter book on the bus and was trying to read a chapter each trip.

Many teachers and parents noted that students had gone out of their way to find other books by the authors studied to read for pleasure and these are often brought to school to share with the class. One parent remarked that:

*“My child did become obsessed with the author, when they changed authors it was difficult for him to shift to a different author. He wanted to read more, but only of that author. Maybe that’s because there is a focus on the author’s intent. So he was like ‘the author.. the author.. the author’.”*

### **Parent perceptions**

Students’ engagement with literate texts is seen by parents as the major factor making a real difference to their children’s reading. One parent noted that *“text selection is what stimulates their reading”*. Another suggested that the school should:

*“keep using the really interesting books – that really is what stimulates children’s reading.”*

The selection of good texts for students is exemplified by the positive comment of one parent in particular:

*“My son is in was in Year 5 last year and the book ‘Sixty Eight Teeth’ is one of the best children’s books I’ve ever read in my life. I volunteer this year and every time the teacher reads it there is definitely quiet in the class and they all seem engrossed by it. Every time she asked a question about it, every child knew the answer – and we are talking all categories of children. I read a lot of books, fiction and nonfiction, and this book had me engrossed. The children found it so interesting; they were actually talking about it, wanting to know what was going to happen on the next page. It was so well written. Kids in the class didn’t want to read before that.”*

A number of parents spoke positively about the books their children, both girls and boys, were now reading at home. Many were books that the students would previously have been unable to cope with; as noted in the following comments:

*“My child is reading more complex words in books. She always read quite basic books and now she’s reading quite hard books. She doesn’t want to read the basic books anymore.”*

*“Same as my son who is in Year 6 – he is reading ‘Harry Potter’ books; he’s gone from reading basic books to far more advanced books this year. Prior to that he skim read things. Now he reads from cover to cover.”*

### **4.2.2 Catering for the needs of different groups of students**

*Accelerated Literacy* claims to be suitable for and equally effective with all students, irrespective of [existing] reading capability. This section reports on the perceptions of school staff who state the program has met this claim.

#### **Lower achieving students and students with special needs**

Many teachers commented on the improvements observed for lower achieving students. The structure of the sequence was described as assisting in developing better work habits for their students. The scaffolding approach allows for individual differences among students. The focus on the same text enables all students to be involved, and the lower ability students can achieve by learning from their higher achieving peers.

Working with a familiar text over a longer period of time improves students’ confidence in their own abilities. This, according to teachers, allows students with lower abilities to participate and experience success. Teachers agreed

that students with special needs find the scaffolding activities supportive when attempting an unfamiliar text and they are therefore “*more willing to have a go*”. One special needs student stated that the approach helped them with their reading in this way:

*“We go over passages a lot before we didn’t; we just read the book and that was it – if you don’t understand it – well you know because you go over it a lot. If you read it a lot of times you get to know the words.”*

There were differences of opinion, however, expressed on this matter. Some teachers were concerned that students with special needs in particular, were able to ‘rote learn’ the text, which obscured the assessment of real reading skills, made it difficult to accurately measure their growth.

A teacher at one school spoke about one of her students who hardly ever spoke because of a speech impediment. Now, following engagement with *Accelerated Literacy*, she wants to read to the class despite her speech difficulties because she is more confident in being able to recognise words, punctuation and meaning. The teacher of a multi-stage special needs class felt the most significant factor that has influenced improved literacy outcomes in her class is the:

*“...rich age-appropriate texts which they would not have otherwise had the opportunity to experience.”*

Lower achieving students, according to many teachers, also like the predictability of the lesson sequence. Teachers noted that the structure and routine associated with *Accelerated Literacy* enabled lower achieving students to feel less threatened and more confident in attempting reading activities. It allows students to achieve small steps more often. One teacher concluded that the strategies of *Accelerated Literacy* had helped her lower achieving students to such an extent that they were better prepared for transition to secondary school syllabus requirements.

*“Poor literacy students are scaffolded and experience success. Students are exposed to rich language. Students are well prepared for the demands of High School English.”*

## High achieving students

A number of teachers commented that they had both lower and higher achieving students in their classes, and were able to adapt activities and strategies to meet the differing needs. As one teacher noted:

*“AL works for different levels in different ways; for example, metalanguage for some, joining words for others.”*

The use of transformations and deconstructing text was seen as a skill-extending activity for most higher achieving students. Some teachers also indicated they use other strategies to keep these students engaged, such as providing independent extension work on the text, and this worked well.

A few teachers expressed concern that *Accelerated Literacy* did very little to provide for higher achieving students who already work at a level well beyond their age level peers. These teachers indicated that their higher achieving students often became bored with the repeated treatment of the one text.

There were mixed opinions regarding how well the low order part of the teaching sequence suited students who could already read well. Teacher concerns about the effectiveness of the reading strategies with their higher achieving students are exemplified by one survey comment:

*“My biggest area of concern relating to AL is that my top students are not being extended as much as they need to be. I do thoroughly enjoy the explicit nature of the program, and while the inclusivity of the program appeals to me in principle, the simple fact is that I have too diverse a range of abilities in my classroom to completely cater for all students.”*

One teacher of a high achieving class commented that the strategies worked effectively with her students, but some did not require the same amount of scaffolding. Accordingly, she spent less time on the low order sequence. Her opinion was that the program was flexible enough to allow for teacher judgment in determining the time spent on each aspect of the sequence, to suit the needs of the students in the class.

## Boys

When asked if particular groups of students had benefited from the *Accelerated Literacy* approach more than others, interviewed teachers consistently commented that boys' reading levels had improved at a faster rate than girls, according to in-class assessments. This was reinforced in a number of survey responses. Teachers commented that boys generally tended to be reluctant readers and *Accelerated Literacy* has provided useful tools to engage them in reading processes. The principal at one school stated that:

*“Our data suggests that it has greatly assisted boys, Year 3 in particular. It has engaged the boys in the structure. Equity too – boys have always felt inferior to girls in literacy, but with them all doing the same thing they feel equal.”*

It was claimed that boys liked the structure of the approach and participated more in literacy discussions. Some teachers described it as a “safe process” for them:

*“They now have a huge self-concept. They know they can do it.”*

## Pre-Year 3

The examination of the effect of *Accelerated Literacy* strategies on students in Kindergarten, Years 1 and 2, was not part of the evaluation Terms of Reference. However, as each of the *Accelerated Literacy* schools chose to implement the program across all stages in the school, many infant teachers commented on the effectiveness of the approach. The use of good quality literature and effective scaffolding strategies were reported to also assist younger students with their reading.

*“I feel kindergarten students... need to hear lots of good quality literature often, gain book skills, and discuss using full sentences, their comprehension of a book, observing pictures and noticing text first.”*

Many teachers of Stage 1 students noted that as a result of the approach, students had grown in confidence in reading a wide range of texts. It was noted that texts studied were also more interesting than the guided reading books used previously. Once again, with Stage 1 students, the *low order* orientation activities in particular, contributed to an improved knowledge of grammar and use of a broader vocabulary.

In one school visited, *Accelerated Literacy* was being implemented in the attached preschool. Teachers of K-2 commented that this was working well as the students entered Kindergarten with the familiarity with text, language and techniques used in literacy lessons. One teacher noted that using *Accelerated Literacy* in the preschool environment has brought students awareness to text structure, increased their vocabulary and introduced basic grammar features even before they enter Kindergarten.

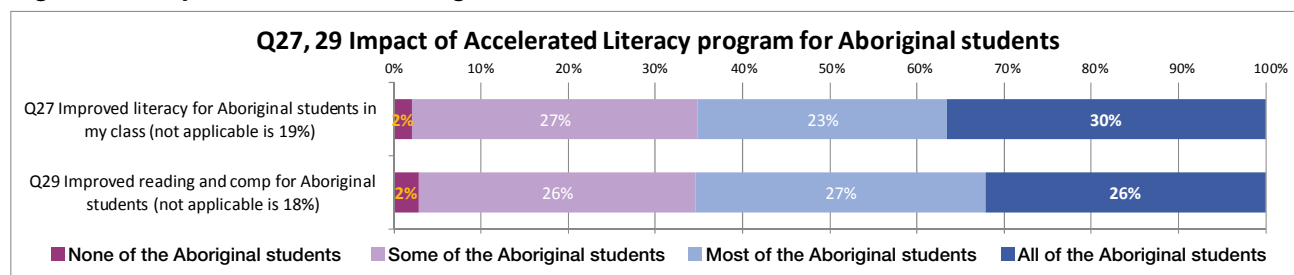
## 4.3 Outcomes for Aboriginal students

Aboriginal students were part of five of the seven focus groups conducted in schools totalling 30% of all students interviewed. Aboriginal students responded positively to *Accelerated Literacy* lessons with most asserting they had made improvements in their reading. NAPLAN data indicates that gain scores for Aboriginal students involved in *Accelerated Literacy* were higher than those for non-Aboriginal students in both cohorts. NPLN assessment data also indicates that the gain scores for Aboriginal students were higher than those for non-Aboriginal students. Refer to Section 4.1.

Survey responses indicate improvements for Aboriginal students in both general literacy outcomes and in reading and comprehension skills, as shown in Figure 4.2. Two-thirds of the respondents with Aboriginal students in their classes

indicated *Accelerated Literacy* has improved general literacy outcomes for most or all Aboriginal students. The other third of respondents with Aboriginal students in their class said some Aboriginal students have improved. Very few said no Aboriginal students improved. Very similar proportions were reported for reading and comprehension skills. Again, only 2% of respondents said that no Aboriginal students improved.

**Figure 4.2: Improvements for Aboriginal students**



In interviews, teachers overwhelmingly report that *Accelerated Literacy* is as effective for Aboriginal students as for non-Aboriginal students. The inclusive approach was seen by the majority of staff to cater for the needs of all students, irrespective of culture, gender, age and ability.

A number of teachers commented that texts suggested on the NALP website (NALP 2007, 2009) were particularly appropriate for their Aboriginal students, enabling them to make greater connections with lessons.

Many teachers noted that Aboriginal students loved the texts with Aboriginal themes and they connected with those texts. The connection resulted in greater levels of engagement in literacy lessons. Several principals indicated that attendance rates for Aboriginal students had improved since the introduction of *Accelerated Literacy* suggesting that students may feel more comfortable and less threatened in the classroom environment.

Many teachers commented that their Aboriginal students benefited from the fact that all students in the class were more engaged. The approach was seen as 'a non-threatening pedagogy' which gave Aboriginal students greater confidence. Teachers believe the *Accelerated Literacy* approach has provided the Aboriginal students with a learning environment where they understand the words and know how to use them. One survey respondent commented that:

*"Aboriginal students now read aloud and now read; shame has decreased and confidence has increased."*

One Aboriginal parent commented that there had been considerable improvement in her child's reading skills. She had observed:

*"Dramatic improvement in the reading of my daughter which is pleasing to her and to me as the mum, I'd been worried about her."*

Another parent observed that her preschool children (who were exposed to *Accelerated Literacy* techniques) are reading and identifying letters as they drive around with the family.

One group of teachers commented strongly on the improvement of educational outcomes for the Aboriginal students in their school; particularly in terms of confidence, better classroom behaviours, attendance, and literacy skills:

*"We've got about 6 or 7 Koori kids in our Year 3 class – at the beginning of the year I had one who wouldn't even stay in his seat, he just kept going out of class; now he drives us crazy the other way: he puts his hand up, yells out the answer 'dodging', 'shrieking' all this technical language about space because we have been doing factual texts. He can't contain himself. That's a real warm and fuzzy moment. I am so excited that he turns up every day. He wouldn't put pen to paper at the beginning of the year, and now he's writing about going to the bottom of the ocean and getting abalone – it makes us cry."*

One survey respondent noted that *Accelerated Literacy* was very effective in terms of the time it took for Aboriginal students to connect with the sequence. She indicated that Aboriginal students in her class were able to identify connectives after only a short exposure to *Accelerated Literacy*.

## 4.4 Other Literacy outcomes for students

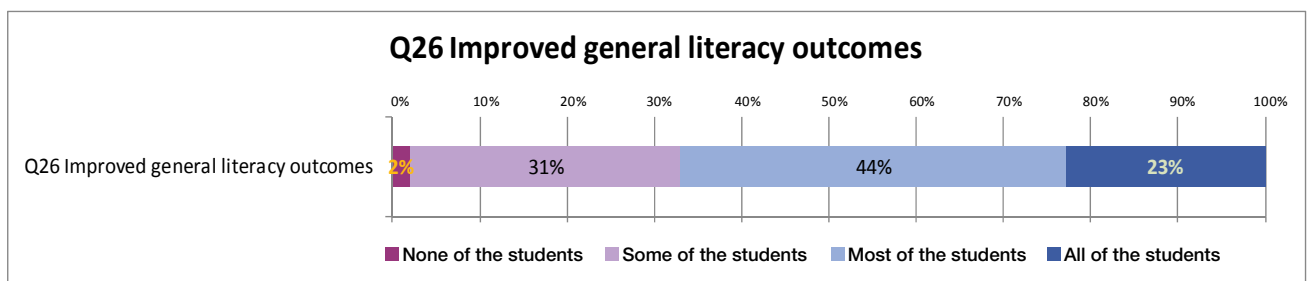
In addition to reading, many teachers, principals, and parents commented that they have witnessed improved overall literacy results, since the introduction of the *Accelerated Literacy* approach.

One teacher commented that:

*“I have found Accelerated Literacy to enhance the overall literacy learning experience for all the students in my class.”*

As shown in Figure 4.3, two thirds of survey respondents said *Accelerated Literacy* has improved general literacy outcomes for most or all students. The remaining third said some have improved while very few respondents said no students improved. Similar results were reported for both Aboriginal and nonAboriginal students.

**Figure 4.3: General literacy improvement**



### 4.4.1 Writing

While not a focus of the evaluation, many teachers commented on the improvement in their students' writing skills. They explained that the improvement in writing was assisted by students being explicitly taught how to read. One survey respondent stated:

*“The pedagogy is quality literacy teaching and the student writing has improved dramatically due to the use of quality texts.”*

The teaching strategies are seen to encourage students to really experience how an author writes. Students' writing improves with the examination of language choices, grammar and punctuation explored through the transformations part of the *Accelerated Literacy* sequence. As one survey respondent stated:

*“AL is the best tool to move students from reading skills to writing skills.”*

Students develop the ability to write more complex sentences. They become more aware of the use of words and the impact they have within a sentence.

Aiming high, and using quality texts as examples of writing, enables students to be exposed to evaluation of good literature. This, in turn, provides them with the skills to improve their own writing. Transforming a sentence and discussing the author's intention enables students to analyse and then construct their own texts. As one teacher noted:

*“...the quality of the writing produced is very good due to the modelling provided during the AL sequence.”*

As for reading, the focus on good quality literate texts builds a broad vocabulary, and expertise with a variety of language structures. Students are more prepared to take risks with new words in their own writing and general communication.



*“After reading ‘The Iron Man’ I have learnt about onomatopoeia... I know how to write a better story.”*

Some students indicated that transformations were the best part of their literacy sessions. When asked what they preferred in *Accelerated Literacy* lessons, one student responded:

*“...the transformation board we use to cut up sentences; and it helps us understand the words and where the commas and stuff like that go.”*

Many students stated that they enjoyed writing passages like a professional author. Using the same structure gave them confidence to write their own narratives.

#### 4.4.2 Spelling

Students indicated that there were many aspects of the *Accelerated Literacy* sequence that they enjoyed, and that assisted in skill improvement. The strategy of ‘chunking’ words promotes phonemic awareness as well as identifying conventions for spelling words correctly. Some students indicated that the spelling strategies were effective for them.

*“If you come across a new word it helps you sound out words that you didn’t know before. AL gives you techniques to work it out, like chunking. We divide the words into parts.”*

One student indicated the spelling strategies of *Accelerated Literacy* were effective in helping her understand language. When asked what students did during *Accelerated Literacy*, she commented:

*“And we’ve also got a sheet that has visual, etymological, phonological and morphemic words in there. We put all our spelling words into that.”*

Many teachers indicated the spelling component worked well with their students as words were examined within a meaningful context. They reported increased students’ spelling results and suggested children are more focused during spelling sessions.

However, some teachers felt the spelling component of the sequence was ineffective in improving skills, as it lacked a focus on transferable rules. They felt they needed to supplement with other lists if particular words needed reinforcement and were not aligned to the text being studied.

#### 4.4.3 Speaking and listening

A particular strategy of *Accelerated Literacy* is the engagement of students in literate discussion about the text. The questioning techniques ensure success as students build on information given rather than guessing at the answer. The more confident students feel in their ability to answer a question, or engage in discussion, the better they develop their oral skills.

A number of teachers and school executive observed that the dialogue and conversation skills of students had also improved. One teacher commented that merely getting students to actually talk about what they are reading extends their oral skills.

#### 4.4.4 Using literacy skills across the curriculum

Many teachers commented that students were now able to use reading strategies across the range of Key Learning Areas, such as numeracy/Mathematics, Human Society and Its Environment (HSIE), and Science and Technology. In one school visited the students unanimously agreed that it helped them with their other subjects.

Students’ numeracy skills were reported to have improved above all. The ability to read mathematical questions, break them down into manageable parts and interpret the whole question with understanding, were noted in particular.

One teacher survey respondent stated:

*“There is also a positive contribution to numeracy, as students are better able to understand the language in which problems are framed.”*

A few principals even felt that NAPLAN numeracy outcomes had improved as a result of students being better able to interpret and understand the questions. One commented that improvement in numeracy as result of *Accelerated Literacy*:

*“has empowered them so much more, and their confidence – they have grown into believing that they can do things.”*

Many students agreed, stating that they thought *Accelerated Literacy* had helped them with their numeracy skills. One student also noted that he was better able to understand the numeracy test in NAPLAN:

*“The [NAPLAN] maths questions had a lot of reading and some of the questions were hard. Learning about words and stuff helped with the Maths.”*

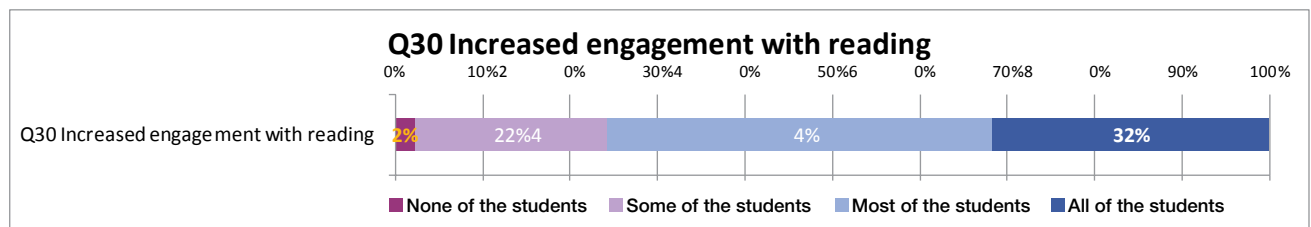
## 4.5 Student engagement with reading

Throughout the interviews conducted in each of the schools visited through the evaluation, the most frequently heard, and strongly expressed teacher comment related to the levels of engagement of students in their classes. One experienced teacher commented that:

*“In all my years of teaching I have not experienced a better program that engages all students in the process of engaging with improving reading.”*

Similarly, the survey data, shown in Figure 4.4, reveals that over three-quarters of respondents indicated that student engagement with reading increased for most or all students. The remaining quarter said some have improved while very few respondents said no students showed any increase.

**Figure 4.4: Student engagement with reading**



Teachers consistently reported that students are engaged, enthusiastic and keen to learn.

The key features of the *Accelerated Literacy* methodology, mentioned previously, each contribute to building student interest:

- the choice of quality texts provides stimulating and interesting stories
- working on a single age-appropriate text that all the class can discuss and share
- exploring the background, context and the author’s intentions for the story, and
- repeated interaction with the text that builds confidence.
- 

Student knowledge and enjoyment of quality children’s literature had increased, according to many teachers. One student commented that:

*“The authors make really good words and every chapter you want to read on.”*

Many teachers commented that their students now see a purpose to reading, both for enjoyment and for seeking information. The approach is reported to encourage students to make connections between what is being read and their own lives.

The most important contribution appears to come from the *participatory approach* to discovering how the text works. *Accelerated Literacy*, it was explained, sets up “*dynamic literate conversations*” between teachers and students, described by one group as:

*“the author and illustrator are brought into conversations as though they were right there in the classroom sharing what they know.”*

Students actively, often physically, manipulate the text through the transformation phase of the *Accelerated Literacy* teaching sequence. Many teachers indicated that students enjoy the opportunity to unravel the hidden language and enjoy exploring the use of language on a much deeper level. The explicit strategies, used with all class members, give even those students who are not confident readers an opportunity to participate and become more actively involved in decoding the text.

The unpacking of the text and scaffolding for the students is a real strength of the program in setting students up to succeed in reading, and in writing, for themselves.

Many teachers and students indicated that using an interactive white board assisted in engaging all students in the text being studied. One teacher commented that:

*“They love transformations on the IWB. So long as I am prepared it works. No different from the physical cutting – but the kids love the IWB.”*

Whether it’s the use of an electronic whiteboard or the generally participatory activities, students were seen to take more risks with their learning and did not feel like they were being intimidated by their higher achieving peers.

Parents commented that their children were now choosing to read at home and they did not feel the necessity to encourage their children to do so. One parent stated:

*“I don’t push my son to read... he will come home and he is really keen and eager to read.”*

A final benefit that comes from greater engagement and participation in class activities, inevitably relates to improvements in student behaviour. A number of teachers commented that they did not have to spend as much time on behaviour management, as students were more engaged in the activity. As mentioned earlier, it was noted that boys and students with special needs particularly like the routine of the lessons. Because students know what type of teaching and learning to expect each day, students feel more secure and are less likely to engage in negative behaviours.

One principal stated that:

*“For the teachers’ part, they are able to focus on teaching not managing (negative behaviours). The school has experienced a reduction in regulatory language and an increase in the language of teaching and achievement among teachers.”*

Most teachers commented that their students feel success and accomplishment. One teacher commented:

*“I believe that AL is great for engaging students, for giving them a literate understanding of text and for turning them on to literacy. I believe it motivates reluctant students to participate in literacy activities and that it promotes success in reading.”*

## 4.6 Other influencing factors

It is difficult to attribute success in student outcomes to the introduction of *Accelerated Literacy* alone. One teacher commented that:

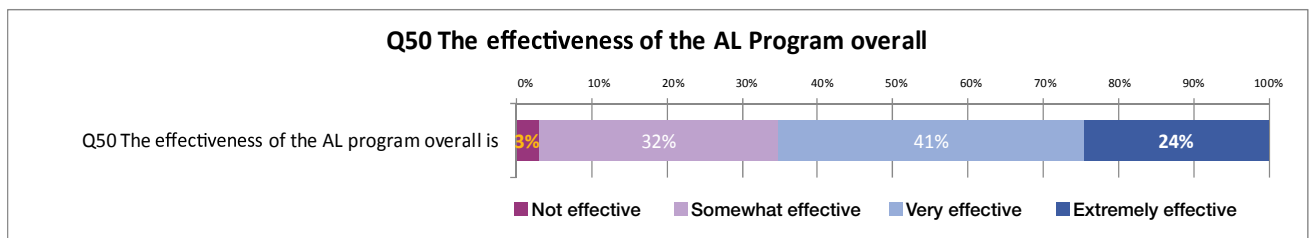
*“I feel as though my class is doing well and improving, but I can’t tell if it’s because of the AL program.”*

Of the 28 *Accelerated Literacy* schools, 27 also implemented a literacy intervention targeting individual students. Only one school employed *Accelerated Literacy* as its only intervention. Even in this school, a range of influences may have contributed to improving student outcomes: change of teacher, other programs introduced in the school, new classrooms, or a range of other local changes.

Most significantly, the implementation of the National Partnership on Literacy and Numeracy as a whole, introduced a series of changes in each school, beyond the *Accelerated Literacy* program itself, including use of SMART data, emphasis on leadership programs, and the increased level of professional learning in general.

Nevertheless, two thirds of survey respondents said the program is effective or extremely effective for students. Almost all of the remainder said it is somewhat effective. Very few said it is not effective, as shown in Figure 4.5.

**Figure 4.5: Effectiveness of Accelerated Literacy**



Across the schools visited during the evaluation, staff felt confident that *Accelerated Literacy* was the major contributing factor to any student outcome improvements in literacy.



## 5 Teacher perspectives

Section 4 presented insights into how well *Accelerated Literacy* contributed to students' achievements. In this section the focus is on teachers' experiences of delivering the program, making it work in their particular classes and school settings, and the effects it had on their own practice.

### Key findings:

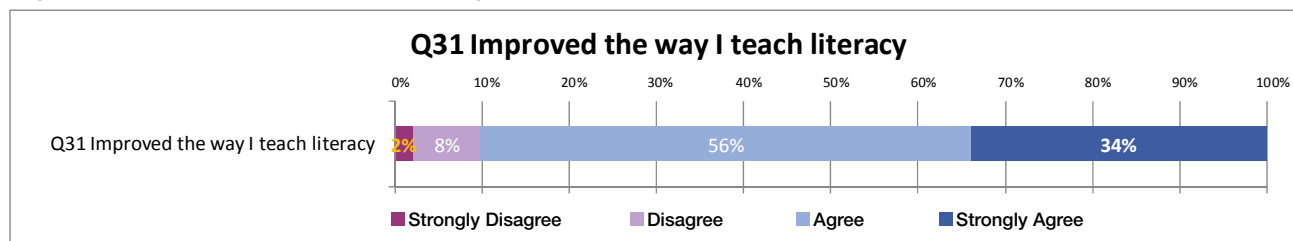
- Teachers have an increased theoretical understanding of the interrelationship of all aspects of literacy, especially reading and writing.
- Teachers have increased knowledge and confidence in identifying student needs through data analysis.
- There is increased teacher confidence in capacity to teach reading at the same stage level to the whole class.
- Teachers indicated there was now increased professional dialogue. Sharing of ideas and resources has increased.
- Teachers have increased capacity to use newly learned AL strategies in other subject areas.
- Teachers have a renewed enthusiasm for teaching and their capacity to use newly learned *Accelerated Literacy* strategies in other subject areas.

### 5.1 Teachers' overall views of *Accelerated Literacy*

Much of the data gathered, particularly from teacher interviews, related to the impact that working with *Accelerated Literacy* has had in encouraging teachers to reflect on their practice. Many teachers indicated that the strategies suggested in the *Accelerated Literacy* approach had helped to improve their teaching practice by introducing new techniques and practices.

Nine out of ten survey respondents said that *Accelerated Literacy* has improved the way they teach literacy in their classes as shown in Figure 5.1.

**Figure 5.1: Improved literacy teaching**

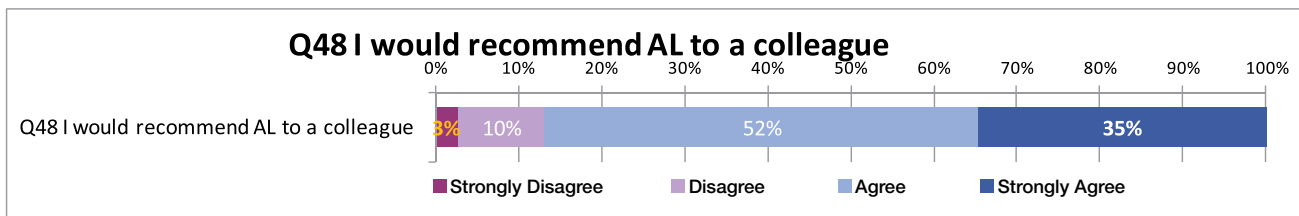


Most teachers indicated that the language used in the approach has given teachers, and students, a common ground on which to discuss and share ideas. Professional dialogue has increased and there is now an emphasis on careful selection of teaching strategies and analysis of data to inform practice. Many teachers commented that the *Accelerated Literacy* approach has made their teaching more explicit. One principal summed it up:

*“We changed the way teachers taught using the pedagogy of AL.”*

As mentioned previously, nearly two thirds of teachers regarded *Accelerated Literacy* as very effective or extremely effective. Seven out of eight survey respondents would recommend *Accelerated Literacy* to a colleague (Figure 5.2).

**Figure 5.2: Teachers' recommendation of Accelerated Literacy**



### 5.1.1 Sequence, structure and strategies

Many experienced teachers commented that the approach of *Accelerated Literacy* was 'common sense'. They could see that many of the strategies were not new. Yet the approach provided them with a comprehensive way of teaching, employing techniques that worked well with all students, within a clear structure and sequence.

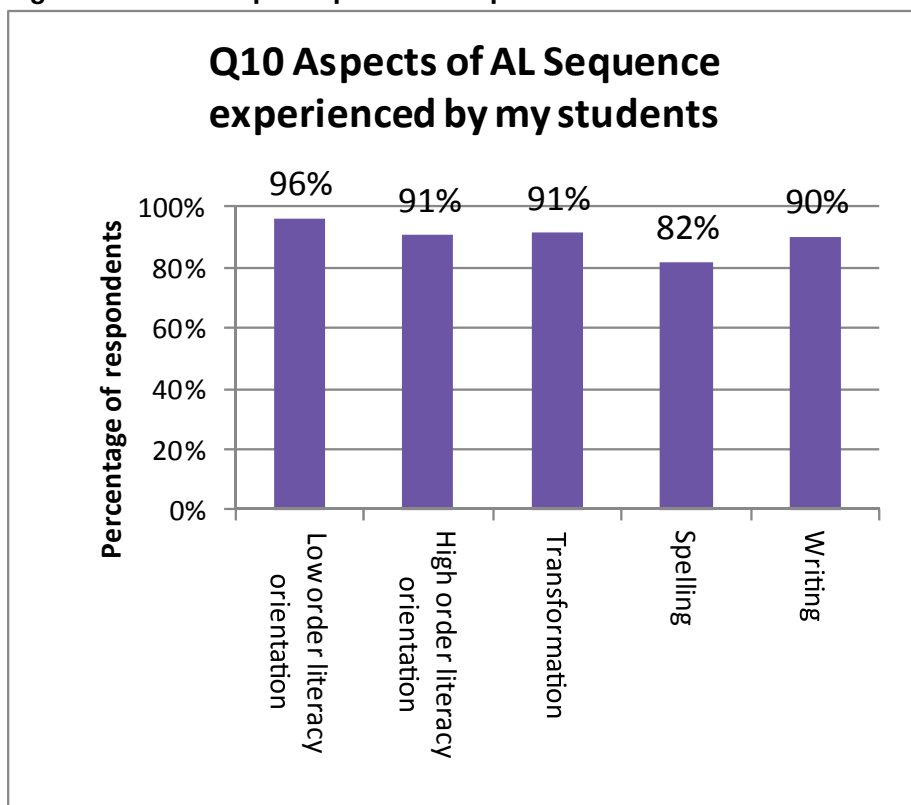
Most teachers indicated that they liked the explicit and systematic way of teaching. They agreed that the strength of *Accelerated Literacy* lies in its structure as a comprehensive, explicit, connected and systematic way of teaching literacy. The teaching sequence is the key feature, bringing all the strategies together in a structured way. One early career teacher stated that:

*“It’s good for a beginning teacher because you have got the structure of AL to work with.”*

Consistent use of the teaching sequence assists with programming, providing the platform from which to plan units of work and ensure that syllabus outcomes are being addressed.

Figure 5.3 suggests that the vast majority of teachers are implementing the approach as intended, with the inclusion of all aspects of the sequence, and with particular emphasis on exploring the background and context of the selected text, through the literate orientation phases.

**Figure 5.3: Student participation in sequence**



Most respondents said that the purposes of the stages are well understood, while one third said they are somewhat well understood. Very few said they have no understanding. See Figure 3.2: Understanding *Accelerated Literacy*, in Section 3 of this report.

In the interviews, a few teachers provided some qualification, commenting that parts of the *low order* sequence were too long and repetitive, and often they moved more rapidly through the sequence to maintain student interest.

Teachers who had been trained by the private provider were more likely to believe that the *Accelerated Literacy* sequence was rigid and inflexible, especially related to the need to adhere to the specified time allocations for each step of the sequence. A few teachers trained by the private provider commented that they did not have time to go through all aspects of the sequence in one lesson. One teacher noted that:

*“Lack of flexibility in the program means the way teachers want to teach isn’t taken into account ... teachers are feeling straight-jacketed.”*

Most teachers trained by regional tutors, however, highlighted the flexibility of the *Accelerated Literacy* approach, and the freedom for teachers to incorporate other proven strategies. A few teachers indicated that the time spent on each aspect of the sequence was dependent upon skills already learnt by their students. Teachers commented that they make *Accelerated Literacy* their own by incorporating techniques they know work and combining these with *Accelerated Literacy* strategies. As one teacher commented:

*“What the teacher does with the program determines the successful implementation of the program.”*

The variation in teachers’ comments suggests there may be some confusion as to how the sequence is intended to be used, and over what time period. Program developer, Wendy Cowey, suggests that the sequence is a guide and is flexible and should be organised to suit the needs of the class and the skills that need to be developed. She stresses the importance of teachers controlling their teaching sequence, not letting the sequence control their teaching. Cowey stresses that teachers do not have to fit the whole teaching sequence into one lesson, but should utilise the sequence to achieve teaching goals. As one in-school tutor noted:

*“Wendy Cowey [AL developer] has a realistic understanding of students and teaching. I like her approach of ‘do what works in your classroom’.”*

Regional tutors confirmed that whilst it was important to retain the fidelity of the approach, teachers needed to understand that there are opportunities for flexibility in its implementation with their classes. Updated training materials used by one regional tutor, reinforces the ‘Fidelity with Flexibility’ message. (Mayfield & Judge, 2012).

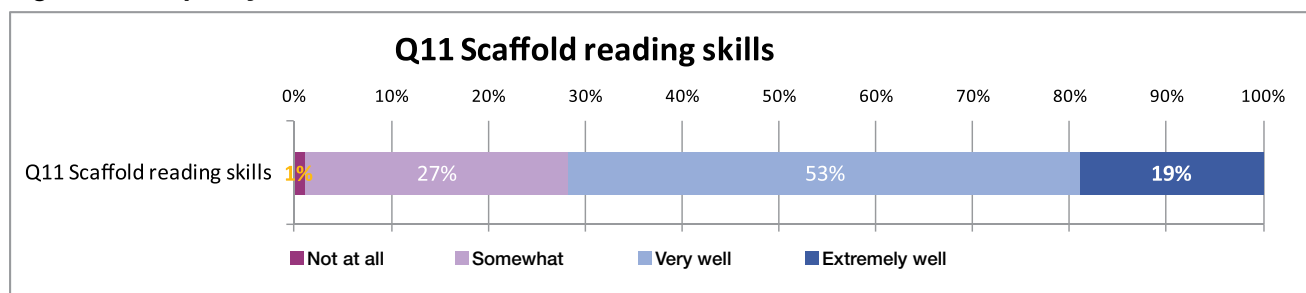
In schools visited, many teachers commented on the need for continuing professional learning with colleagues to ensure the continuation of appropriate delivery of the sequence and its application. Early career teachers often commented that they would have liked such training in their education degree course work.

### 5.1.2 Specific features of *Accelerated Literacy*

The scaffolding strategies, including the use of low order background knowledge orientation to text was seen by teachers as one of the most effective aspects of the sequence, particularly in the area of reading. Most respondents said they can scaffold reading skills well (Figure 5.4).

Most teachers agreed that the scaffolding approach takes time and commitment. One teacher commented that *“it took me a year to get my head around it”*. For many teachers it is the commitment to the approach and the passion and enthusiasm modelled for the students that have the greatest impact.

**Figure 5.4: Capacity to scaffold**



Teachers identified the importance of a number of features of the approach that changed the way they teach literacy, as follows.

### **Building background knowledge through literate orientation**

Providing background knowledge to the text, including information about the author, is seen by teachers as a major strength. It gives a purpose to text study and can often support learning across a number of subjects. In terms of effective practice, one teacher commented that background orientation to text prepares students for what they are about to learn:

*“There’s lots of preparation - they know what their outcomes are going to be.”*

Building up this knowledge base before reading the text is seen by most teachers as an effective strategy for enabling students to read the text with meaning. The literate orientations give students understanding of new vocabulary as well as new or different concepts and provide a structure to work from.

### **Analysis of illustrations and visual images of the text**

Scaffolding through the analysis of illustrations and visual images of the text, a technique rarely used previously by most teachers, also helps students attain a deeper comprehension. Developing visual literacy was an area many teachers did not consider to be important prior to *Accelerated Literacy* training.

### **Structure and repetition**

The structure of the sequence and the repetition used, particularly in the low order orientation to text, was another strength of the program, particularly in respect to improving reading skills for boys and lower achieving students.

### **Transformations, or deconstruction and reconstruction of text**

The specific and systematic breakdown of sentence components was seen by teachers as an effective way to teach grammar, as well as providing a basis for teaching writing. A number of teachers commented that the transformation strategies provide a meaningful context in which to explore aspects of grammar:

*“It’s terrific for explicit sentence structure and for the explicit teaching of grammar.”*

Many teachers had not previously considered deconstructing text at the sentence level, but now appreciated its potential.

### **Consistency of language**

Many teachers commented that explicitly teaching literacy language promotes students’ use and knowledge, enabling them to describe the purpose of learning activities within the sequence. They clearly know what each step is. Allowing students access to this language enabled more productive discussions in class, as well as building students’ knowledge base for progression to higher years. As one teacher commented:

*“AL methods create a joint attention frame in which the teacher and the student are attending [to] the text with a shared understanding so any misconceptions are easily identified. AL is the best approach for giving and receiving feedback on literacy learning that I have encountered in more than 20 years teaching.”*



The common approach and consistency of language made literacy lessons easier to plan and manage, and teachers feel better able to engage in professional dialogue with colleagues, and share ideas.

### Focusing on one text

The capacity to explore all aspects of literacy was seen by most teachers as an effective and efficient way of planning for, and addressing the range of learning needs in the class. One teacher suggested that having students reading the same text decreased her need to divide her attention between individuals or groups working on entirely separate activities. Focusing on one text and addressing gaps with individual students was seen as efficient by teachers.

*“If there are large reading gaps in one class, then AL makes it easier since everyone reads the same book.”*

### Text choice

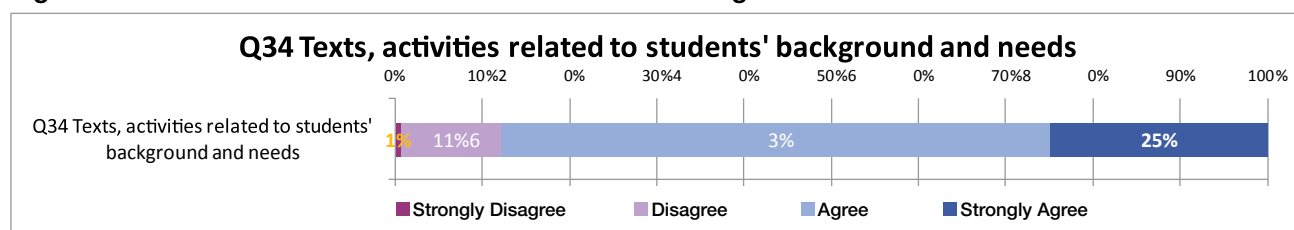
Teachers commented that having all students using the same text led to less ‘labelling’ of student ability. Confidence was increased due to everyone studying the same text in detail. Teachers commented that the texts chosen for study gave students access to literature that they may not normally select and often it motivated their students to choose books by the same author for reading for pleasure.

Many teachers noted that the literate texts as recommended by the National *Accelerated Literacy* Program (NALP) were rich in vocabulary and text construction, thus providing a good literature base for reading improvement. Teachers noted that text was often a key factor in determining the engagement of their students in reading. One teacher noted that *Accelerated Literacy* gave her the opportunity to move away from the non age-appropriate texts to address reading levels. Another experienced teacher commented:

*“I was from the old literature based reading program of the 80s so I don’t use ‘The Readers’ in the store room – they are all to a formula and written by the same authors. I’ve always used whole texts. I enjoyed AL being brought into the school so we could get away from ‘The Readers’ approach.”*

Most respondents said they chose texts and activities related specifically to student background and learning needs (Figure 5.5). Not only does this assist with engaging students, but more importantly provides opportunities for teachers to extend students skills by choosing texts that focus on particular skill development.

**Figure 5.5: Text choice based on student needs and backgrounds**



### 5.1.3 Whole-class approach

Many teachers commented on the benefits of the whole-class approach by stating that students are no longer given different work determined by their ability level. Many teachers stated that their students all have a chance to succeed, no matter what level they are at. As a consequence, many teachers perceived that competition between the students had decreased and they were more willing to support each other which made teaching easier. As noted by one teacher:

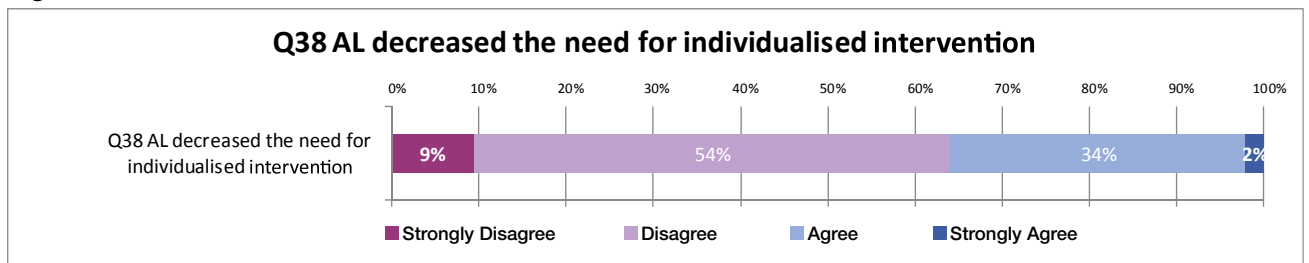
*“It allows everyone to see themselves as learners and everyone in a class to be working on the same text.”*

Another strength of the whole-class approach, according to some teachers, was having a class set of books rather than individual readers. As a result, all students are exposed to age- and stage-appropriate texts and the support required from teachers to develop the essential comprehension and decoding skills and strategies. Teachers believed class texts assisted with students feeling equal and not different.

Many teachers commented that previously students not achieving to expected levels were withdrawn from classrooms during literacy lessons for extra support. Teachers believed that many of these students felt differentiated from their peers as a consequence. Not having students withdrawn during *Accelerated Literacy* lessons for individual intervention support is seen by many teachers as a huge benefit. In schools visited it was common practice to provide extra support for individual students (via *MultiLit* or *Individual Learning Plans*) in sessions outside the structured *Accelerated Literacy* lesson. Some teachers negotiated modified timetables to ensure no individual students were withdrawn during these periods.

Despite their enthusiasm for whole-class lessons, however, only one third of survey respondents said *Accelerated Literacy* has decreased the need for individualised intervention, as shown in Figure 5.6:

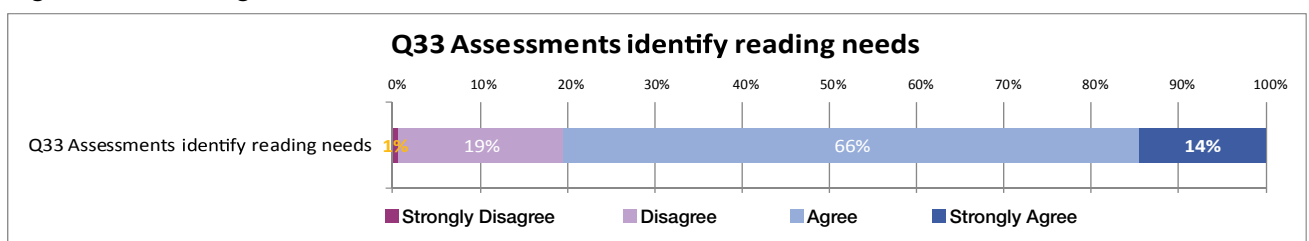
**Figure 5.6: Need for continued individualised intervention**



#### 5.1.4 Assessing student learning

Many teachers use the recommended assessments detailed in the training, which include pre- and post-tests, such as the *PM Benchmark* assessments (Nelley & Smith, 2005), and a variety of other products suggested for use throughout the sequence. Most teachers indicated that they continue to use running records. Several teachers indicated that, in Years 3-6, they use school-based 'NAPLAN-type' tests as well.

**Figure 5.7: Reading assessments**



Most respondents said that the recommended assessment activities are valuable in identifying students' reading needs, as shown in Figure 5.7.

## 5.2 Teacher views on specific aspects of literacy

Most teachers indicated that *Accelerated Literacy* addresses all areas of literacy and provides a balanced literacy approach. One teacher interviewed commented on the connection between aspects of literacy as follows:

*"[Accelerated Literacy] is a very holistic approach to learning to read, great connection with the reading and writing process, great way of addressing HO [higher order] and LO [lower order] thinking."*

### 5.2.1 Reading, comprehension and understanding

Most teachers commented that *Accelerated Literacy* provides a sound foundation for students in developing effective reading skills. The strength of *Accelerated Literacy* is that it provides a great deal of support for reading, particularly for students who have difficulty in this area. Many teachers see that comprehension strategies are embedded within the process, which is a real strength.

### 5.2.2 Grammar, language, spelling and writing

Literacy development is dependent on the interconnection between reading and writing. Reading instruction is most effective when complemented with writing instruction and vice versa.

While not the focus of the evaluation, strong messages came from both the interviews and survey responses about the value of *Accelerated Literacy* in teaching grammar, vocabulary and language, spelling and writing.

The transformation strategies provide a systematic breakdown of whole text, sentences and word components. Students breakdown the components of a sentence, identifying and examining the word usage, phrasing, sentence construction and grammatical techniques used by authors to produce meaning. A Stage 1 teacher commented that:

*“AL is effective in terms of grammar, meta-language. The Stage 1 kids could identify the conjunctions, a lot earlier than I would have thought to introduce it.”*

A number of teachers commented that their own knowledge of grammar had improved as they were trained in *Accelerated Literacy*.

Some teachers commented on the effectiveness of the integration of spelling learning within the text being examined. The ease with which students were able to learn words through the strategy of ‘chunking’ was seen as both effective and efficient. Phonemic awareness (the understanding that words are developed from sound ‘chunks’) is fostered through the spelling strategies and develops as students read and write new words. Teachers identified that teaching spelling using words in context was part of good practice.

A few teachers felt differently, stating that the spelling aspects of *Accelerated Literacy* are very vague and unorganised, and they were not confident in using this part of the sequence. One teacher said:

*“I don’t like using AL to teach spelling. It is too hard to plan a comprehensive spelling program across the year when books are randomly chosen before each term and there is no guarantee of different phonetic patterns being present inside that book.”*

Teachers overwhelmingly reinforced that as a result of their students reading good quality literature, they become better writers. Reading a variety of texts helps students learn text structures and language that they can then transfer to their own writing. In addition, reading provides students with knowledge that they can use in their stories.

Nearly all teachers agreed on the value of *Accelerated Literacy* for teaching writing. The emphasis on author style and purpose is seen as a highly effective strategy for students to learn better writing techniques. Practice in writing, using the same grammatical techniques as professional authors, helps students build on their reading skills.

However, a few teachers were concerned that students’ creativity was being stifled, given the emphasis placed on what they saw as students “merely rewriting the original text”. One teacher recalled:

*“At all the in-services I attended, many participants and presenters were over the moon, when children could write a sentence which was virtually a copy from the text, with just a few words changed. I did not see any evidence of completely independent, full narrative writing.”*

### 5.3 Effect on teacher workload and commitment

The introduction of a new program always requires additional professional learning and teacher commitment and effort. Teachers and executive staff spoke frequently about the impact of *Accelerated Literacy* on aspects of planning, lesson preparation and classroom implementation.

#### 5.3.1 Preparation and programming

Most teachers agree that *Accelerated Literacy* can take a lot of planning and preparation because of the in-depth analysis of text that is required. Nevertheless, collaborative planning, using NALP resources and developing and creating a shared resource bank, were seen as methods which were ultimately time and cost effective.

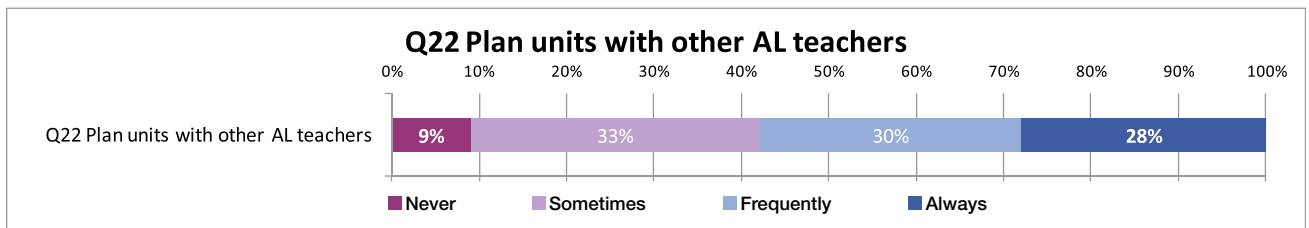
Some teachers indicated that the amount of time it takes to prepare resources for AL is at the expense of other KLAs. One teacher commented:

*“I have found that all the extra planning and preparation has resulted in less time for other KLAs, and I haven’t felt on top of my other subjects.”*

#### Increased collaboration in planning and programming

According to many teachers planning collaboratively was seen to have increased. Units of work are more frequently planned and developed in teams. As shown in Figure 5.8, most respondents plan units of work with other *Accelerated Literacy* teachers at least sometimes, while only one in ten never plan this way. More than half plan together frequently or always.

**Figure 5.8: Planning in a team**

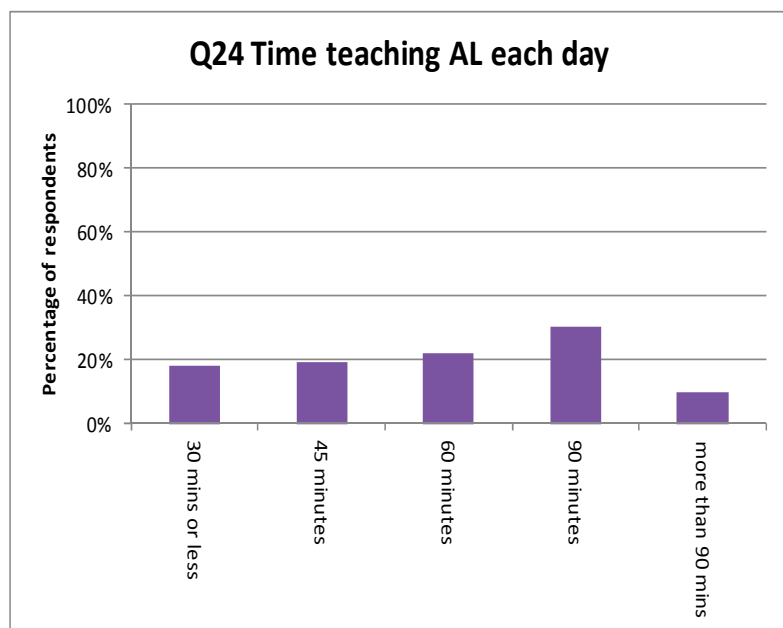


Whilst some teachers saw programming meetings as an additional demand on their time, ultimately teachers believed the development of shared resources saved time and effort for individual teachers.

Those teachers who utilised resources and teaching notes provided by the NALP website found that their planning and preparation time was reduced.

#### 5.3.2 Lesson Time

The recommended time allocation for an *Accelerated Literacy* session is 90 minutes per day. As shown in Figure 5.9, as many as two-thirds of respondents do not achieve this allocation. Six out of ten survey respondents stated that they teach *Accelerated Literacy* for up to an hour each day. One in ten teaches more than 90 minutes.

**Figure 5.9: Time spent teaching *Accelerated Literacy***

Consistent with these survey responses, many teachers interviewed indicated that the length of *Accelerated Literacy* sessions created difficulties. Typically teachers expressed difficulty with:

*“...finding time to hold a full length AL session in addition to separate guided reading groups, writing and other elements of the English syllabus, as well as other KLAs.”*

Part of the issue here is the persistent feeling that *Accelerated Literacy* was to be implemented in addition to existing reading activities rather than as the complete program.

Frequently, school visits revealed situations where teachers were implementing reading programs in addition to *Accelerated Literacy*. It appeared that this was often aimed at providing the differentiation of text that *Accelerated Literacy* tries to avoid, e.g. using graded reading materials.

Some teachers indicated that the recommended 90 minutes lesson time was appropriate. Often this meant changes in how teachers structured literacy sessions to include a variety of activities, or steps in the sequence. Some schools reorganised timetables so that *Accelerated Literacy* took place between 9am and 10.30am each day. Some schools integrated a fruit break at an appropriate interval, splitting the session into two cohesive stages.

In one school visited, the *Accelerated Literacy* approach is utilised across all KLAs and *Accelerated Literacy* texts are chosen to work thematically across topics. Teachers commented on the utility of applying *Accelerated Literacy* strategies in other learning areas.

*“AL has been incorporated into all aspects of my KLAs, not just [literacy lessons]”*

For the teachers in this school their *Accelerated Literacy* strategies are utilised across the entire school day.

## 5.4 Effect on teacher practices

As shown previously in Figure 5.1, nine out of ten survey respondents said that *Accelerated Literacy* has improved the way they teach literacy in their classes.

Teacher interviews enabled the evaluation team to discover what types of improvement occurred through teachers' involvement in *Accelerated Literacy*. The *Framework of Professional Teaching Standards* (NSW Institute of Teachers, 2005) describes the nature of teachers' work in three domains: professional knowledge, professional practice and professional commitment.

## 5.4.1 Professional knowledge

This domain concerns teachers' knowledge and understanding of fundamental ideas, principles and structure of the subjects they teach. It encompasses knowledge of subject content, pedagogy, and student learning processes.

### Subject content

Most teachers indicated that they have a greater knowledge of literacy content and have a better capacity to:

- choose age- and stage-appropriate literate texts
- teach reading and comprehension strategies
- discuss the meaning and purpose of grammar and language
- examine author's style and intent and link to improved reading and writing skills
- facilitate modelling best practice
- develop new units of work for appropriate texts using the AL approach
- examine visual literacy and infer meaning from pictures
- use student assessment data to inform practice
- use *Accelerated Literacy* strategies across the curriculum.

In several cases, teachers indicated that their personal knowledge of grammar has greatly improved.

### Subject pedagogy

Many teachers confirmed that the strategies of *Accelerated Literacy* were now embedded into their practice and that they would continue to use the strategies, both in literacy and other KLA learning situations. One teacher stated that:

*“I thought what I was doing was best practice, but now it's even better practice.”*

Use of *low order* orientation, changed the way teachers introduced texts. Giving students the facts first means that there are no secrets; the students are not guessing at knowledge. This results in greater comprehension for all students.

Most teachers indicated that they understood the purpose of the *Accelerated Literacy* sequence and its application to text analysis. The scaffolding technique in reading is seen by teachers to support learning and allows students access to text that might otherwise be too challenging. Teachers confirmed that they now realise scaffolding in reading also enables students to connect reading with prior knowledge, preparing them to comprehend more easily and quickly.

### Knowledge of students and learning

Many teachers interviewed commented that professional learning through the *Accelerated Literacy* approach has given them a better grounding in learning theory. Teachers indicated that *Accelerated Literacy* has reinforced the importance of taking into account the diverse backgrounds of their students as well as their individual learning needs. One teacher commented as follows:

*“The strength of AL lies in the teacher's understanding of the text, their students needs and how, when and how much to scaffold the questioning for each student's success. Also in learning to handover as soon as possible.”*

Teachers have gained a better knowledge of scaffolding techniques that are fundamental to social learning theories. Scaffolding is used to extend students' thinking within the zone of proximal development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1962). Learning occurs in this cognitive region, which lies just beyond what the student can do alone. Anything that the student can learn with the assistance and support of a teacher, peers, and the instructional environment is said to lie within the ZPD. *Accelerated Literacy* is based on this learning theory. As one survey respondent noted:

*“The Accelerated Literacy approach is built on the theory of scaffolding students' learning so they may successfully participate in discussion around 'literate texts'.”*

## 5.4.2 Professional practice

This domain focuses on the teaching process as well as the knowledge and skills gained through teacher experience. It includes the effective development of teaching and learning programs and the appropriate organisation, selection, development and use of materials and resources.

### Planning, assessing and reporting

Teachers commented that planning literacy learning has been made much more efficient and effective because all activities are related to a single text set within a structured sequence. It was also indicated that teachers were better able to identify class needs through increased interactions with students as a result of discussions around text.

Assessments used by teachers, as recommended by *Accelerated Literacy*, effectively identify learning needs. Many teachers commented that they were now using quality assessment tasks which forced them to think about how they are going to achieve what they want to achieve with their students.

Most teachers also reported that they had improved their ability to monitor student progress through increased skills in analysing data according to the Data Analytical Skills Framework (DASA). DASA provides an online self-assessment tool that helps teachers to:

- evaluate how they use data tools for teaching and learning
- create a personal log of evidence of data analysis skills capability
- identify aspects of their practice for further professional learning.

In assessing their skills through DASA teachers are provided with pathways that link with resources for skills improvement in navigating and analysing SMART data for the classroom and the school, as well as linking school and external assessments and using data to drive pedagogy. Skills improvement in assessment was noted by one principal, as follows:

*“all of our staff access SMART data and know what they are doing – in 2009 they didn’t.”*

Improved skills in data analysis is an ongoing process according to teachers and assists greatly not only in identifying student learning needs but also in making teachers reflect on their own practice. As noted by one survey respondent:

*“I believe that Accelerated Literacy has improved my teaching and therefore the students’ reading skills. High and low order literate orientation helps all students at all levels in some way with oral reading, particularly in self-confidence. There has not been as much overall progress in comprehension but results show this and I am able to work on weaknesses.”*

Many teachers commented that they are better equipped to use teaching strategies to foster student interest, support learning and to make content meaningful to students.

## 5.4.3 Professional commitment

This domain encompasses the capacity of teachers to critically reflect on their own practice and a commitment to their own professional development.

Teachers continually improve their professional knowledge and practice. Most teachers indicated engagement in professional learning around the approach to *Accelerated Literacy* has helped in extending and refining teaching and learning practices.

A number of teachers commented that they feel more responsible for improving literacy outcomes across the school. Teachers recognised the importance of collaboration in programming and planning and the benefits of working with other staff to improve outcomes for students in other classes and stages.

A few teachers commented that learning about SMART data was effective in making all teachers in the school feel responsible for achieving student outcomes, as suggested here:

*“It has made ALL teachers take responsibility for results, not just the Yr 3 and Yr 5 teachers.”*

Teachers overwhelmingly indicated that they now work productively and openly with colleagues in reviewing teaching strategies and refining professional knowledge and practice. A number of principals and program leaders stated that many teachers used to have classroom doors closed. Following the introduction of *Accelerated Literacy*, teaching practice had changed in many schools with teachers now comfortable with an open door approach. One in-school *Accelerated Literacy* tutor noted that:

*“Initially some teachers were reluctant to have people come into their classrooms, but once they experienced the support, they valued it. A relational trust was built. Now it’s ‘we work together’, so I can be the best teacher I can be.”*

In schools where *Accelerated Literacy* mentors were trained, the lesson study approach was seen as extremely effective. Observing other teachers work with AL was described as helpful in improving their understanding of how the strategies worked. For most teachers this ‘lesson study’ element, which is a recommended practice of *Accelerated Literacy*, provided opportunities for staff to observe best practice and provide collegial feedback and discussion. One principal noted:

*“A lot of AL is modelling – teacher modelling, peer modelling; it’s what teachers have always done, but AL gives them the tools to get there.”*

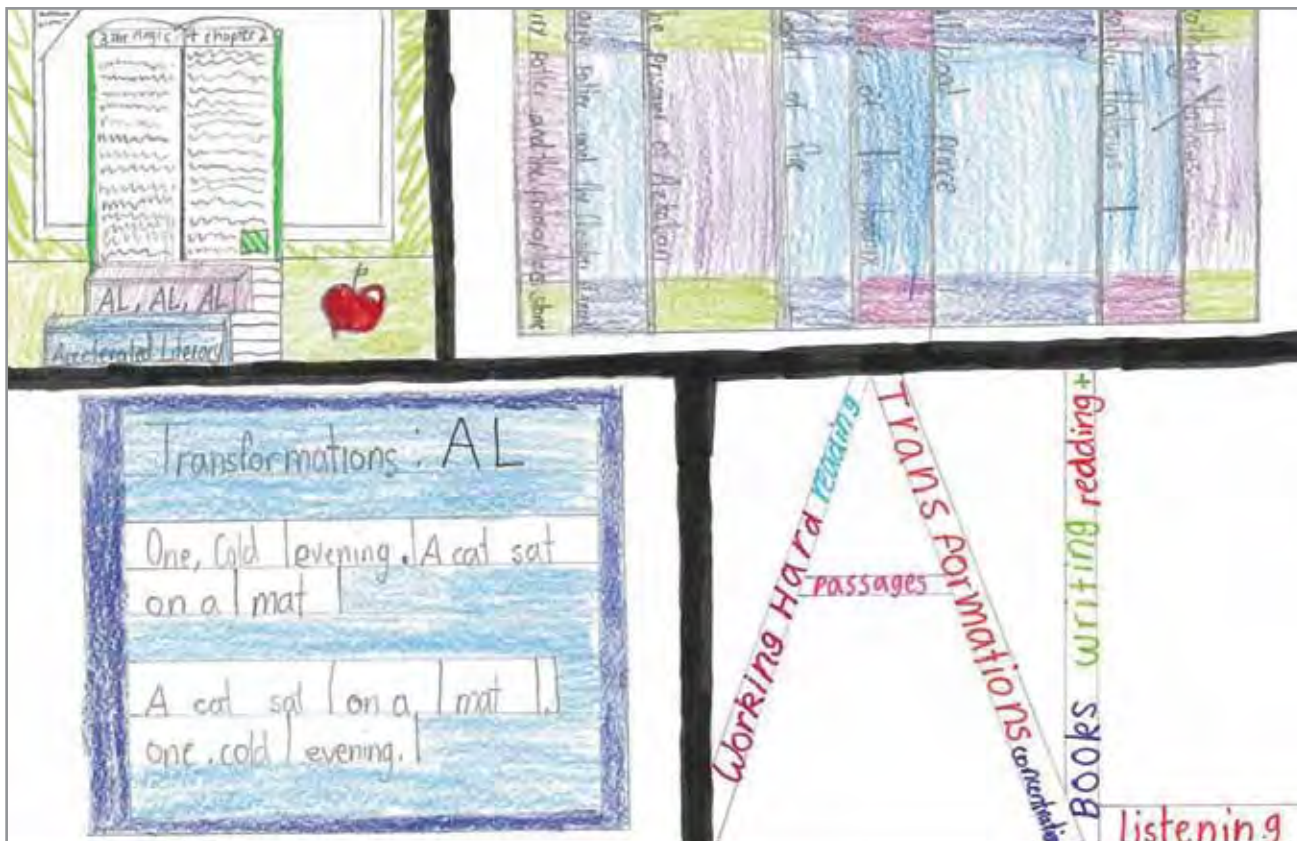
Engaging parents and caregivers in the educative process was also more evident in classrooms with a number of teachers commenting that parents had been given knowledge about the *Accelerated Literacy* approach and were using strategies with their children at home to support learning in the classroom.

Most of all, an overall change in many teachers’ attitudes was reported. In interviews, most teachers expressed enthusiasm and a sense of empowerment as a result of their involvement in *Accelerated Literacy*. One teacher claimed:

*“It has changed the way I teach for the greater good – enthusiasm. Seeing the things you can get out of the children – you get excited.”*

Most teachers indicated a renewed enthusiasm for teaching and their capacity to use newly learned *Accelerated Literacy* strategies in other subject areas. One principal stated that teachers have been empowered and now share that success.





## 6 Impacts in schools

Taking a whole-school approach was seen as a critical success factor by many respondents. The previous sections have described how this approach influenced the implementation of *Accelerated Literacy* and the effects it had on students and teachers.

This section examines the effect that implementing *Accelerated Literacy* as part of the National Partnership on Literacy and Numeracy (NPLN) has had on the organisational unit of the school itself.

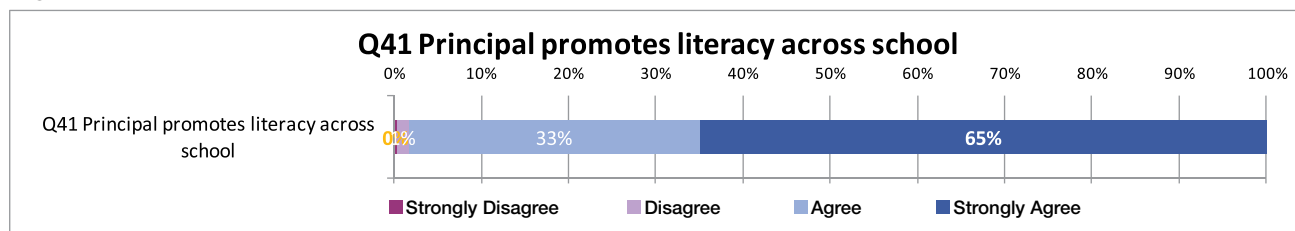
### Key findings:

- There is a high level of consistency of *Accelerated Literacy* practice across all classes.
- Leadership capacity has increased throughout the school.
- Teachers are more willing and able to contribute to whole-school literacy planning and to participate in whole-school monitoring of student performance through the use of data.
- *Accelerated Literacy*, combined with the other programs of the NPLN, has produced notable changes in school culture. Most importantly, teachers have demonstrated increased commitment and enthusiasm, and collegial trust has increased in all schools.
- There are mixed views on how *Accelerated Literacy* may be sustained beyond the period of the NPLN. A range of strategies is proposed for assisting the ongoing success of the program.

Nearly all schools surveyed have implemented *Accelerated Literacy* from Kindergarten to Year 6. The cross-stage capacity of *Accelerated Literacy* was one of the major factors that influenced schools' selection of the program. The resultant changes for teachers produced improvements for school communities as a whole.

Teachers were almost unanimous in acknowledging the role of principal support in laying the foundation for the whole school to take on the NPLN project, as shown in Figure 6.1.

**Figure 6.1: Literacy promoted in school by principal**



While the focus of change was on introducing the literacy program, it is important to remember that *Accelerated Literacy* was implemented in the context of the NPLN as a whole. It is difficult to isolate the effects of leadership initiatives and the focus on using SMART data, from the changes in practices stimulated by *Accelerated Literacy*. It is acknowledged that the changes described in this section have resulted from the combined effects of all aspects of the NPLN initiatives.

### 6.1 Whole-school benefits

Principals and teachers were very supportive of taking a whole-school approach to implementing *Accelerated Literacy*, enabling consistency of teaching practices throughout the school. By directing NPLN funding to implementation of *Accelerated Literacy* across Years K-6, rather than in Years 3 to 6 only, schools were able to effect change across the whole school. Continuity of literacy teaching and learning, and building of capacity across the school, stand out as particular benefits.

### 6.1.1 Continuity of approach

Schools' commitment to the *Accelerated Literacy* approach was most clearly demonstrated through its inclusion in the School Literacy Plan and School Management Plan. In each of the seven schools visited, there was a strong *Accelerated Literacy* presence in the School Literacy Plan. In fewer cases, the Management Plan also reflected this commitment.

As mentioned previously, teachers particularly appreciated the fact that *Accelerated Literacy* was being implemented by all or most teachers, providing a strong sense of common direction in literacy teaching. Teachers reported that prior to implementing *Accelerated Literacy*, a number of different programs or individual strategies were used, with little support or guidance, often leaving teachers feeling isolated and unsure of what was needed. As one teacher noted:

*“Everyone was doing different things in literacy, but now it is consistent and there is follow-through.”*

Consistency of strategies, language and the *Accelerated Literacy* sequence of activities provided direction for teachers, regardless of stage or grade.

*“AL has helped pull us all in the same direction, we knew we needed to make changes.”*

One principal commented that as a school leader it was easier and more effective to coordinate the same approach across all classes in the school:

*“Pre-NPLN we used any old interventions. Post-NPLN we have different expectations and a whole-school approach. This is useful as it is a licence to say ‘we will do it this way’ with everyone.”*

Most principals echoed this sentiment, indicating that the major advantage of implementing the new program across the whole school came from raising expectations that, as a school, a real difference can be made for students, as well as building teachers' confidence.

Continuity of literacy experiences was often quoted as a significant benefit for students. Teachers stated that previously, each year students potentially had to work within a different literacy approach, sometimes using new terminology and very different activities. Shared implementation of *Accelerated Literacy* increased pedagogical consistency across all classes in the school and supported students as they moved from year to year. Now, suggested one teacher, *“students do not have to relearn every year”*. They know what to expect and how it's going to work. One teacher noted:

*“Accelerated Literacy is becoming an integral part of our school's culture.”*

Many teachers reported that they were carrying strategies learned in implementing *Accelerated Literacy* through to other KLAs. As a result, the teaching practices across all curriculum areas are more cohesive, providing consistency for students in every subject area. Using the strategies of *Accelerated Literacy* across all subject areas was seen as an obvious choice by many teachers. *Accelerated Literacy* was perceived as not needing to *“sit all by itself.”* One teacher commented that:

*“Students and teachers benefit from wide implementation of the pedagogy in other KLAs as well as literacy sessions.”*

Teachers perceived that they had been *“given training which has allowed us to extend the pedagogy to all aspects of the school”*. Their expertise and confidence was growing.

Teachers also saw benefits for students where preschools are attached to the school. One teacher noted that because students were experiencing *Accelerated Literacy* in the preschool meant that they started school with some literacy skills.

Using the approach across the school, including in pre-Stage 1 and Stage 1, challenged teachers' expectations of what students could achieve. Seeing success with younger students encouraged Stage 2 and 3 teachers to expect better results from their students. As stated by one teacher:

*“[There are now] high expectations, particularly down in infants because of what has been seen, and the outcomes in terms of what a Kindergarten student can achieve.”*

One principal indicated that the one change he would make if he had the time over again would be to implement *Accelerated Literacy* in Kindergarten first, as he judged this as the best time to start.

## 6.1.2 Building capacity across the school

Shared learning, to build pedagogical expertise, is widely reported to have greater impact than changes in individual teachers' practices, alone.

In many of the schools visited as part of the evaluation, similar capacity has been built across the school as a whole; in literacy teaching and learning; assessment and the use of data to influence decision making; and in development of teachers' leadership skills.

### Teaching capacity

In most situations, engagement with *Accelerated Literacy* has resulted in a solid foundation of practice across the school, and shared commitment to improving students' literacy outcomes. Teachers suggest that the NPLN has set high expectations for them (as well as for students), and that the support and success they've experienced with *Accelerated Literacy* is often providing the motivation to keep building their expertise. Teachers reported increased confidence in their abilities to teach effectively and greater willingness to work with others in their classrooms.

Several teachers indicated that they paid more attention to the importance of the Quality Teaching Framework (Professional Support and Curriculum Directorate, 2003) than they had previously, primarily because the *Accelerated Literacy* strategies and activities aligned to so many of the elements. A number of teachers referred to this connection. One experienced teacher stated that she had:

*“never seen a program that fits so well with the Quality Teaching Framework.”*

Principals frequently reported that as implementation progressed, teachers became more willing to be mentored and take on leadership roles within the school.

Increased teacher collaboration in planning and sharing resources was evident in nearly all *Accelerated Literacy* schools. Banks of shared resources have been developed as teachers worked together to trial, revise and write new *Accelerated Literacy* teaching sequences and activities. In most cases these are saved on the local network to be accessed by all staff, as needed. As one teacher noted:

*“We keep a bank of everyone's programs on the staff drive so everyone can use it, and staff change it to suit themselves. By the end of this year we should have two years' of good programming so eventually it won't be such an onerous task.”*

One principal stated that teachers were now more able to be 'mobile across the school'. Their ability to teach across the K-6 range is highly valued by many principals. Not only does this add to a teacher's individual skills and professionalism, but it also enhances capacity and flexibility of staffing for the whole school. Developing expertise and shared commitment makes movement between years and stages easier and more efficient.

## Assessment and use of data

Teachers consistently reported that they were using better quality assessments. Often these were those suggested by *Accelerated Literacy*, but increasingly teachers reported being able to develop their own.

Whole-school training in using SMART data assisted school communities in identifying teaching priorities, both for individual students and classes, and more generally across stages or the school as a whole.

Where schools engaged in regular discussion of student growth, teachers reported that they started to incorporate more consistent methods of monitoring students' progress. Increased appreciation of the value of assessment data was a common outcome. In one school visited a teacher had been designated as the school data analyst. The role of this person was not only to provide advice to teachers on how to analyse data effectively, but also to design an in-school NAPLAN-type test that could be used periodically throughout the year to identify student needs as quickly as possible.

## Building leadership capacity

Developing leadership capacity across the school is one of the reform elements of the NPLN. Implementation of *Accelerated Literacy* became a useful vehicle for development of teachers' leadership skills. Commonly, schools established an *Accelerated Literacy* team or appointed a designated *Accelerated Literacy* coordinator, to lead and manage the program. Shared leadership amongst staff was one of the positive factors for success.

Teacher capacity and leadership were promoted by providing professional learning opportunities for all staff and by providing for release from normal duties for teacher trained mentors, tutors and program leaders.

Many principals indicated that building leadership skills was now part of school planning. A number of executive mentioned the *NSW DEC Analytical framework for effective leadership and school improvement in literacy and numeracy*<sup>®</sup> (PLLDD, 2010) and the degree to which it helped them to develop leadership skills within the school and identify areas for school improvement. One deputy principal spoke at length about the value of the framework and the importance of the Team Leadership Program:

*“The Analytical Framework is powerful stuff...The thing we want to do now with the Team Leadership Program is expand it and use it with the staff across the school. [It is a] fantastic program.”*

One principal stated that it was important for her to establish leadership capacity that will be maintained beyond the life of the NPLN, particularly at the end of the implementation timeline. She stated that:

*“...going into classes and observing lessons is important as well. We don't want teachers to think 'Oh it's over now (NPLN)'.”*

## 6.2 Commitment to staff training

Much of the teacher capacity building relied on ongoing professional learning. This has proven to be a strength of the *Accelerated Literacy* implementation in many schools across the whole cohort. The training model was highly valued, particularly when supported with ongoing in-school activities.

Initial training of most or all teachers, preferably at the same time, provided a sound foundation for whole-school implementation. Typically, it promoted the many conversations and clarifications as teachers began to program, plan and teach, ensuring a consistent approach to implementing the program and fostering greater collegiality across the school. One teacher noted that it was effective having all staff, including the principal, trained in the approach:

*“It supports us knowing that he [Principal] knows what we are doing and why. We are all working toward the same thing. It's a nice positive environment.”*

The ongoing support made available to staff during the implementation of *Accelerated Literacy* was seen by teachers as valuable in changing their teaching practice and ultimately changing the culture of learning within the school. Releasing teachers to observe others, to plan collaboratively and to develop skills in using data, not only enhanced teacher expertise, but also strengthened levels of trust within the staff.

The additional training provided for mentors and tutors added to their credibility in the eyes of teachers, and was effective and cost efficient, according to principals. Where schools established local mentors and specialised *Accelerated Literacy* in-school tutors, teachers overwhelmingly appreciated the support provided for implementing the approach.

It was noted by a number of principals that the building of teacher capacity through ongoing formal training and leadership development, often meant that these trained staff moved on to higher positions elsewhere. Principals were generally supportive of the individual teachers and sometimes recognised this as capacity building within the Department as a whole.

### 6.3 Culture change

Many school staff commented that since introducing *Accelerated Literacy* across the school, they had observed that the whole social and educational context of the school had changed for the better. As one principal noted:

*“If I was to look at the one major impact it would be the changed culture of the school.”*

Teacher enthusiasm, increased collegiality and working as a team, and enhancement in the overall tone of the school, were common areas of improvement mentioned by both teachers and school executive members.

A number of principals stated that teachers were much more engaged in the teaching and learning process and were much more committed and generally enthusiastic about their role within the school.

Staff absenteeism was reported to have decreased in several schools; it was noted that teachers wanted to come to work. One principal observed that the car park is always full at 7.45am sharp. Every morning he saw teachers preparing for the two hours of literacy teaching between 9 and 11:

*“Teachers say ‘I don’t want to miss the sequence’.”*

Other principals noted that teachers were now “driven”. They reported hearing teachers say:

*“It’s going to be great doing this text.” or “We had the best lesson on transformations.”*

Teachers were encouraging and supportive of each other and were eager to share their ‘AL moments’. In most interviews, teachers and principals spoke of the shift away from teachers working in isolation.

One principal commented that:

*“...teachers no longer talk about ‘I do this on my own’. Instead, they now speak about ‘we do this together’.*

Many teachers also talked about being connected and working as a team, as a result of the common approach: “We work together and know what each other is doing.”

One program leader commented that staff were much more willing to open their doors to other teachers, executive and parents:

*“One teacher who had his door shut all the time, now asks when I’m coming because he wants that support. Staff are happy – they want the feedback. And these guys are at the stage where they want criticism – they want to know what was wrong so they can improve. It’s a quantum leap in staff comfort.”*

School leaders indicated that teachers had become excited. One teacher stated that:

*“We are all really passionate about it. It came at a time when everybody was ready to try something new.”*

Another more experienced teacher commented that:

*“I’ve been here 8 years. I have noticed a huge shift. The kids have improved academically and the staff are enthusiastic.”*

Teachers consistently reported that they felt a greater sense of responsibility for whole-school planning and student outcomes; that this was not just the job of a specific classroom teacher. As examination of student performance data became a focus of the whole school, teachers reported that they felt part of the decision-making processes that determined school priorities.

Similarly, teachers talked of professional learning as an ongoing process, occurring incidentally through staff room conversations, as often as in formal workshops or in-service courses.

The positive feelings in the school, according to principals, also had significant effects on student behaviour and attendance. The change in the tone of the school, according to one principal, had an even greater impact on community attitudes towards the school. This was directly reflected in an increase in enrolments:

*“We’ve had 33 enrolments this year when last year we had about 12 – we’ve got talk on the street about what goes on at this place. AL is a significant part of that.”*

Another principal explained that the school had received disadvantaged schools funding since 1987. As a consequence, staff and community saw the school in terms of its welfare focus. Following the introduction of *Accelerated Literacy* across the school, and the successes achieved, people now perceived the school “as a school of opportunity rather than of welfare.”

## 6.4 Involving parents

Increased commitment and enthusiasm by teachers, according to principals, have changed the quality of interactions taking place with the parent community.

In most schools visited, parent information sessions had been organised so that parents would be able to understand and support their children’s literacy learning. Parents also mentioned that information about the program had been provided through open days, newsletters and the school website.

One student even noted that:

*“Every so often we have open days and our parents come in and they know what we are reading.”*

Parents who took part in interviews, generally knew that *Accelerated Literacy* was being implemented in the school, even if their knowledge of the program was limited. Most indicated that they had been given enough information by the school or their children’s teachers to enable them to support their child with reading at home.

In some cases the school executive confirmed that some parents had been formally trained in *Accelerated Literacy*, in order to build understanding and support.

Many parents stated that they were excited at their ability to support their children with some techniques learned in the information sessions. One parent commented that:

*“I did some reading at home with my kid and I PQR’d and I got it all right.”*

Some parents indicated that they had been given a whole lot of strategies to help with their children's reading, and that these were extremely effective in supporting the school approach.

More generally, it was noted that parents were interested in what their children were learning, and while many expressed that the approach appeared challenging, their children were experiencing success. One parent stated that she knew that:

*“Accelerated Literacy is to help the students to meet the state standards and also to help those children that are doing quite well to reach a bit further.”*

Teachers at the school commented that this helped with parent understanding of literacy approaches in the school:

*“It doesn't matter which class a child is in, parents know what they're getting in terms of teaching.”*

## 6.5 Sustaining Accelerated Literacy beyond the NPLN

Principals and teachers were asked about the extent to which *Accelerated Literacy* was seen as sustainable in the school.

While teachers overwhelmingly supported the notion of continued implementation of *Accelerated Literacy*, overall responses fell into one of several categories, exemplified by the participant quotes included below:

- School communities where they have **invested in building capacity within the school** felt they had equipped the school to continue with minimal need for ongoing resourcing, at least in the short term.

Funds have been used to develop resources and expertise during the period of the partnership, and extending the program beyond the NPLN period has been part of early planning. In these cases teachers are optimistic, as shown:

*“In school [tutors] will continue to train staff in AL without funding. We intended that from the start.”*

*“AL is very sustainable. We have access to many resources and have two executives who have had further training. We can access their knowledge at any time and ask for assistance or guidance. There is a lot of sharing amongst staff of ideas about AL and its implementation.”*

*“We have ensured sustainability through ensuring the school is well resourced and that all staff are trained and supported. We have ensured that all school policies support the program and that staff are aware of their responsibilities in ensuring the success of AL.”*

- Schools communities that have **identified that it would be difficult to maintain** the program without the current level of support with funding and training:

*“Our mentor has always been available to help guide us in programming, to give them lessons on particular aspects in AL, to team teach... Without the assistance we currently get from our marvellous in-school mentor AL will become harder to program.”*

*“With new teachers coming in it makes it difficult because we have no [school-based] trainers and we will not have the funding to continue to train to the level we have.”*



- School communities where it is recognised that **ongoing funding will need to be identified**, to maintain the level of support that has ensured success to date:

*“Continued support and networking is vital to the success of anything. Time to meet with others to talk and plan is essential.”*

*“We need to ensure that the two tutor mentors that are currently receiving training will be able to supply ongoing training to new staff whilst up-skilling the skills of the existing staff. Release time and other Teacher Professional Learning opportunities still need to be provided to the school- i.e. thinking outside the box on using release time for collaboratively planning.”*

*“We can keep going. We have got the resources; we just need to keep topping up the materials (highlighters etc); we can take out of the stage budgets. We have enough texts to keep us going. We will look at some nonfiction texts from our literacy budget.”*

- **Individual teachers** who will continue using the *Accelerated Literacy* approach and strategies, irrespective of the level of support provided by the school or system:

*“We will continue with the Accelerated Literacy methodology even if there is no support through NPLN funding.”*

*“I will definitely continue to teach AL as we have amazing resources and the children enjoy the variety of activities such as the transformation board and text marking.”*

*“I am personally willing to implement this program in any classroom I have in the future as the training and support I have received has given me the knowledge and confidence to use the program effectively.”*

The last comment was followed up with a reminder that this is not always the case:

*“I don’t believe that all teachers within my school feel the same way, which ultimately will affect what happens to the program in my school.”*

Difficulty in training new teachers and providing ongoing in-school support are seen as the two major barriers to sustaining the program.

Training new teachers relies on availability of expert trainers, a resource that is not guaranteed at a regional level, and expensive if provided by the private sector. Providing relief for teachers to support others or to plan collaboratively is also a financial burden for some schools; as demonstrated by the comment of one in-school literacy leader:

*“It is possible to sustain AL while we have trained staff. There is now a lot less money for training and support but those who are already trained will always use a varying level of the skills and strategies learned as it is a pedagogy.”*

Several principals identified, in retrospect, that they should have considered a teacher-tutor, in-school training model.

One experienced principal noted that teacher mobility could be a challenge but if teachers were willing to continue to support each other then the approach could be effectively sustained.

*“Sustainability is always going to be difficult with a transient teaching population, however with experienced staff leading the pedagogy and willing to impart their expertise with new staff, the sustainability of Accelerated Literacy for years to come is possible.”*

Other principals spoke of locating alternative funding sources. They are committed to embedding the program in school plans and arranging alternative budget provisions. One principal stated that finding necessary funding to support the maintenance of the program would not be too difficult.

Similarly, some teachers are willing to think creatively about how they might support one another.

Several teachers noted that the loss of funding would mean a loss of in-school support, but the strategies are so effective that they will continue to use them.

*“Losing this support will make things trickier but the pedagogy is now seen throughout all of my teaching and it has helped me to further engage the students.”*

Some teachers indicated they would continue to use parts of the teaching sequence that they knew worked for their students and that they felt comfortable about incorporating into their practice.

While having resources was a key factor in maintaining *Accelerated Literacy* activities for many teachers and school principals, their provision is not seen as such an issue. Purchase of consumables and even sets of books can more easily be accommodated in general school budgets.



## 7 Summary of findings and conclusions

This section provides a summary of the efficacy and impact of *Accelerated Literacy*, as it emerged through the evaluation. Findings from both quantitative and qualitative components are drawn together to address each of the Terms of Reference, as follows:

- assessment of the effectiveness of the program
- assessment of the extent to which the program achieves its goals in an efficient manner and where applicable, addresses the mandatory reform elements of the NPLN, which are:
  - effective and evidence-based teaching of literacy
  - strong school leadership and whole-school engagement with literacy
  - monitoring student and school literacy performance to identify where support is needed
- assessment of the extent to which the program has improved the educational outcomes of Aboriginal students
- investigation of the most effective ways for schools to be supported to participate in the evaluation and for the reforms to be incorporated into school practices.

*Accelerated Literacy* is presented as a comprehensive approach to learning to read and write, using structured sequences that examine the complexities of quality texts. In order to be able to implement *Accelerated Literacy*, teachers participated in an extensive professional learning program, spanning a number of weeks. Support for the program's implementation was required at a whole-school level.

It is acknowledged that in all but one school, *Accelerated Literacy* was implemented concurrently with an individualised literacy program intervention targeting selected students in each class. As such, it is difficult to attribute improvement to one approach or program alone.

The significant finding of this evaluation is that *Accelerated Literacy* has delivered positive effects for students, teachers and real benefits for school communities.

The other components of the NPLN have bolstered the effectiveness of *Accelerated Literacy* implementation. Both the team leadership component and the requirement to examine SMART data have contributed significantly, in most cases.

Timelines, funding and occasionally program selection were factors that were not always within the organisational control of participating schools. These limitations are taken into account within the following summary and conclusions, as appropriate.

### 7.1 Assessment of the effectiveness of *Accelerated Literacy*

The impact of *Accelerated Literacy* on student outcomes, teacher practice and whole-school change, varied across schools. Often this appeared to be dependent on the approach taken by school leaders. In some cases there was a sense of using the NPLN opportunity to lay foundations for ongoing change; in others it appeared to be more about immediate needs being met, as quickly as possible.

#### 7.1.1 Effectiveness of *Accelerated Literacy* for students

While a clear finding of this evaluation was that *Accelerated Literacy* has improved the reading outcomes of most students, greater support for this proposition came from teacher surveys and qualitative data gathered from interviews with teachers and students, than from broad-scale testing.

## NAPLAN and NPLN assessments

Aggregate student data collected from NAPLAN and NPLN assessments were analysed to identify the change in student literacy outcomes, particularly in reading. A range of limitations on the reliability and validity of results observed in these data sets have been outlined in the report; these should be considered when drawing conclusions from the results discussed.

Gains in mean reading scores were observed for all student cohorts at *Accelerated Literacy* schools in both NAPLAN and NPLN assessments. In both NAPLAN cohorts (students in Year 3 in 2008/Year 5 in 2010, and Year 3 in 2009/Year 5 in 2011) students at *Accelerated Literacy* schools achieved slightly higher reading score gains than for students across all NPLN literacy focus schools.

Results in both data sets indicate that gain scores for Aboriginal students involved in *Accelerated Literacy* were higher than those for non-Aboriginal students in both cohorts.

## School-based views of student outcomes

Overall, school staff, students and the parent community agreed that the *Accelerated Literacy* approach had been effective in increasing students' skills in reading, during the period of the NPLN.

Teachers consistently reported observed improvements in:

- the volume, variety and complexity of texts read
- students' ability to read for meaning
- students' confidence in, and enthusiasm for reading
- students' use of effective strategies to assist them read and understand text.

Teachers were clearly able to articulate the features of *Accelerated Literacy* that they believed to be effective in achieving better outcomes for their students:

- program design, based on scaffolding activities for the whole class
- structured teaching sequence, used consistently
- teaching and learning activities linked to selected text
- assessment activities.

The scaffolding techniques assisted the progress of most students more quickly than expected. This was seen particularly with students who were reading at a lower level at the commencement of the program. It was noted by a few teachers that this achievement was less evident with their higher achieving students, who often found the low order parts of the sequence repetitive.

Many principals, school leaders and teachers stressed that they believed the full impact of *Accelerated Literacy* and improvements for students will not be fully apparent for a few more years.

### 7.1.2 Effectiveness of *Accelerated Literacy* for teachers

Building teacher capacity was a key intention of the NPLN. The sustained professional learning program and ongoing in-school support provided positive results for teachers. Teachers highlighted that they now had:

- enhanced understanding of reading and how to teach it, and the overall change in their teaching practices
- renewed focus on the individual needs of each student
- increased knowledge of social learning theories that underpin the *Accelerated Literacy* approach
- new understandings of how to monitor student progress and use assessment data to guide their pedagogical decisions.

Most of all, teachers recounted changes in how they worked within the school. This included:

- increased collaborative planning and programming
- working productively and openly with colleagues in reviewing teaching strategies and refining personal practice
- taking on leadership roles, where appropriate.

A general sense of renewal or reinvigoration for teaching was perhaps the most positive outcome expressed by a majority of teachers who participated in interviews.

### 7.1.3 Effectiveness of *Accelerated Literacy* for school communities

Emerging from both the survey and interview data were indications of specific measures which assisted schools with effective and efficient implementation of the *Accelerated Literacy* intervention.

In turn, the impact of *Accelerated Literacy* on the school work environment was notable. Building whole-school capacity and creating a more supportive and focussed culture within the school, were frequently reported as the most valuable outcomes of the NPLN. Key features include:

- establishment of a coherent and consistent approach and strategies for teaching literacy throughout Years K-6
- recognition of the value of, and development of skills in using student performance data to inform decision making and whole-school planning
- investment in developing in-school expertise to support ongoing professional learning of all teachers
- enhanced school capacity to provide mutual support and to collaboratively create and share literacy teaching resources.

## 7.2 Assessment of efficient achievement of goals

Principals and teachers describe *Accelerated Literacy* as having laid the foundations for ongoing improvement in teaching and learning in literacy. Issues of efficiency that emerged from the evaluation, relate to implementation issues, the costs incurred and value that schools derived from participation.

### 7.2.1 Efficient implementation

*Accelerated Literacy* provides a self-contained, holistic approach to teaching reading and writing. It is based on sound theoretical foundations and a well-documented, empirical evidence-base drawn from a period of implementation in Australian schools.

The approach provides teachers with:

- well-organised structure centred on the teaching sequence for developing literacy lessons
- explicit activities that scaffold student skill development
- pre- and post-assessments and other assessment resources recommended for use at designated points in units of work
- recommended texts and teacher lesson guides
- suggested resources that support student engagement in lesson activities.

Teamed with the professional development package that supported teacher's learning, the structured approach and resources enabled teachers to proceed confidently from the beginning of the program implementation. The focus on learning how to work with the pedagogical approach also provided a platform from which teachers developed their own capacity to create sequences of lessons and units of work based on locally identified needs.

Although most teachers indicated that *Accelerated Literacy* initially required much time and effort to implement effectively with students, they identified that expert follow up and the collegial support fostered in each school, provided the assistance they needed. Having a common understanding of the literacy approach provided teachers with the security that they were not alone, and could seek help from a range of sources.

Within the NPLN implementation period, teachers built sufficient confidence and expertise to comfortably talk of both gains they observed in student achievement, and in their own abilities to devise and implement *Accelerated Literacy* on their own; in literacy and in other KLAs.

## 7.2.2 Costs, funding and value

Major costs were incurred in implementing *Accelerated Literacy*, related to training, purchase of resources and provision of in-school support.

### Training

Training by DEC regional trainers was seen as the cost effective option for many schools. However, there is considerable confusion about the actual costs of training, for teachers, and especially at mentor and tutor level. Significant differences exist in costs quoted in each region across the state. It appears that this results from regional decisions about how to fund support for *Accelerated Literacy* and how to organise and facilitate training. Several school staff members highlighted the inequities they perceived to exist between different school communities.

Most principals chose to train all teachers in the school. A number chose to train support officers, temporary staff and casual relief teachers. One school trained parents to help with community involvement and support for the approach. Although initially costly, investing in professional learning across the school was seen as cost-effective in the long term, not only in supporting consistent practices, but also in building collegiality and trust between teachers, enhancing the whole-school learning environment.

The cost of casual relief in some schools became an inhibiting factor to training all staff at the same time. Some schools minimised these costs by training their own in-school *Accelerated Literacy* tutors. In-school tutors were seen as a valuable asset for future training and ongoing professional learning for teachers.

The costs of employing private providers to train staff were seen as excessive, and proved to be ineffective in encouraging staff to commit themselves to the approaches used.

### Resources

The recommended resources were seen as valuable assets to school literacy programs. The class sets of good quality books and teacher support notes were valued by teachers as necessary and cost effective resources. One principal commented that the purchase of resources was planned with the knowledge that over time, the funds allocated to training would drop off; leaving the school with a rich set of resources that could continue to be used.

The consumables required by students, including highlighters, large quantities of cardboard and marker pens, were identified, almost universally, as an additional, ongoing budget requirement; particularly in those schools located in low socio-economic communities.

Purchases of material resources, including class sets of age- and stage-appropriate literate texts, was seen by staff to be an efficient and effective method to support the introduction of, and planning for the new teaching approach.

## In-school support

Schools that chose to invest in training teachers as *Accelerated Literacy* tutors and mentors identified layers of benefit:

- training was provided to all staff around local needs, and without having to fit in with regional trainer availability and costs
- tutors and mentors provided solid support for ongoing professional learning within the school
- continued training of new teachers can be accommodated for the foreseeable future.

Providing school leaders, tutors and mentors time to support staff with relief from duties was particularly effective in assisting teachers in the early stages of *Accelerated Literacy* implementation.

Many schools, especially those without in-school tutors see provision of training and ongoing assistance, especially for new teachers, as a significant budget challenge for the future.

## Funding and value

School literacy plans and other school documentation demonstrated the great variation in schools' planning and use of their NPLN funds. Principals regarded this as one of the most beneficial aspects of the partnership. The ability to spend their funds according to local needs and decisions, increased teacher and community commitment to the program.

Almost all schools considered *Accelerated Literacy* to be cost effective in terms of results achieved across the whole school setting. However, leaders in several schools claimed that to find local funds to maintain the program, without the benefit of NPLN funding, would be a challenge.

Positive changes were reflected in all schools, as reported by survey respondents and in-school staff interviews. Many teachers expressed the opinion that the value of the intervention came from the overall change in teacher practice through professional learning.

## 7.3 Addressing the mandatory reform elements of the NPLN

The NPLN comprised the three professional learning elements:

- focussed literacy interventions for whole-class groups and individual students
- teacher leadership development, and
- effective use of student performance information.

The evidence from this evaluation suggests that implementation of *Accelerated Literacy* has contributed to schools' progress in addressing the reform agendas of the NPLN, as follows:

### 7.3.1 Effective and evidence-based teaching of literacy

*Accelerated Literacy* argues that the literacy learning needs of the whole class should be addressed through exploration of a common text. This is not however, to suggest that students' individual needs are not at the forefront of the teaching process. In programming literacy units, *Accelerated Literacy* requires that teachers take into account their students' cultural, socio-economic, language and individual learning needs. Text selection and the provision of learning activities are based on the high expectation teachers hold for all students in the class.

Teachers indicated that *Accelerated Literacy* has refocussed their attention on reflecting on their practices and using student feedback to validate their choice of strategies and refine and adjust them accordingly.

The ability to share teaching practice and student outcomes with colleagues was seen by teachers as an effective means to strengthen evidence-based practice.

### 7.3.2 Strong school leadership and whole-school engagement with literacy

Nearly all surveyed schools implemented the *Accelerated Literacy* approach across the whole school, from Kindergarten to Year 6. The majority of principals and teachers agreed that whole-school engagement assisted both staff and students. Teachers felt well-supported by principals and school leaders in implementing *Accelerated Literacy* in their classrooms and across the school.

The *Accelerated Literacy* approach offered much potential for leadership development in schools, particularly through the lesson study element, the formation of literacy teams and/or stage teams to assist with planning and programming, and the opportunities for professional skills enhancement through the mentor and tutor programs.

Reference was made to the *NSW DEC Analytical framework for effective leadership and school improvement in literacy and numeracy*® (PLLDD, 2010) as an effective mechanism for identifying areas for improvement within the school. A number of schools identified the need for greater parent and community involvement, and had made specific attempts to engage parents and the community, which were reflected in school plans.

Teachers across all stages indicated that they felt more responsibility for outcomes achieved across the entire school. It was reported that including the parent community in new literacy teaching and learning approaches was a successful method of reinforcing skills learnt within the classroom. Some parents had received much information about the approaches of *Accelerated Literacy* and were able to effectively support their children's reading at home by using the similar techniques used by teachers. Developing effective partnerships with parents was seen by school staff as vital in building on skills gained. Students who were previously observed by parents as being disinterested and unchallenged were now enthusiastic about going to school and did much more reading at home.

Having the ability to provide funds for relief from normal duties for developing leadership capacity was seen by all schools as a major benefit in facilitating strong school leadership and whole-school engagement with literacy. A few principals commented that as a result of providing professional development opportunities to teachers, particularly in team leadership skills, some teachers had been successful in applying for permanent executive positions.

Nearly all teachers commented that having whole-school engagement with *Accelerated Literacy* provided greater opportunities for collaboration in planning and programming. Dialogue between staff, it was reported, not only had increased due to the consistency in approach but also was at a much higher professional level due to teachers being able to use the same language of teaching and learning. The capacity of resource sharing between teachers had increased as had their sharing in success and evaluating student and school performance.

### 7.3.3 Monitoring student and school literacy performance

Teachers acknowledged that as a result of working with *Accelerated Literacy* assessment processes, and with school-based and national testing results, they are better able to identify and respond to their students' literacy needs. Assessments such as *PM Benchmark Kit 2* (Nelley & Smith, 2005) and *TORCH* (2003) were seen by teachers as effective in providing regular evidence of where support was needed.

In a number of schools staff had developed local assessment tests based on NAPLAN which were designed to be used regularly over the school year to monitor student and school performance. This allowed schools to identify local needs in a quick and efficient way, without having to wait for national testing results.

Where examination of student data has been a priority in the school's NPLN implementation, teachers have developed a sound knowledge of national literacy achievement standards and have become skilled in using a range of data and assessment tools. Teachers regularly assess student achievement and use data to monitor learning, adjust classroom practice and inform future targets.



There was evidence in several schools that the formation of literacy teams promoted regular discussion and analysis of student assessment data. Many teachers commented on their increased capacity to analyse SMART data. Assessment and data analysis is now being used effectively to inform practice.

Teachers who accessed DASA commented that they had evidence of increased skills in data analysis and evidence-based teaching.

## 7.4 Improving educational outcomes of Aboriginal students

The evaluation of *Accelerated Literacy* focussed on changes in teacher and school practices and student achievement related to reading. In gauging improvements in general educational outcomes of Aboriginal students the evaluation has relied on responses to the teacher survey and interviews with parents, teachers and students themselves.

In external assessments, some gains were evident in reading results for Aboriginal students, as detailed in Section 4 of this report. Similarly, teachers reported improvements in general literacy skills.

Staff in schools with Aboriginal students generally reported improvements in other educational outcomes, including improved attendance, increased participation in class activities, and some better results in other subject areas. Teachers could not identify specifically that these improved outcomes were directly related to the implementation of *Accelerated Literacy*.

A few teachers stated that they had observed no particular changes as a result of the literacy intervention. Some staff reported that their Aboriginal student outcomes had always been higher than those of their non-Aboriginal students.

Teachers of Aboriginal students agreed that the recommended texts and teaching guides available for *Accelerated Literacy* provided them with a huge variety and choice of literate texts that were culturally appropriate and engaging for their students.

Parents in particular, observed enhanced reading behaviours and commented that their children were more generally engaged in school.

## 7.5 Supporting schools to participate in the evaluation

Qualitative data was gathered from seven schools. The evaluation team worked with each school to:

- minimise disruption to school routines
- provide schedules of interviews and parent consent forms well ahead of time
- provide funds for catering for personnel involved in the evaluation process.

In cases where parents were unable to attend as scheduled, phone interviews were arranged at a convenient time.

Schools that took part in the evaluation saw it as a valuable opportunity to reflect on their practice, both individually and collectively. Teachers in particular appreciated the chance to provide feedback on their experiences with *Accelerated Literacy*, and as part of the NPLN in general.

Many principals, literacy team leaders and teachers indicated that questions asked by evaluation officers assisted their own assessment of the effectiveness and efficiency of implementing the literacy initiative.

## 7.6 Support for reforms to be incorporated into school practice

The evaluation findings set out the factors contributing to the success of *Accelerated Literacy*, and the issues that have arisen that may hamper its continued implementation.

## 7.6.1 Success factors

Several factors were identified as contributing to the program's overall success. These included:

- the quality and model of training, promoting teacher confidence in implementing *Accelerated Literacy*
- strong school leadership and whole-school commitment to literacy improvement, through engagement with *Accelerated Literacy* and ongoing support for teacher learning
- flexibility in how funding could be used to meet local needs, allowing:
  - school-based decisions in response to local priorities and preferences
  - investment in building school capacity, enhancing teacher expertise, ICT equipment, texts and learning materials
- building capacity of teachers, individually and collectively, particularly in relation to:
  - willingness to learn new methods of teaching literacy
  - developing leadership skills
  - developing expertise in interpretation and use of performance data
- regular monitoring of student progress using quality school-based assessments and SMART data.

## 7.6.2 Challenges encountered in implementing *Accelerated Literacy*

The following issues have been commonly identified as real or potential barriers to the effective ongoing implementation of *Accelerated Literacy*:

### **Inconsistency of training**

The training for teachers was varied. Teachers commented that it was preferable to have had the same trainer for all modules and for all staff. There was widespread agreement that the *Accelerated Literacy* regional trainers were of a high calibre and understood the need for flexibility. Private trainers, on the other hand, were found to be too costly and rigid in their approach.

### **Uncertainty around ongoing support at a regional level**

Support for ongoing implementation of *Accelerated Literacy* appears to be greatly varied from region to region within the DEC. There is confusion around opportunities for initial teacher training; costs of this and additional training to mentor and tutor levels; availability of follow up support; and how long services may continue to be offered to schools.

Schools have made considerable investment in the program to date, and need some indication of the future availability of *Accelerated Literacy* facilitators or trainers, especially as new staff are appointed to the school.

### **Limited engagement with parents**

Most parents were aware that their child's school was implementing *Accelerated Literacy*, even when understanding of the program was limited. Where schools had organised information nights or workshop sessions with the parents, there was evidence of support for the program and some follow through at home was evident. Some parents commented that they would like to have been more informed about the program, in order to provide support at home.

### **Catering for all students, within the time constraints of the school day**

A few teachers indicated that children with high achievement levels in reading, found the repetition of the *low order* sequence unengaging. However, many teachers commented that engagement and motivation for these students can be enhanced through careful selection of the whole-class text, by providing extension activities and involving them in peer mentoring activities.

Frequently it appears that schools are continuing to use other reading programs in addition to *Accelerated Literacy*, often in order to provide reading opportunities at various ability levels. This presents major difficulties in managing time, especially if the recommended 60-90 minutes per day is allocated to *Accelerated Literacy* activities.

## 7.7 Sustainability

Four factors are identified as being critical to the sustainability of *Accelerated Literacy* in schools beyond the funding period:

- Ongoing commitment and support from the school principal and leadership team
- Embedding changes in practice for teachers, with support for ongoing collaboration, planning, unit development and lesson study
- A whole-school (P-6) approach leading to ease of transition from year to year for students, and consistency for teachers
- Ensuring a strategy for ongoing professional learning and training of new teachers.

The majority of teachers stated that the strategies of *Accelerated Literacy* are embedded in their practice and they would continue to use the approach regardless of school decision. Some staff were concerned that they would not receive the same level of support for mentor and tutor lesson studies if schools were unable to provide finances to release staff members from class.

In schools where tutors had not been trained, concerns were expressed about available funds to continue to train new staff members. Where there were trained tutors, forward planning is required to maintain their availability within the school.

A few principals indicated that they would ensure that funds would be found to continue professional learning. The purchase of resources, including class sets of texts and interactive whiteboards, was seen as an investment for the future of the *Accelerated Literacy* approach.

The majority of school communities and individual staff members were confident that *Accelerated Literacy* could be sustained beyond the funding period. A number of schools were already able to articulate plans for doing so.



# Glossary

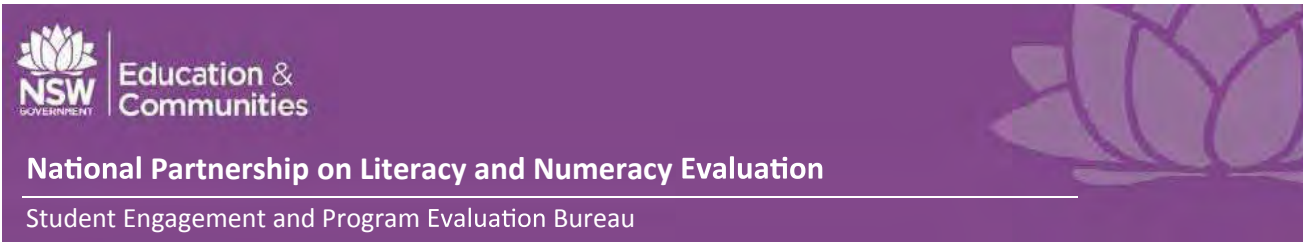
TERM	DESCRIPTION
AECG	Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc. (NSW)
AEO	Aboriginal Education Officer
AETD	Aboriginal Educational and Training Directorate, DEC
AL	<i>Accelerated Literacy</i>
Benchmark	Standard against which performance is measured
BST	Basic Skills Test
CEC	Catholic Education Commission, NSW
CEO	Catholic Education Office
DASA	Data Analysis Skills Assessment
DEC	NSW Department of Education and Communities
EMSAD	Educational Measurement and School Accountability Directorate
ESL	English as a Second Language
ILP	Individual Learning Plans
Goals	Specific targets to achieve a defined objective
K-2	Kindergarten to Year 2
KLA	Key Learning Area
LBOTE	Language Background Other Than English
Literacy	Ability to read and write to defined levels
Literate text	Texts that are complex and rich in language, allowing the reader to actively construct meaning beyond the words on the page
MultiLit	<i>Making Up Lost Time in Literacy Reading</i> tutor program
NALP	National Accelerated Literacy Program
NAPLAN	National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy
NP Low SES	National Partnership for Low SES Schools
NPLN	National Partnership on Literacy and Numeracy
NT	Northern Territory
Numeracy	Mathematical skills needed to cope with everyday life
PERG	Program Evaluation Reference Group
SEPEB	Student Engagement and Program Evaluation Bureau, DEC
SES	Socio-economic status
SLSO	School Learning Support Officer
SMART	School Measurement, Assessment and Reporting Toolkit
Teaching sequence	Units contained within a specific program working together to achieve overall effect
Strategies	Action to achieve a goal in a particular program

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# Appendix 1 - Evaluation instruments



## Program developer discussion guide

### Overview

1	Tell us about <i>Accelerated Literacy</i> , how did it come about?
2	Why was this program developed?
3	What gaps or needs does it address?
4	What are the key features of this program?
5	In what ways does it differ from other literacy/numeracy programs?
6	How are staff trained in delivering <i>Accelerated Literacy</i> in schools?
7	Are there any built in assessments included in the program (for teachers to assess the effectiveness of the program and identify areas of need)

### Evaluating the program

8	What are the main goals of the program? What would be the key measures of success – from both a process and outcomes perspective?
9a	Have there been any evaluations of <i>Accelerated Literacy</i> conducted to date?
9b	What were the findings of these evaluations?
9c	Were there any specific findings related to reading/numeracy outcomes for students?
9d	Specifically Aboriginal students?
10	Is it possible to isolate the reading component of <i>Accelerated Literacy</i> in terms of outcomes for students (and for our evaluation ToR)?
	What would be the key questions you would like asked to the following groups about the program:
11a	Teachers
11b	Principals/school executive
11c	Students
11d	Parents

**National Partnership on Literacy and Numeracy Evaluation**

Student Engagement and Program Evaluation Bureau

**Principal Interview**

Program:	Data Ref:
School:	Region:
Date:	Time:
Evaluation officer:	Principal or delegate:

**Introduction:**

- Reiterate purpose of evaluation:
  - (a) Assess the effectiveness of the program
  - (b) Assess the extent to which the program achieves its goals in an efficient manner
  - (c) Assess outcomes for Aboriginal students
  - (d) Assess the sustainability of the program for 2012 and beyond

**Confirm procedure for day**

- Principal Interview
- Class observation
- Student focus group
- Teacher interview
- Parent/community focus group

**Documents for discussion:**

Annual School Report	
School Management Plan	
School Literacy plan	
any self-evaluation reports of the program undertaken by the school	
any periodic progress reports provided by the school for this program	
any analysis of DASA	
any relevant school-based assessments	
other: Analytical Framework	



Discussion points		Link to ToR
<b>PA</b>	<b><i>Accelerated Literacy</i> selection and purpose</b>	
PA1	Why did the school select <i>Accelerated Literacy</i> as an intervention strategy? <i>PROMPT: Data used (NAPLAN), AL in use prior to NPLN in the school</i>	1
PA2	Is this the only program used for literacy lessons?	2
PA3	If not, please describe how you determined your choice of other literacy programs. <i>PROMPT: Other NPLN intervention: MultiLit? ILPs? Other?</i>	2
<b>PB</b>	<b><i>Accelerated Literacy</i> implementation</b>	
PB1	Describe the process you used to implement the program. <i>Prompt: Training, Team leaders, grades involved, consultation with community</i>	2 2
PB2	Comment on the factors that assisted or hindered the implementation.	2, 4
<b>PC</b>	<b><i>Accelerated Literacy</i> impact/outcomes</b>	
PC1	What changes have you seen as a result of implementing <i>Accelerated Literacy</i> in your school? <i>PROMPT: attendance, engagement, better student outcomes in reading, consistent teaching practices, enhanced teacher / staff professional focus</i>	1, 2, 3
<b>PD</b>	<b>Sustainability</b>	
PD 1	Do you believe <i>Accelerated Literacy</i> is a cost-effective intervention program? <i>PROMPT: resourcing, professional development, student outcomes, other benefits, other costs</i>	2
PE 2	How will you continue the program without NPLN funding? <i>PROMPT: resourcing, teacher practices</i>	4

Thank principal for their time.



### Teacher Group Interview

Program:	Data Ref:
School:	Region:
Date:	Time:
Evaluation officer:	No of teachers:

### Introduction:

- Reiterate purpose of evaluation:
  - (a) Assess the effectiveness of the program - for reading [only]
  - (b) Assess the extent to which the program achieves its goals in an efficient manner
  - (c) Assess outcomes for Aboriginal students
  - (d) Assess the sustainability of the program for 2012 and beyond
- Reiterate that this discussion is to supplement the feedback from the online teacher survey



Discussion points		Link to ToR
TA	<b>Accelerated Literacy selection and purpose</b>	
TA1	What is your view of <i>Accelerated Literacy</i> in terms of its effectiveness as a literacy program? PROMPT: What evidence do you have?	1
TA2	Does the program achieve its stated goals? PROMPT: scaffolding, effective with ALL students, Aboriginal students What evidence do you have?	2
TB	<b>Accelerated Literacy implementation</b>	
TB1	From your experience with the program, what are the factors influencing the implementation of the program? PROMPT: Training, team leader support, appropriate text choice	1
TB2	How critical are these?	1
TB3	What are the critical factors necessary for the efficient implementation of the program? PROMPT: Strong school leadership, whole school engagement, community involvement, professional networking (e.g. yammer)	2
TC	<b>Accelerated Literacy impact/outcomes</b>	
TC1	What changes have you seen in your school overall as a result of the introduction of this program?	2
TC 2a	What difference has your involvement in the program made to the way you teach? PROMPT: Planning, monitoring progress, whole class engagement and inclusivity	2
TC2b	What evidence do you have for these changes? PROMPT: DASA, program planning, assessments, lesson study	2
TC 3a	To what extent has the program affected the reading skills of your students? Particular groups of students?	1, 2, 3
TC 3b	What data do you use to monitor this improvement? PROMPT: NAPLAN, NPLN, AL assessments (TORCH)	2
TC 4	What impact has the program had on educational outcomes for Aboriginal students in your class? PROMPT: engagement, attendance, confidence	3
TD	<b>Cost/sustainability</b>	
TD 1	Will you continue with the Accelerated Literacy methodology even if there is no support through NPLN funding? PROMPT: Are you able to do this on your own as a teacher or do you need collegial support? Budget for appropriate texts? Budget for professional development?	4
TE	<b>Additional comments</b>	
TE1	Is there anything else you would like to add?	

Thank participants for their giving their valuable time.



## National Partnership on Literacy and Numeracy Evaluation

Student Engagement and Program Evaluation Bureau

### Parent/Community Focus Group

Program:	Data Ref:
School:	Region:
Date:	Time:
Evaluation officer:	Parents:  Community:

### Introduction:

- Introduce evaluation team.
- Ensure they have coffee/tea etc if they want and feel comfortable in an informal setting for a discussion about literacy in the school.
- Ask how many have children at school, how many are members of community without students at the school (quick count).
- What do participants know about *Accelerated Literacy*. Brief description of the *Accelerated Literacy* intervention (very informal).

This should be a general discussion regarding reading and *Accelerated Literacy* and the impact upon the children of those present. Whilst there are specific questions that may need answering, the evaluation officers should guide the discussion around the main headings.



Discussion points		Link to ToR
CA	<b>Involvement in the school program</b>	
CA1	What is your understanding of how the school tries to improve literacy outcomes for students? PROMPT: Whole school literacy approach? <i>Accelerated Literacy</i> ? Individual Interventions?	2
CA2a	Have you been given any information about how you would be able to support your child/ students in this reading program? PROMPT: assisting reading at home, choice of books to use (relevant to their background and experience)	2
CA2b	By whom, or how was the information given? PROMPT: principal, teacher, school newsletter, school website	
CB	<b>Effectiveness of the <i>Accelerated Literacy</i> program</b>	
CB1	What do your children/students say about their school activities in reading / literacy / <i>Accelerated Literacy</i> ? PROMPT: Do you know the texts they are reading at school? Do they enjoy the lessons?	1, 3
CB2	Have you noticed any changes in your child's reading? Have there been any other changes? PROMPT: reading more at home, reading independently, more engaged in school, better attendance, better English/literacy results	1, 2, 3, 4
CB3	Would you like to see it continue to be used as a program in the school?	
CC	<b>Additional comments</b>	
CC1	Anything else you would like to comment on regarding the program or your child's reading?	

Thank participants for their giving their valuable time.



## National Partnership on Literacy and Numeracy Evaluation

Student Engagement and Program Evaluation Bureau

### Student Focus Group

4-6 students (some who were present during lesson observation)

Program:	Data Ref:
School:	Region:
Date:	Time:
Total students: Male: Female: Aboriginal:	Year levels:
Evaluation officer:	Permissions:

### Introduction:

- Thank students for being there.
- Introduce evaluation officers. Have students write their own names on place cards.
- Remind students why you are meeting with them (to talk about the literacy program they are doing).
- Remind students of an event from the observation class where you were impressed with their learning (e.g. "When you were able to....., that was very impressive. Can you tell me a little bit more about what was happening in the lesson we observed?")

This should be a general discussion regarding reading and *Accelerated Literacy* and the impact upon the students present. Whilst there are specific questions that may need answering, the evaluation officers should guide the discussion around the main headings. Allow the students to talk freely about school, literacy, and reading.



Discussion points		Link to ToR
SA	<b>Engagement</b>	
SA1	What is the first thing you think about when I say the word 'READING'?	1, 2, 3
SA 2a	What can you tell me about the text you are currently working on?	1
SA 2b	What about the book/story do you like?	
SA 2c	Tell me about some of the other texts you have read in school this year.	
SA 3a	Tell us what you think about your <i>Accelerated Literacy</i> lessons.	1
SA 3b	Are there things you like about your <i>Accelerated Literacy</i> lessons? <i>Prompt: ability to read, comprehend, understand author intent</i>	1
SA 3c	Are there things you don't like about your <i>Accelerated Literacy</i> lessons? PROMPT: spending too long on a text, transformations, spelling, working in groups, too easy "know the answers"	1
SB	<b>Skill development</b>	
SB1a	Do you think you've improved in reading? PROMPT: In what ways? How do you feel? What's different? Are you reading different things at home?	1, 3
SB1c	Have you done any reading assessments? Have you improved your reading according to these tests?	1, 3
SC	<b>Other benefits</b>	
SC1	Think about all the subjects you do at school. How do you think your <i>Accelerated Literacy</i> classes help you with these?	1, 3
SC2	Anything else you would like to say about your literacy lessons or reading?	

Thank participants for their time.

Note: May be positive for students if evaluators provide a small snack (check for allergies with teacher), or small item to reward students for engaging in focus group (check class/school reward system).



### National Partnership on Literacy and Numeracy Evaluation

Student Engagement and Program Evaluation Bureau

#### Lesson Observation\*

The purpose of the 30 mins classroom observation is:

- to provide confirmation of data collected through survey/interview responses regarding student engagement and teacher practice
- to provide a contextual relationship with the students in the class prior to student focus group session.

Program:		Data Ref:
School:		Region:
Date:		Time:
Evaluation officer:		Class:
Teacher:	Number of students:	Aboriginal students:
SLSO present <input type="checkbox"/> AEO present <input type="checkbox"/> Reading tutor/s present <input type="checkbox"/>	Numbers of students withdrawn and reasons for withdrawal:	
Lesson Activity:		

Ob	General observations and comments regarding:
Ob1	Program being implemented in lesson: _____ yes _____ no.
Ob2	Program effectiveness (e.g. student focus and engagement).
Ob3	Program embedded in class culture (e.g. evidence of student work/literacy promotion in class environment).

\*as agreed with teachers and principals







Evaluation of selected NSW programs for the National Partnership on Literacy and Numeracy

## INFORMATION SHEET for parents and carers

**Evaluation:** Evaluation of selected NSW programs for the National Partnership on Literacy and Numeracy:  
*Accelerated Literacy*

The evaluation is being conducted by the Student Engagement and Program Evaluation Bureau of the NSW Department of Education and Communities.

We are trying to find out about the effectiveness and efficiency of teaching and learning initiatives as part of the National Partnership program.

**Permission:** We are asking for your permission for your child to take part in this evaluation. Your child may take part in a group discussion regarding their experience of the program being delivered in their school. The discussion group will include 4 to 5 students and will take place at schools, during school time, for about 30 minutes. A teacher or staff member will be present during the discussion.

**Involvement:** Participation is voluntary and your child will only take part if both you and your child agree. No-one will be able to identify you or your child from the results of the study.

Participation will not affect your child's results or progress at school nor will a decision not to participate. If you or your child change your mind about taking part, please let the principal know and any information given by your child will be destroyed.

Please be aware that audio recordings may be made during the group discussions. All recordings will be stored by the Student Engagement and Program evaluation Bureau, until April 2012, and then they will be destroyed.

**Further information:** If you would like to know more at any stage, please feel free to contact:

<p><b>Bill Tomlin</b> Manager Planning and Evaluation ☎ 02 9244 5697 ✉ bill.tomlin@det.nsw.edu.au</p>	<p><b>Meg Dione</b> Senior Evaluation Officer Program Evaluation Unit ☎ 02 9244 5168 ✉ meg.dione@det.nsw.edu.au</p>	<p><b>Judith Henderson</b> Senior Evaluation Officer Program Evaluation Unit ☎ 02 92668038 ✉ judith.henderson1@det.nsw.edu.au</p>
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This information sheet is for you to keep. Your child has also been given information about this project.

CONSENT FORM

I (*print name*) .....give consent for my

child (*print name*) ..... to participate in the evaluation described below.

**TITLE: Accelerated Literacy Program Evaluation**

**EVALUATION OFFICER:**

Name: Meg Dione-Rodgers

Phone: 9244 5168

In giving my consent I acknowledge that:

- I understand the procedures for the evaluation and the time involved.
- I have read the INFORMATION SHEET for parents and carers. I have been given the opportunity to discuss the information and my child's participation in the evaluation with the principal or delegate.
- I have discussed participation in the evaluation with my child and my child agrees to participate.
- I understand that participation in this project is voluntary. The student is free to withdraw at any time.
- If the student does not participate, there will be no disadvantage of any kind.
- I understand that the student's participation is strictly confidential and that no information will identify my child.

I understand that audio recordings may be made as part of the evaluation.

Signed..... Date.....

# Appendix 2 - Online teacher survey responses

## Accelerated Literacy teacher survey results

Including comments on item responses

### Teaching Background

#### Q1 Teaching Qualifications

Bachelor Degree	63.0%
Diploma in Education	42.4%
Special Education (Degree or Diploma)	7.4%
Masters	6.1%
PhD	0.3%

*Key points:* Most respondents have a single qualification; either a bachelor degree or a diploma in education. Two-thirds of respondents have degree-level qualifications. Almost half have a Diploma in Education. A small proportion have special education or post-graduate qualifications. [Further analysis shows that one in ten have both a bachelor degree and a Diploma in Education].

#### Q2 Teaching Experience

Less than a year	2%
1 to less than 2 years	3%
2 to less than 3 years	3%
3 to less than 4 years	5%
4 to less than 5 years	5%
5 or more years	81%

*Key points:* Most respondents have at least 5 years teaching experience. Four-fifths of respondents have 5 or more years teaching experience. A very small proportion have less than three years experience.

#### Q3 Time teaching at the school

Less than a year	10%
1 to less than 2 years	9%
2 to less than 3 years	7%
3 to less than 4 years	8%
4 to less than 5 years	7%
5 or more years	59%

*Key points:* Many respondents have taught at least five years at the school. Many respondents have been at the school for five or more years. Around one in five have been at the school for less than two years.

### Involvement in the Accelerated Literacy program

#### Q4 Accelerated Literacy teaching experience

Less than a year	20%
1 to less than 2 years	45%
2 to less than 3 years	20%
3 to less than 4 years	8%
4 to less than 5 years	3%
5 or more years	3%

*Key points:* Most were in their second or third year of teaching Accelerated Literacy. Most have less than two years teaching Accelerated Literacy while very few have four or more years.

Q5 Have you participated in cultural immersion training?

Yes	16%
No	69%
Don't know	15%

Key points: Few have had cultural immersion training

Only about one in seven definitely have cultural immersion training while two-thirds have none.

Q6 Accelerated Literacy formal professional development program/s (tick one or more)

Accelerated Literacy Module Training	90%
School based AL professional development	65%
Accelerated Literacy Trainer workshops	19%
None of the above	2%

Key points: Almost all have had specific *Accelerated Literacy* training; some had several forms and some were trainers. Nine out of ten were trained in the *Accelerated Literacy* modules while two thirds have had school based PD and one in five had the trainer workshops. [Further analysis shows that almost half had two forms of PD and about one in six had three forms of PD].

## Understanding of the *Accelerated Literacy* program

Q8 I understand the principles of *Accelerated Literacy*

Extremely well	16%
Very well	55%
Somewhat	28%
Not at all	0%

Key Points: Generally the principles are well understood, with only about one quarter of respondents saying they understand less than very well.

Q9 I understand the purpose of every stage of the *Accelerated Literacy* teaching sequence

Extremely well	14%
Very well	51%
Somewhat	34%
Not at all	1%

Key points: Many respondents said that the purposes of the stages are well understood while one third said they are somewhat well understood. Very few said they have no understanding.

Q10 Students in my class have experienced the following aspect/s of the *Accelerated Literacy* teaching sequence (tick one or more)

Low order literate orientation	97%
High order literate orientation	91%
Transformation	92%
Spelling	82%
Writing	91%

Key points: Students mostly experienced all aspects of the *Accelerated Literacy* teaching sequence. For all aspects except spelling, more than nine out of ten respondents said students experienced that aspect. For spelling, more than eight out of ten respondents said students experienced that aspect.

## Q11 I can scaffold reading skills

Extremely well	19%
Very well	53%
Somewhat	27%
Not at all	1%

*Key points:* Most respondents said they can scaffold reading skills well.

## Q12 I have managed my students through the use of inclusive strategies

Never	2%
Sometimes	24%
Frequently	45%
Always	29%

*Key points:* Almost all respondents said they use inclusive strategies to some extent. Very few do not use inclusive strategies.

## Q13 National Accelerated Literacy Program (NALP) website

Yes	82%
No	18%

*Key points:* Four out of five respondents have accessed the NALP website.

## Implementation of the Accelerated Literacy program

Q14 When you implemented Accelerated Literacy in 2009, what year level/s did you teach at that time? (tick one or more)

Kindergarten	13%
Year 1	15%
Year 2	13%
Year 3	13%
Year 4	14%
Year 5	12%
Year 6	13%
Not applicable	43%

*Key points:* Accelerated Literacy was implemented in 2009 by about half of respondents, with similar frequency at all year levels.

Q15 When you implemented Accelerated Literacy in 2010, what year level/s did you teach? (tick one or more)

Kindergarten	18%
Year 1	17%
Year 2	19%
Year 3	18%
Year 4	18%
Year 5	24%
Year 6	21%
Not applicable	19%

*Key points:* Most respondents implemented Accelerated Literacy in 2010. It was implemented slightly more in Years 5 and 6 than in the other year levels.

Q16 When you implemented Accelerated Literacy in 2011, what year level/s did you teach? (tick one or more)

Kindergarten	16%
Year 1	21%
Year 2	21%
Year 3	23%
Year 4	23%
Year 5	26%
Year 6	20%
Not applicable	12%

*Key points:* Nine out of ten respondents implemented *Accelerated Literacy* in 2011. It was implemented slightly less in K and Years 1, 2 and 6 than it was in Years 3 to 5.

### Opinion of the support materials and the services provided

Q17 The Accelerated Literacy training modules are a useful reference

Strongly Agree	30%
Agree	65%
Disagree	5%
Strongly Disagree	0%

*Key points:* Almost all respondents said the *Accelerated Literacy* training modules are a useful reference

Q18 The assessment tools are easy to implement

Strongly Agree	12%
Agree	74%
Disagree	14%
Strongly Disagree	0%

*Key points:* Most respondents said the assessment tools are easy to implement

Q19 I use the texts from the recommended Accelerated Literacy book list

Always	25%
Frequently	48%
Sometimes	25%
Never	2%

*Key points:* About three in four respondents use the texts always or frequently while almost all other respondents use the texts sometimes. Very few never use the texts.

Q20 I use other literate texts not on the recommended Accelerated Literacy book list

Always	2%
Frequently	25%
Sometimes	55%
Never	18%

*Key points:* About four out of five respondents use other literate texts while one in five never use others. Very few always use other literate texts.

Q21 I use the suggested classroom resources (e.g. transformation boards)

Always	37%
Frequently	43%
Sometimes	15%
Never	4%

*Key points:* Almost all respondents use the suggested classroom resources to some extent. Very few never use them. More than a third always use the suggested classroom resources.

Q22 I plan units of work with other Accelerated Literacy teachers in the school

Always	28%
Frequently	30%
Sometimes	33%
Never	9%

*Key points:* Most respondents plan units of work with other Accelerated Literacy teachers at least sometimes, while one in ten never plan this way. More than half plan together frequently or always.

Q23 I am supported by the school Accelerated Literacy team leader/coordinator

Always	41%
Frequently	27%
Sometimes	20%
Never	7%
Not applicable (e.g.. You are the team leader/coordinator)	6%

*Key points:* Most respondents who are not team leaders said they are at least sometimes supported by the team leader, while almost half said they are always supported. A small proportion said they are never supported.

Q24 The approximate length of time I spend teaching Accelerated Literacy each day is

30 minutes or less	18%
31-45 minutes	20%
46-60 minutes	22%
61-90 minutes	30%
91 minutes or more	10%

*Key points:* Six out of ten respondents teach Accelerated Literacy for up to an hour each day. About one third teach between 61-90 minutes. One in ten teaches more than 90 minutes.

Q25 I maintain student assessment folders to monitor student performance in reading for

All my students	75%
Most of my students	4%
Some of my students	8%
None of my students	13%

*Key points:* Most respondents use student assessment folders, with three quarters using the folders for all students.

### Impact of the Accelerated Literacy program

Q26 Accelerated Literacy has improved general literacy outcomes for

All the students in my class	23%
Most of the students in my class	44%
Some of the students in my class	31%
None of the students in my class	2%

*Key points:* Two thirds of respondents said Accelerated Literacy has improved general literacy outcomes for most or all students. The remaining third said some have improved while very few respondents said no students improved.

Q27 Accelerated Literacy has improved general literacy outcomes for

All of the Aboriginal students in my class	30%
Most of the Aboriginal students in my class	23%
Some of the Aboriginal students in my class	27%
None of the Aboriginal students in my class	2%
Not applicable	19%

*Key points:* Two thirds of the respondents with Aboriginal students in their class said *Accelerated Literacy* has improved general literacy outcomes for most or all Aboriginal students. The other third of respondents with Aboriginal students in their class almost all said some Aboriginal students have improved. Very few said no Aboriginal students improved.

Q28 Accelerated Literacy reading strategies have improved reading and comprehension skills for

All the students in my class	21%
Most of the students in my class	46%
Some of the students in my class	30%
None of the students in my class	3%

*Key points:* About two thirds of respondents said *Accelerated Literacy* has improved reading and comprehension skills for most or all students. The remaining third said some have improved while very few respondents said no students improved.

Q29 Accelerated Literacy reading strategies have improved reading and comprehension skills for

All of the Aboriginal students in my class	26%
Most of the Aboriginal students in my class	27%
Some of the Aboriginal students in my class	26%
None of the Aboriginal students in my class	2%
Not applicable	18%

*Key points:* Two-thirds of the respondents with Aboriginal students in their class said *Accelerated Literacy* has improved reading and comprehension skills for most or all Aboriginal students. The other respondents with Aboriginal students in their class almost all said some Aboriginal students have improved. Very few said no Aboriginal students improved.

Q30 Accelerated Literacy has increased student engagement with reading for

All the students in my class	32%
Most of the students in my class	44%
Some of the students in my class	22%
None of the students in my class	2%

*Key points:* About three quarters of respondents said *Accelerated Literacy* has increased student engagement with reading for most or all students. The remaining quarter said some have improved while very few respondents said no students improved.

Q31 Accelerated Literacy has improved the way I teach literacy in my class

Strongly Agree	34%
Agree	56%
Disagree	8%
Strongly Disagree	2%

*Key points:* Nine out of ten respondents said that *Accelerated Literacy* has improved the way they teach literacy in their classes.



Q32 *Accelerated Literacy assessments provide evidence of where support is needed*

Strongly Agree	14%
Agree	70%
Disagree	14%
Strongly Disagree	1%

*Key points:* Most respondents said that *Accelerated Literacy* assessments provide evidence of where support is needed.

Q33 *The Accelerated Literacy assessment activities are valuable in identifying students' reading needs*

Strongly Agree	14%
Agree	66%
Disagree	19%
Strongly Disagree	1%

*Key points:* Most respondents said that *Accelerated Literacy* assessment activities are valuable in identifying students' reading needs.

Q34 *The Accelerated Literacy texts and activities chosen for my class are related specifically to student background and learning needs*

Strongly Agree	25%
Agree	63%
Disagree	11%
Strongly Disagree	1%

*Key points:* Most respondents said they chose texts and activities related specifically to student background and learning needs.

### Support services and resources provided by the *Accelerated Literacy* program

Q35 *The School Learning Support Officer plays an active role in my Accelerated Literacy lessons.*

Always	11%
Frequently	18%
Sometimes	29%
Never	17%
Not applicable (i.e., no school learning support officer in my lessons)	25%

*Key points:* One-quarter of the respondents had no SLSO in their *Accelerated Literacy* lessons. One-third of those respondents who had a SLSO said the SLSO always or frequently played an active role. Two-thirds said the SLSO played an active role only sometimes, or never.

Q36 *The Aboriginal Education Officer plays an important role in my Accelerated Literacy lessons*

Always	1%
Frequently	2%
Sometimes	18%
Never	39%
Not applicable (i.e., no AEO in school)	41%

*Key points:* Many respondents did not have an AEO in their school. Of those who did, almost all said the AEO never or only sometimes played an important role in *Accelerated Literacy* lessons.

Q37 Reading tutors/community volunteers play an important role in my Accelerated Literacy lessons

Always	1%
Frequently	7%
Sometimes	19%
Never	34%
Not applicable (i.e. no tutors/community volunteers)	38%

*Key points:* Many respondents did not have Reading tutors/community volunteers in their school. Of those who did, most said the Reading tutors/community volunteers never or only sometimes played an important role in *Accelerated Literacy* lessons.

Q38 Accelerated Literacy has decreased the need for individualised intervention

Strongly Agree	2%
Agree	34%
Disagree	55%
Strongly Disagree	9%

*Key points:* About one third of respondents said *Accelerated Literacy* has decreased the need for individualised intervention.

Q39 Accelerated Literacy team members in my school have the experience, skills and knowledge to support me in planning lessons and units of work

Strongly Agree	38%
Agree	57%
Disagree	5%
Strongly Disagree	0%

*Key points:* Almost all respondents said *Accelerated Literacy* team members support them in planning lessons.

Q40 Accelerated Literacy team members in my school are given release time to plan lessons and units of work together

Strongly Agree	22%
Agree	54%
Disagree	19%
Strongly Disagree	5%

*Key points:* Three quarters of respondents said *Accelerated Literacy* team members are given release time to plan together.

## The participation of the school in literacy programs

Q41 The school principal promotes literacy across the school

Strongly Agree	65%
Agree	33%
Disagree	1%
Strongly Disagree	0%

*Key points:* Almost all respondents said the school principal promotes literacy across the school.

Q42 School staff are encouraged to develop literacy knowledge and skills

Strongly Agree	67%
Agree	32%
Disagree	1%
Strongly Disagree	0%

*Key points:* Almost all respondents said school staff are encouraged to develop literacy knowledge and skills.

Q43 The school executive shows an active interest in student literacy outcomes

Strongly Agree	65%
Agree	32%
Disagree	3%
Strongly Disagree	0%

*Key points:* Almost all respondents said the school executive shows an active interest in student literacy outcomes.

Q44 School leaders ensure human resources are available

Strongly Agree	40%
Agree	54%
Disagree	6%
Strongly Disagree	0%

*Key points:* Almost all respondents said school leaders ensure human resources are available.

Q45 School leaders ensure material resources are available

Strongly Agree	51%
Agree	44%
Disagree	4%
Strongly Disagree	1%

*Key points:* Almost all respondents said school leaders ensure material resources are available.

Q46 A culture of continuous improvement in literacy outcomes is promoted in the school

Strongly Agree	60%
Agree	38%
Disagree	2%
Strongly Disagree	0%

*Key points:* Almost all respondents said a culture of continuous improvement in literacy outcomes is promoted in the school.

Q47 Accelerated Literacy has encouraged parent/caregiver engagement in literacy

Strongly Agree	8%
Agree	37%
Disagree	51%
Strongly Disagree	4%

*Key points:* Respondents were evenly divided about whether *Accelerated Literacy* has encouraged parent/caregiver engagement in literacy.

Q48 I would recommend the Accelerated Literacy Program to a colleague

Strongly Agree	35%
Agree	52%
Disagree	10%
Strongly Disagree	3%

Key points: Seven out of eight respondents would recommend the *Accelerated Literacy* Program to a colleague.

Q49 I have accessed regional support to implement Accelerated Literacy in my class

Always	6%
Frequently	13%
Sometimes	37%
Never	44%

Key points: Most respondents said they sometimes or never accessed regional support to implement *Accelerated Literacy*.

Q50 My involvement in Accelerated Literacy has led me to conclude that the program overall is

Extremely effective	25%
Very effective	41%
Somewhat effective	32%
Not effective	3%

Key points: Two thirds of respondents said the program overall is effective or extremely effective. Almost all of the remainder said it is somewhat effective. Very few said it is not effective.

Q51 Comment on the strengths and weaknesses of Accelerated Literacy in relation to improving students' reading skills.

No of open responses: 294

Q52 Comment on the extent to which Accelerated Literacy is sustainable in your school.

No of open responses: 294

**Note:** Free text answers have been included in the analysis of the evaluation interviews and focus groups.

# Appendix 3 - Online survey response statistics

## NPLN: ACCELERATED LITERACY SURVEY RESPONSE STATISTICS

There are 28 public schools in NSW implementing the *Accelerated Literacy* program through National Partnership on Literacy and Numeracy funding. Of these, 26 completed the survey as well as three other schools. The schools' background data and the survey response data are shown in the table below:

Region	NPLN Accelerated Literacy Schools	Number of survey respondents	% of total survey respondents (298)	Teachers in school	Total student enrolment	Aboriginal student enrolment	% Aboriginal students
Hunter Central Coast	Glendale East Public School	9	3.0%	12	166	18	11%
Hunter Central Coast	Gorokan Public School	25	8.4%	35	458	85	19%
Hunter Central Coast	Gwandalan Public School	19	6.4%	30	371	26	7%
Hunter Central Coast	Mayfield East Public School	11	3.7%	14	182	26	14%
Hunter Central Coast	Wyong Public School	9	3.0%	20	327	47	14%
Illawarra South East	Batemans Bay Public School	20	6.7%	27	428	54	13%
New England	Boggabri Public School	0		10	81	16	20%
New England	Curlewis Public School	1	0.3%	3	31	13	42%
New England	Hillvue Public School	7	2.3%	28	317	209	66%
New England	Inverell Public School	0		23	313	57	18%
New England	Newling Public School	3	1.0%	10	95	51	54%
North Coast	Coraki Public School	1	0.3%	10	74	45	61%
North Coast	Forster Public School	20	6.7%	32	662	87	13%
North Coast	Tweed Heads South Public School	2	0.7%	10	148	68	46%
Riverina	Hay Public School	8	2.7%	16	251	22	9%
Riverina	Mount Austin Public School	8	2.7%	26	199	61	31%
Riverina	Tumbarumba Public School	6	2.0%	11	175	4	2%
South Western Sydney	Blairmount Public School	13	4.4%	31	472	21	4%
South Western Sydney	Campbelltown North Public School	14	4.7%	22	341	30	9%
South Western Sydney	Riverwood Public School	5	1.7%	11	83	6	7%
South Western Sydney	Rosemeadow Public School	22	7.4%	41	477	37	8%
South Western Sydney	Sackville Street Public School	18	6.0%	37	566	29	5%
Western Sydney	Cambridge Park Public School	15	5.0%	32	419	62	15%
Western Sydney	Kingswood Park Public School	1	0.3%	15	109	33	30%
Western Sydney	Lynwood Park Public School	12	4.0%	16	311	5	2%
Western Sydney	Marayong Public School	18	6.0%	39	454	35	8%
Western Sydney	Riverstone Public School	13	4.4%	33	248	41	17%
Western Sydney	Seven Hills West Public School	14	4.7%	24	306	6	2%
Schools that responded to the survey, not listed as <i>Accelerated Literacy</i> schools:							
Hunter Central Coast	Weston Public School	1	0.3%				
Western	Condobolin Public School	2	0.7%				
Western	Trangie Central School	1	0.3%				





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