



Report of the Program
Evaluation of

Reading to Learn

March 2012



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Executive summary

Program Evaluation: *Reading to Learn*

The NSW Department of Education and Communities¹ commissioned the Student Engagement and Program Evaluation Bureau (SEPEB) to conduct a program evaluation of *Reading to Learn*, a whole-class program designed to improve literacy for primary school students. *Reading to Learn* is one of several programs offered to schools for implementation under the National Partnership on Literacy and Numeracy (NPLN).

The Terms of Reference of the program evaluation for *Reading to Learn* 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.

Reading to Learn

The *Reading to Learn* program is designed to enable students from all backgrounds to read texts in all areas of their school curriculum, with full comprehension. *Reading to Learn* promotes a cross-curricula and cross-year approach to learning to read and write, through engaging with fiction and non-fiction texts.

Scaffolding support is an important component of *Reading to Learn*. The concept of scaffolding in teaching literacy in Australia has been promoted by Brian Gray and Wendy Cowey (Rose, Gray, & Cowey, 1999). David Rose was a development partner in that early work, and the approach of both *Reading to Learn* and Accelerated Literacy grew out of the shared work. The programs are now conceptually distinct.

Evaluation Methodology

The evaluation methodology comprised the following components:

- knowledge review - a review of program documentation relating to *Reading to Learn*
- stakeholder interviews with program developers and program funding directorates, including Aboriginal Education and Training Directorate (AETD)
- online survey of teachers in all 18 schools that implemented *Reading to Learn* as their whole-class intervention
- visits to seven of the 18 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 National Partnership on Literacy and Numeracy (NPLN) assessment data.

¹ 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

Reading to Learn is presented as a comprehensive literacy program to be implemented on a whole-class basis. It is underpinned by an intensive professional learning program. It appears that some of the most beneficial aspects of *Reading to Learn* have arisen from the shared experience of participating in the training, and the renewed focus on literacy learning in each school. How this has flowed on to students has been of varied benefit.

Implementation of *Reading to Learn*

Principals highlighted the importance of being able to choose the program to be implemented within the school. In several instances the decision was made at regional level, causing a significant degree of resistance to the intervention in several schools. This, combined with dissatisfaction with the initial training, resulted in division amongst school staff, and a reduction in the cohesive implementation at a whole-school level.

For the remainder of schools, strong leadership, ongoing support for teachers and working with parents and the community contributed to successful implementation.

Outcomes for students

Comparison of the performance shown in external assessment data and the perceptions of many school stakeholders regarding the effectiveness of the *Reading to Learn* program, reveals a significant mismatch. Disappointing early NAPLAN results contrast with the positive impressions of a large number of respondents regarding the benefits of elements of the program for many students.

Reading to Learn was not the sole literacy intervention implemented in each school. It is acknowledged that it is difficult to attribute student performance solely to the *Reading to Learn* program.

Most respondents indicated that *Reading to Learn* has increased student engagement with reading, improved reading and comprehension skills, and improved student writing. It was reported widely that *Reading to Learn* had:

- improved students' confidence in reading
- increased student capacity to use a variety of strategies to develop comprehension
- enabled student transfer of literacy skills and strategies into other key learning areas
- extended the diversity of texts that students were engaged in reading, both in and out of school.

Some teachers with students with special needs in their classes reported that the program delivered lesser gains for these students. Other teachers with special needs students said that the capacity of *Reading to Learn* to support students in confidently attempting tasks was instrumental in improving their reading, particularly for the higher ability students in this group.

The repetitive nature of the program had a negative outcome for some of the more capable students, who reported that they became bored once they had mastered the new concepts and meaning of the words of a particular text. This view was supported by responses of some teachers and parents.

Outcomes for Aboriginal students

Almost half of the respondents who had Aboriginal students in their classes reported that *Reading to Learn* had improved reading and comprehension skills for most or all Aboriginal students in their class. Almost all of the other respondents with Aboriginal students in their class said that some Aboriginal students had improved. Very few said that no Aboriginal students had improved.

NAPLAN data may support a proposition that for the Aboriginal students only, reading improved slightly more in *Reading to Learn* schools, compared to the whole-state improvement.

Teacher perspectives

Many teachers reported that their literacy teaching practices had improved. They described having built confidence and expertise in purposeful choice of texts and teaching strategies, and in the development of well-structured literacy lessons. This was most beneficial to beginning teachers.

The most positive and significant aspects of the program for teacher practice included:

- more purposeful selection of teaching texts with richer content, which better supported teaching literacy across the curriculum
- explicit incorporation of detailed reading strategies to develop comprehension skills
- improved understanding of text types and scaffolding for writing
- increased participation in collegial discussion and joint preparation of literacy activities, in stages.

Teachers felt that *Reading to Learn* was time-intensive in lesson preparation and delivery. In many instances it was necessary to modify the structure and elements of the program to work within the boundaries of available time and resources, student need and ability level, and the stage or class curriculum focus.

The majority of teachers were trained in workshops delivered by the program developer or regional trainers. Half of the respondents also participated in school-based professional development. A small number of teachers undertook further training to become trainers in *Reading to Learn* themselves. In a minority of cases, negative perceptions of the program resulted from teachers' experiences with the training model and school implementation.

Impacts on whole-school practices

Staff reported widely that the principal value of the implementation of *Reading to Learn* was the commonality of language that led to collegial discussion and greater collaborative effort around literacy teaching. One principal's view is representative of the comments of many school staff:

“I think it has been beneficial for all our staff as a school; all the things we have been able to do and work together and the new opportunities that it has presented.”

Increased emphasis on, and teacher attention to literacy learning were universally noted.

School culture was perceived to have improved in many instances. In a number of schools, teachers spoke positively about staff accepting new leadership responsibility for literacy improvement. Practices such as whole-school planning, team development and learning-focused dialogue were becoming embedded in school operation.

Factors influencing success

Three factors particularly influenced the success of the program:

- leadership of literacy improvement
- funding for the program
- whole-school implementation.

The most successful schools were those in which the principal and executive teachers actively drove program implementation, and supported staff to share responsibility for successful implementation and improvement in literacy learning. Aligned to this was school literacy planning which defined the goals and actions to enhance literacy teaching practices.

NPLN funding allowed teaching staff to attend program training. In many schools the program also allowed for the purchase of multiple sets of books, in sufficient numbers for every student to have their own copy. Importantly, it also enabled employment of a dedicated school *Reading to Learn* coordinator position, and provided time for collaborative planning and programming by staff.

Whole-school engagement with the program was identified as a critical factor influencing success. Where this occurred, the training of most teachers and implementation in most classrooms brought the benefits of shared understanding of the philosophy, language and strategies of the program, as well as providing continuity for students.

Challenges experienced in implementing *Reading to Learn*

In several schools the program was implemented across the school from K-6. In a few schools, teachers chose not to participate or continue with the program. Small schools reported several difficulties in using the program in composite classes, such as: the need to address a broad range of student needs arising from age and relative ability; the need to plan continuously over a two or three year cycle; and the demands of doing extra preparation.

While training was seen as essential to the implementation of *Reading to Learn*, many teachers expressed the view that the initial training model and delivery could be improved by addressing issues that arose around flexibility in delivery, giving greater emphasis to practical application or in specific components of the program, such as catering for diversity of student needs.

In some schools, the lack of ongoing professional support was seen as a barrier to effective implementation. Opportunities for more sharing of programming and lesson planning between teachers and between schools, were also suggested, particularly as a method of reducing the workload of individual teachers in lesson and resource preparation.

Sustainability

Generally schools supported the continuation of many positive elements of *Reading to Learn* but did not see that it would be the exclusive method of literacy teaching. Many teachers said that they would use parts of the program but would supplement it with other literacy strategies.

The factors identified as being critical to the sustainability of *Reading to Learn* in schools beyond the funding period, include:

- ongoing commitment and support from the school principal and leadership team
- support for ongoing collaboration, planning, unit development and lesson study
- ensuring a strategy for ongoing professional learning and training of new teachers, including indication of ongoing support for the program from DEC regions, where applicable
- continued allocation of resources to purchase materials, including class sets of texts, stationery and other consumables.

Part 1 Introduction

This evaluation report is presented in two parts:

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

1 Evaluating *Reading to Learn*

Reading to Learn 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 is operating 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:

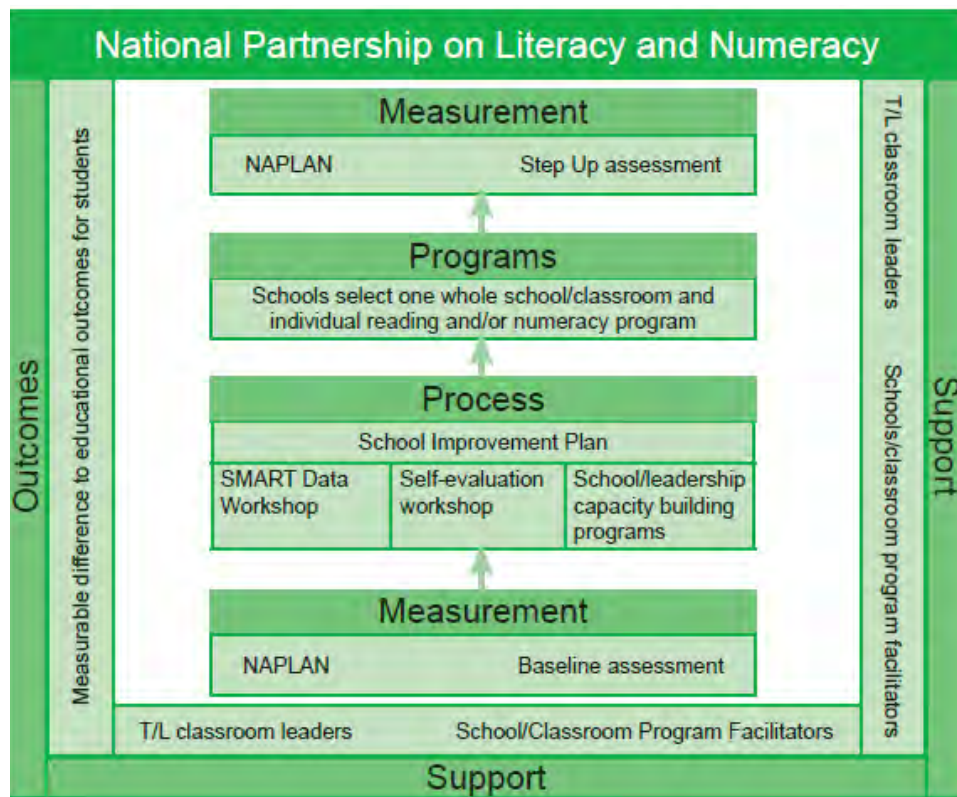
- the 2008 National Assessment Program - Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) data: schools where the percentage of all students in Years 3 and 5 achieving at or below minimum standard is above the state percentage in reading and numeracy
- the school's suitability and readiness to participate in the NPLN, 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, team teaching and the like
- work with school/classroom program facilitators and/or teaching and learning leaders
- purchase equipment or resources essential to the implementation of the professional learning program, or
- employ teacher aides where 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 Reading to Learn

Reading to Learn 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 .

Fifteen public schools and three Catholic primary schools implemented the *Reading to Learn* program through participation in the NPLN. Of these, seven schools participated in the qualitative field visit component of the evaluation.

A description of the *Reading to Learn* 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 eight 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 are 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 *Reading to Learn* 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.

Given the short timeframe 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.

Reading to Learn strongly maintains that literacy skills in reading and writing are developed in unison, forming complementary aspects of the scaffolded learning sequences that characterise the program approach (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 *Reading to Learn* 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 *Reading to Learn* 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 *Reading to Learn*; an interview with the program developer, Dr David Rose; and visits to seven of the 18 schools implementing the program.

Background document review

Prior to the commencement of the evaluation, SEPEB 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 Dr David Rose

Evaluation team members met with Dr David Rose at the commencement of the evaluation. Dr Rose provided insights into the philosophy underpinning the development of both the *Reading to Learn* program and the professional learning model. He also provided recommendations on the types of questions to direct to teachers and students.

School visits

The evaluation team used 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 number 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 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 National Partnership for Low SES Schools, 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 parent group representatives (where available)
- document review including the school plan, the school literacy plan, the annual school report, and school program registers and schedules.

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 knowledge review. Original categories were 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 *Reading to Learn*, this coded data amounted to 2,160 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 includes 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 18 schools, to capture teachers' experiences and views on the effectiveness of *Reading to Learn*.

The online survey was completed by a total of 115 staff, including some principals and school executive from 16 of the 18 schools implementing *Reading to Learn*. Full results of the online survey are attached at 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 whole-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 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 1.1. Individual students cannot be identified and a significant turnover of students in some schools makes comparisons between students uncertain.

Table 1.1: 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 program and by various cohort groups of students, as shown in Table 1.2.

Data for English as a second language (ESL) students 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 on student performance, of being in a program school.

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 a NPLN program group, as will be evident in the following tables and text. The sample is in most cases 'all NPLN program schools' but it may be a cohort only, such as the boys or the Aboriginal students only.

Table 1.2: Aggregate data sets

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

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 periods 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
- 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) 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 *Reading to Learn* 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 maintained even after *Reading to Learn* 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 *Reading to Learn* 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 *Reading to Learn*

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 Reading to Learn program details

This section provides an overview of the *Reading to Learn* program and has been drawn from the *Reading to Learn* professional learning materials (Rose, 2010), the program website (*Reading to Learn*, nd) and the interview with Dr David Rose undertaken by the program evaluators (Dione-Rodgers, 2011).

2.1 Aim

The aim of *Reading to Learn* is to support every student in a class to read and write challenging texts at their year level.

Taking a whole-class approach, and drawing on reading theory, functional linguistics and genre approaches to writing, the program claims to “enable the weakest students in a class to read and write successfully, at the same time as challenging more advanced students” (Rose, 2010).

2.2 Background

Reading to Learn is based on the ‘Scaffolding Literacy’ approaches initially developed by Dr Brian Gray, Dr David Rose and Wendy Cowey with Indigenous students in Central and South Australia, and with underachieving school students attending the Schools and Community Centre at the University of Canberra. The approach of both *Reading to Learn* and Accelerated Literacy grew out of this shared work. Since 2001, Dr Rose has further developed and refined the *Reading to Learn* program (Rose, 2010; Rose & Acevedo, 2006). The programs are now conceptually distinct.

Dr Rose argues that lack of student engagement is a frequent barrier to developing strong literacy skills. A key goal of *Reading to Learn* is to change the classroom culture so that all students are continually engaged in the pleasure of reading and in successful completion of tasks at each step of the teaching process.

The program has been developed over a ten year period, working with teachers of primary, secondary and tertiary students, to integrate reading and writing within the full range of curriculum areas, at all year levels.

Reading to Learn is described as a system of literacy teaching strategies that enables learners with weak literacy skills to rapidly learn to read and write at levels appropriate to their age and the area of study.

The strategies use principles of scaffolded learning, in which teachers support students to practise at higher literacy levels than they can on their own. They enable students to read high-level texts with accuracy and comprehension, and to use what they learn from reading, in their writing. Over time this supported practice enables learners to work independently at the same high level.

2.3 Features of Reading to Learn

Reading to Learn is built on a three part ‘scaffolded learning cycle’ that prepares and supports students to successfully complete tasks and then move to the next step or higher level of understanding, known as the elaboration, as shown in Figure 2.1.

The scaffolding cycle is applied to each of three levels or scales of learning:

- whole curriculum units
- activities within each lesson
- teacher /student interactions in the classroom.



Figure 2.1: Scaffolded Learning Cycle

Learning the 'patterns of language' required for fluent reading and successful writing is managed through integrated learning sequences that progress from the level of the whole text, to the sentence and to individual words, taking into account the context of the selected text. This model of 'text-in-context' is the basis for the program's design of language teaching strategies.

In primary school settings *Reading to Learn* includes three levels of learning support that can be utilised at various points in any teaching program:

- *Preparing before reading and modelling writing*: exploring background knowledge to help understand the text; step-by-step summary of the text; reading and discussion of selected parts of the text
- *Detailed reading and rewriting*: detailed exploration of language patterns in selected passages, to deepen students' understanding of written texts; used daily in literacy lessons
- *Sentence making, spelling and sentence writing intensive strategies*: students manipulate language patterns in selected sentences to practise spelling, letter-sound correspondences and fluent writing; used each day in early years to upper primary classes, and for additional support where required.

The strategies can be applied in dedicated lessons, in tutorial support, or integrated into usual teaching practices in any curriculum area.

The program recommends working with parents, including offering one-on-one tuition with parents, to encourage regular reading to their children at home. Equipment including small whiteboards are provided. By strengthening relationships with home it is suggested that literacy improvement opportunities can be extended beyond the classroom.

Assessment strategies focus on:

- three levels of reading comprehension: literal; inferred and interpretive
- use of 'running records' for miscue analysis
- *Reading to Learn* writing assessment.

Explicit teaching of comprehension strategies occurs throughout the learning sequences, enabling students to learn where meaning is located within and beyond the structures of the text. As writing skills develop from skills in reading, the writing assessment is also used to provide a picture of students' progress in reading.

In summary, *Reading to Learn* emphasises building understanding of a text before starting to read it, followed by carefully planned teacher/learner interactions to provide maximum support for students to develop and apply specific literacy skills.

2.4 Training requirements

It is suggested that planning and implementing the *Reading to Learn* strategies represents a new and complex process of teaching. Teachers are required to develop high level skills in text analysis and detailed planning of classroom interactions, to ensure that all students are able to participate actively at the same high level.

2.4.1 Professional learning program

The professional learning program offered by *Reading to Learn* comprises:

- eight days of training workshops, delivered in four two-day blocks
- classroom practice and evaluation between workshops
- a set of ten course books
- a training DVD of demonstration lessons with early years, primary and secondary classes.

In each cycle of workshops and classroom practice, teachers build their skills in teaching reading and writing, and their knowledge about language.

Workshop content includes:

- development of linguistic knowledge to select appropriate texts, and to analyse language patterns
- planning lessons within teachers' curriculum programs
- processes for assessing reading accuracy and comprehension.

The course books are designed to give teachers the knowledge and skills to confidently deliver the *Reading to Learn* strategies. The DVDs show demonstration lessons and are designed to be used together with the course books.

The *Reading to Learn* website provides overview information, sample pages from the course booklets and references to support articles, books and reports. Additional lesson plans and other resources are not yet available.

2.4.2 Costs

The costs of the professional learning program were presented as follows:

- approximately \$100 per teacher, per workshop day (average)
- \$120 per teacher for the resource pack of training books and demonstration DVDs.

It was proposed that regional consultants/facilitators and experienced teachers would progressively take over more of the training, so ongoing costs to schools would be reduced.

Additional course books and DVDs can be ordered directly from the website.

Schools are advised to obtain sets of individual whiteboards and activity resources including cardboard strips and highlighters for class activities.

2.5 Program support

Prior to the National Partnership on Literacy and Numeracy (NPLN) *Reading to Learn* had been implemented extensively in the Department's Western NSW Region, where training is available and formal support is provided to schools implementing the program.

For schools in other areas of the state, NPLN Program Facilitators may have provided training and limited support for school implementation.

2.6 Previous evaluations

The following evaluations were used to inform the decision to include *Reading to Learn* as one of the NPLN programs.

McRae et al. (2000) in their evaluation of programs targeting Indigenous students reported that the literacy improvement rate for many Aboriginal students was equivalent to almost four years' growth in one year.

The evaluation undertaken for the Catholic Education Office, Melbourne (Culican, 2006) reported similar results: average literacy gains across all schools and classes, and among students from all backgrounds and ability ranges was double the expected rate; and 20% of students made gains of four times the expected rate of literacy development.

A small evaluation was undertaken for the Association of Independent Schools of Victoria (2009) looking at the application of *Reading to Learn* in the middle years, with similar positive results.

A study of the *Reading to Learn* professional learning program and effects in the classroom was conducted for the Office of the Board of Studies, NSW (2007). Findings included:

- general improvement in all students, as witnessed by teachers, irrespective of initial reading ability and literary experience
- improved student engagement in schooling
- elevated attendance, rising from 50% to 86% of students attending on a regular basis.

In summary, it is claimed that students with the greatest learning needs can be accelerated at three to four times expected learning rates and the reading rates of all students can be doubled.

In 2008, the *Reading to Learn* program was in use in approximately 90 NSW schools, predominantly located in Western NSW.

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, and in response to issues that emerged through the data collection.

3 Implementation of *Reading to Learn*

Section 2 provided an overview of the *Reading to Learn* 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 18 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 *Reading to Learn* in practice.

Key findings:

- Strong leadership, ongoing support for teachers and working with parents and the community contributed to successful implementation.
- In several instances the choice of literacy intervention was made at regional level, causing a degree of resistance within schools.
- Inconsistencies in and varied quality of the initial training had a significant impact on the success of implementation of the program.
- In-school professional learning was effective in providing in-time, targeted support for teachers.

3.1 NPLN program selection

Following a school-based evaluation conducted with external support, schools were able to select from a range of program options, targeting reading or numeracy in Stages 2 and 3. Each school was required to implement a whole-class program and one aimed at providing individual intervention for students requiring additional support.

A number of factors were mentioned as having influenced schools in their choice of *Reading to Learn* as the whole-class program, including: prior knowledge of the program; diocesan or regional direction; availability of support; and local issues based on teacher quality or student needs.

Some schools chose the program for its focus on particular areas, such as literary and factual texts, text comprehension, its perceived potential *"to develop the quality teaching skills"* of staff, and because it appeared accessible. Many of these judgements appear to be based on teachers' previous positive experience with the program or the school having several members of staff already trained.

Principals in four of the seven schools visited indicated that they did not have a choice about which program they would use; this decision having been made at regional or Catholic Education Office diocesan level. It is understood that this was in response to the short time-frame for selection, or in order to maximise local support. Staff and principals in two schools saw this as a top down 'mandate' to their schools, which had negative effects for staff commitment to the program, at least in the early stages of implementation. One principal noted:

"As a result [this] got a lot of staff offside who then felt very negatively towards the program... resources really mean nothing unless you've got the people on the ground who are really believing in the philosophy themselves."

For a small number of teachers, their strength of feeling on this issue resulted in them choosing not to participate in training or the implementation of the program with their classes.

3.2 Professional learning

Reading to Learn requires detailed teacher knowledge of appropriate pedagogy and language, which is built up in steps by teachers through a combination of professional learning (PL) workshops and classroom practice. Under the NPLN, the professional learning program was reduced to six days (three two-day workshops), delivered over a period of six to twelve months.

Initial training was offered to participating schools in two steps. In Terms 3 and 4 2009, the training program was delivered in three two-day workshops, each followed by supported practice in implementation. Schools were encouraged to involve teachers of Years 2, 3 and 4, together with all support teachers and executive staff. DEC regional consultants or facilitators, who support teachers in their practice development, also took part.

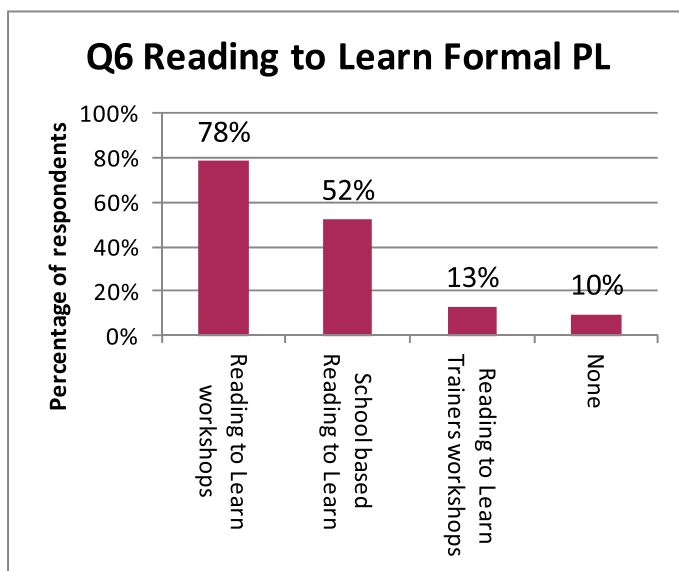
In Terms 1 and 2, 2010, there was a second program of six days of workshops. This round targeted teachers of Years 3, 4 and 5, together with other staff who had not yet been trained. Teachers and regional consultants and facilitators who had participated in the 2009 training were able to mentor those who were new to *Reading to Learn*.

Several schools reported completing training following the *Reading to Learn* program model of four two-day workshops, as presented by program developer, Dr David Rose.

3.2.1 Participation in professional learning (PL)

Almost all survey respondents indicated they had undertaken formal training in *Reading to Learn*, with over half having also participated in school-based *Reading to Learn* professional learning, as indicated in Figure 3.1. About one in eight had also attended trainer workshops.

Figure 3.1: Formal professional learning programs



Formal training experiences varied greatly between sectors and schools. Many schools had a large proportion of their permanent teachers undertake the six to eight days' training, in three or four two-day sessions. In a few cases principals explained that the NPLN funding enabled them to include casual or part-time staff members in these initial training sessions. Teacher interviews revealed a greater number of cases where this did not occur, with frequent comments made in both surveys and interviews, such as:

“Part-time and casual teachers were not included which meant that, in reality, not all teachers were necessarily trained.”

“As I am only part-time this training has not applied to me although my team teacher is training and has been using it when possible with our class.”

There was some debate about this, especially given the limited resources and the expense of the training. One teacher expressed the dilemma:

“...casuals and also temporary staff, they’re coming and going so the value of training a temporary person who may only be here for a year and then moving on, how do you equate that? Not that I wouldn’t do it, but...”

The initial training model

The training model was well-appreciated by the majority of participants. Between training sessions, teachers were encouraged to try strategies in their classes. The value of this model was generally acknowledged by teachers, with many comments made such as:

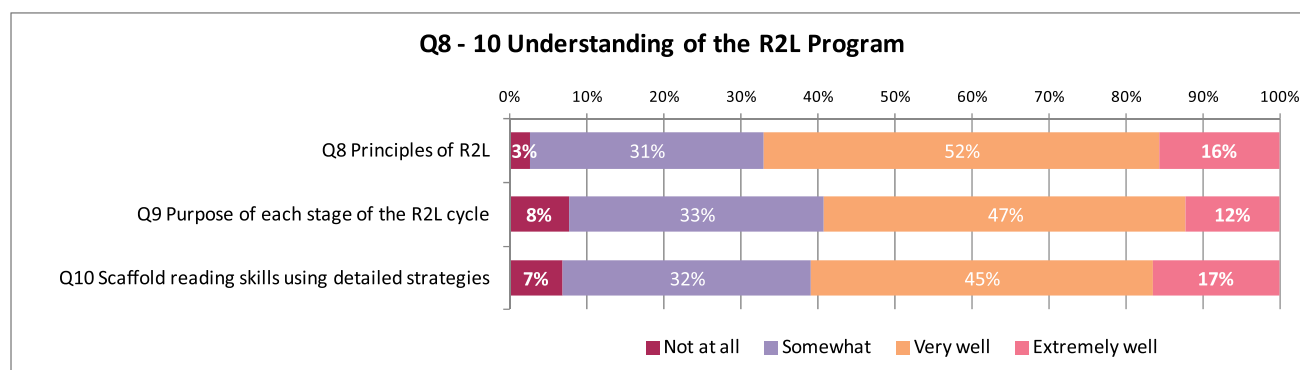
“We had some opportunities to experiment with the program in the classroom and develop a better understanding of how to implement it.”

Other respondents contrasted this approach positively with previous experiences, where they had attended workshops and not followed up on the ideas presented. Another teacher suggested “you’d be lost without it”.

In contrast, a number of teachers felt that the training was very intense and rather overwhelming. This was somewhat mitigated in schools where some staff had been previously trained. They felt they could assist by talking through issues with their colleagues between sessions.

Despite the variation in responses to the training models and provision, which is further explored in the next section, most teachers responded positively to questions regarding their level of understanding of the program. As shown in Figure 3.2, most teachers reported that the principles of the program and purposes of each stage of the teaching cycle, are extremely well or very well understood.

Figure 3.2: Understanding of Reading to Learn program elements

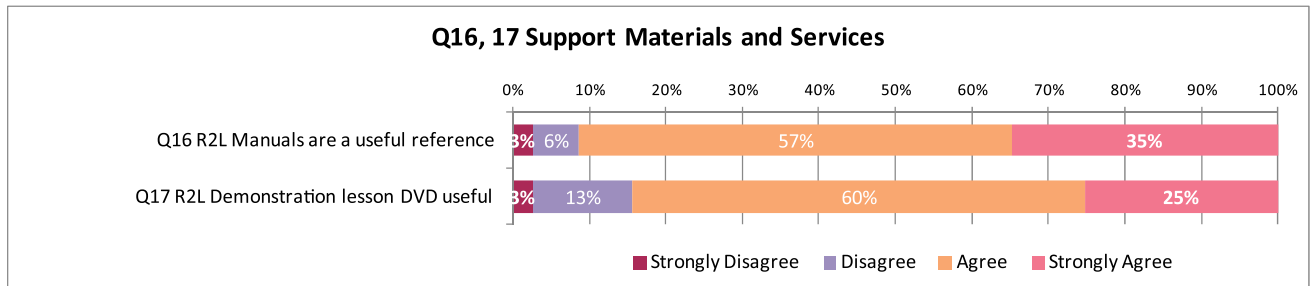


Between 30% and 40% of respondents reported that these fundamental elements of the program were only somewhat understood, or not understood at all.

Support materials

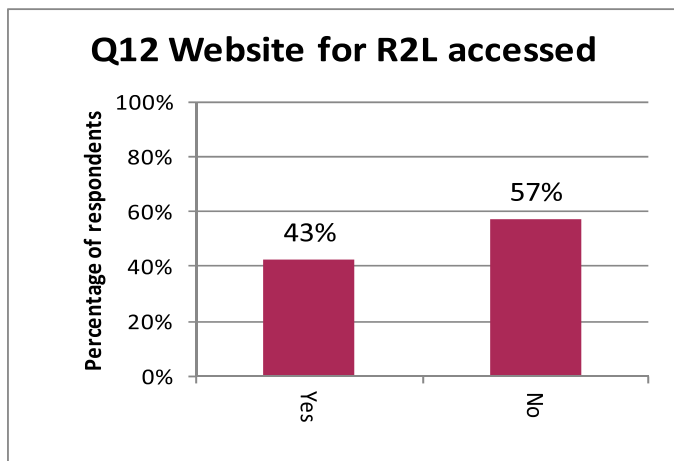
The accompanying professional learning resources were very well-received; being regarded as practical references for classroom application, as per Figure 3.3.

Figure 3.3: Support materials and services



Less than half of survey respondents, however, have accessed the *Reading to Learn* website, as shown in Figure 3.4. To date the site offers very few resources in addition to general information and samples of the training modules, which may explain its lack of appeal.

Figure 3.4: Teachers accessing the *Reading to Learn* website



3.2.2 Trainers

Reading to Learn professional learning workshops were presented by the program developer or by DEC regional consultants. In the interviews, teachers provided extensive feedback about these sessions. Many teachers thought the training was “brilliant” or “career changing”, as demonstrated by one teacher’s strong praise:

“Teachers... carry with them that professional development - it’s going to be with them for the rest of their career.”

However, a larger number of more critical comments highlighted deficits, such as too much repetition, sometimes of whole workshop topics; content gaps where major topics were omitted (e.g. maths, assessment); or poor presentation style and general organisation. It was noted that application of the program to the early years was not as well covered as for later years. For a significant number of participants, their expectations of the content to be covered, were not met.

The sessions delivered by the program developer attracted many negative comments, in terms of presentation style, slow pace, lack of practical application, few opportunities for questions or interaction and lack of follow-up between sessions.

One principal commented:

“...as educators I always believe that my staff have the right to question the educational validity of whatever they’re teaching and that didn’t seem to be the case.”

So significant were these difficulties that some groups of teachers developed strong negative views of the *Reading to Learn* program itself; seeing it as rigid and lockstep in its implementation.

In summary, most teachers participated in comprehensive training in order to be well prepared to deliver the *Reading to Learn* program. Views as to the quality and efficacy of the training were mixed, with a large number of participants believing that the consistency of training content and style could be improved.

3.2.3 Impact of training variations on schools

Central training sessions were arranged by either the DEC regional office or CEO diocese. Often for teachers in regional areas, attendance entailed significant travel times and associated expenses. A number of respondents felt that the training could have been completed more efficiently, with cost savings and reduced disruption to the school. This was particularly so for those who completed eight workshop days. One blunt assessment suggested:

“We did eight days that we could have been done in four. It was expensive.”

The cost of providing teacher relief, travel and accommodation proved to be significant expenses in addition to the quoted fees for professional learning. In some cases this limited the number of teachers able to be trained, particularly part-time and casual or temporary staff. One part-time teacher reported that:

“R2L is hard to implement when you have a shared job position and only one teacher is trained.”

The inability to train all the staff who would be working with students became a limitation on the implementation of the program.

It is noted that in other schools, support staff, including Aboriginal workers, were funded to attend training. They appreciated the opportunity to understand the program and the various strategies that teachers would use in their classes. One attendee commented:

“It was very helpful just understanding the way it is all implemented. The teachers haven’t got the time to tell you how to do it so you can help them in the classroom.”

Principals noted that while having all teachers trained at the same time was beneficial, having a large proportion of staff away simultaneously was a burden on casual staff and created some short-term behaviour issues among students.

In schools where there is a high turnover of teaching staff, it was suggested that provision of regular training will be needed to maintain the program’s integrity over time.

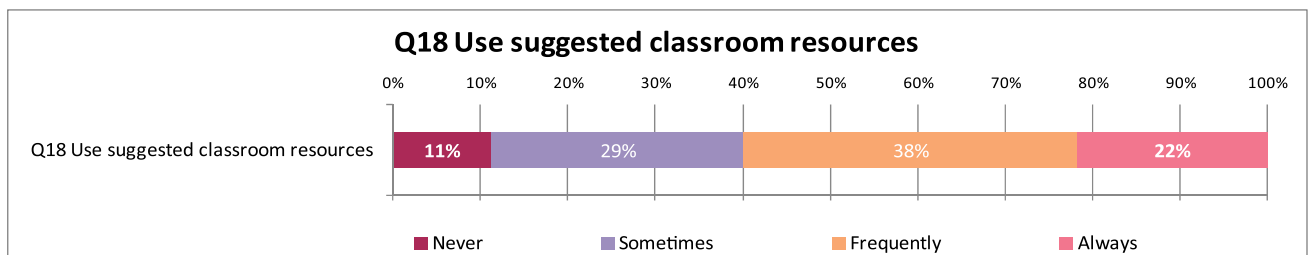
In summary, the training requirements of *Reading to Learn* were extensive and costly, both financially and in terms of teacher resources.

The high participation rate in schools was beneficial, as outlined later, but there was substantial evidence that the standard and style of training was not consistently high across all workshop programs. In many cases, teacher views of the *Reading to Learn* program as a whole, appear to have been coloured by this experience.

3.3 Reading to Learn resources

Respondents to the teacher survey consistently suggested that the *Reading to Learn* support materials were useful, as shown in Figure 3.5, with three out of five respondents saying they used the suggested classroom resources frequently or always.

Figure 3.5: Teacher 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 *Reading to Learn* lessons, it was frequently acknowledged that this expense would have to be built into future class budget allocations.

3.4 School implementation

A number of school-based factors were seen to influence the effectiveness of the program. Of particular importance were: implementing the program across the whole school; leadership and planning; providing support, coordination, and ongoing professional learning; teamwork and collaboration; and encouraging participation of parents and community members.

3.4.1 Whole-school approach

Taking a whole-school approach was seen by many respondents as a critical success factor. This required strong leadership and planning, relied on training as many staff members as possible, and was enhanced when parents and community were also included. *“To be effective it has to be across the whole school”* was a typical comment.

A key strategy was to provide training in *Reading to Learn* for all or most staff, preferably at the same time, with follow-up professional learning maintained at school. Where this occurred it produced many conversations and opportunities for clarification as teachers began to program, plan and teach the strategies. Most teachers felt that their shared experience promoted a consistent approach to implementing the program, to the benefit of students as they moved through the school. Frequent comments were made such as:

“... working in a school with so many staff trained in R2L enables professional dialogue and sharing to occur on a regular basis.”

Including part-time or temporary teachers in training, while costly, was reported as being beneficial.

Schools experienced less momentum where all staff were not trained, or where only some learning stages implemented the program. This was particularly true where even a small number of teachers refused to undergo training or implement the program.

Although some respondents were satisfied that only some teachers and classes were using the program, more believed that the whole-school approach created a sense of joint purpose. They frequently noted that the second year of implementation, in particular, was easier when more teachers could work together.

3.4.2 Leadership and planning

The importance of leadership in the implementation of *Reading to Learn* was observed to take several forms:

- leadership by the principal and executive
- program leadership by an appointed coordinator, and
- shared leadership amongst staff.

Each of these was identified as a significant factor for success.

The least positive responses to the *Reading to Learn* program as a whole, occurred in those schools where teachers felt locked out of decision-making and unsupported in their efforts.

One principal explained that as the “*leading learner*” in the school he felt it was a “*big call*” to ask teachers to take on such a major change, without support from all the executive. Other teachers commented that *Reading to Learn* was brand new for everyone including the principal, executive, teachers and support staff, so they felt a sense of joint endeavour and commitment.

Successful leaders supported the program by forming a *Reading to Learn* team to lead the implementation and support their colleagues at each stage level. Functions of the team included involving teaching staff in analysing data and current teaching practice, and developing a plan and budget. The team was frequently complemented by the creation of a coordinator or mentor position.

Each of these layers of leadership not only encouraged teachers to become more deeply involved in the program, but also acted to develop teachers’ leadership skills. Teachers who felt a joint responsibility for implementing the program were more highly motivated:

“It wasn’t just people telling you what to do, we had the chance to contribute and get our own program that would work in our school.”

One DEC regional officer observed that:

“The most successful schools have strong leadership, where executive staff are actively involved in implementing the program and supporting colleagues to improve their teaching practice.”

3.4.3 Ongoing professional learning, support and coordination

There was a clear contrast between schools where teachers perceived that they had quality in-school and external support, and those who struggled without it.

Follow-up professional learning and support was a significant issue for schools. As noted in the survey responses shown previously in Figure 3.1, a proportion of teachers participated in school-based training with the program developer or a consultant, often in conjunction with the school *Reading to Learn* coordinator. Generally this was seen to be an effective model.

In-school support

To provide in-school support and coordination, many schools used NPLN funds to appoint a *Reading to Learn* coordinator (sometimes called a mentor), either released from class within the school, or employed from outside. This was encouraged in DEC schools.

In-school coordinators provided professional learning sessions as teachers began to plan and deliver lesson sequences. Teachers generally suggested that this informal learning worked well.

While the details of the coordinator role varied from school to school, the function was frequently described as critical in realising the program implementation. Similarly, while principals and executive teachers took the overall leadership role, there was greater acknowledgement by teachers, of the importance of individuals in dedicated *Reading to Learn* support positions.

Coordinators undertook some or all of the following functions, as described by both survey respondents and in interviews:

- leadership of the *Reading to Learn* team
- planning, organising and presenting ongoing professional learning
- class observations and demonstration lessons
- assisting with selection of texts and joint programming
- timetabling literacy sessions, support staff and joint stage planning times
- developing proformas and assisting individual teachers.

Many coordinators felt a responsibility for ensuring the integrity of the program and consistency of its execution. Coordinator guidance was valued highly by staff:

“She’s clarified things for us so we’re all on the same page as a whole school and we’re all going in the same direction so that’s good.”

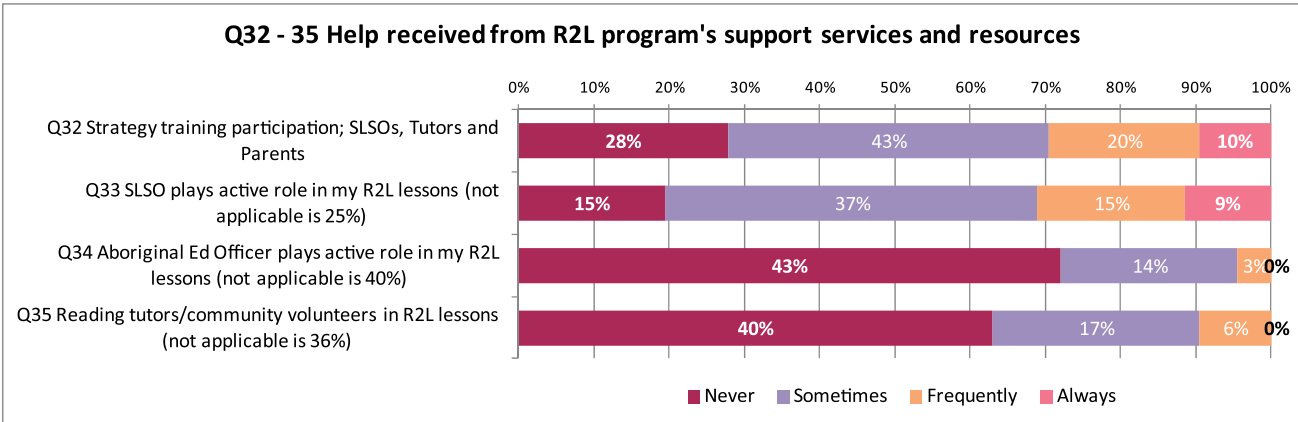
Another executive staff member commented that:

“People are still asking her to come on board and I think that’s become quite a vital role... teachers felt very well supported through this process.”

While the coordinator role was frequently seen as a key factor in supporting staff, it was also acknowledged in a number of schools, that other well-trained and qualified (sometimes ‘accredited’) teachers took on leadership and support roles. Sometimes designated separately as mentors, these *“very knowledgeable teachers who are very enthusiastic”* contributed to building confidence in teachers and to ensuring the success of the program.

There has emerged an interesting mismatch in the evaluation data. The NPLN encouraged involvement of support personnel in each program, especially if creating a whole-school approach to the innovation. Yet teacher survey results show very little use of these resources. While many respondents did not have an Aboriginal education officer or reading tutors/community volunteers in their school, even where they were available, almost all said they only sometimes or never played an important role in *Reading to Learn* lessons, as shown in Figure 3.6.

Figure 3.6: In-school support accessed by teachers



This may be a reflection of the difficulties schools had in organising training for support staff, or it may relate to general organisational differences in school implementation. In either case, it seems to be a missed opportunity to more closely involve support staff, especially Aboriginal Education Officers and reading tutors or community volunteers.

Where teachers had regular clerical support to prepare teaching resources, it was seen as a real boon.

External support

Teachers in many schools also commented on the quality of external support they received from their Literacy Consultant or other regional staff, in assisting with initial training or providing additional professional learning in schools and classrooms.

As schools felt the need for more training they called in a regional consultant or in one case, a university provider. Refresher courses assisted those teachers who felt somewhat overwhelmed by the initial training. Discussion in the teacher interviews suggested that consultants were generally well received, with very few teachers indicating that they preferred support from someone within their own school.

Often external support appeared to be determined by the school system and area in which the schools were located, which in turn affected the training and follow-up support that was available. Several schools in one area felt that after initial training they needed significantly more support than seemed to be available. A number of teachers referred to having received little or no support from beyond the school. Clear examples include:

“We weren’t given access to any form of mentoring. Basically we were just given the course and that was it. ‘Go for it’, which in my opinion wasn’t enough.”

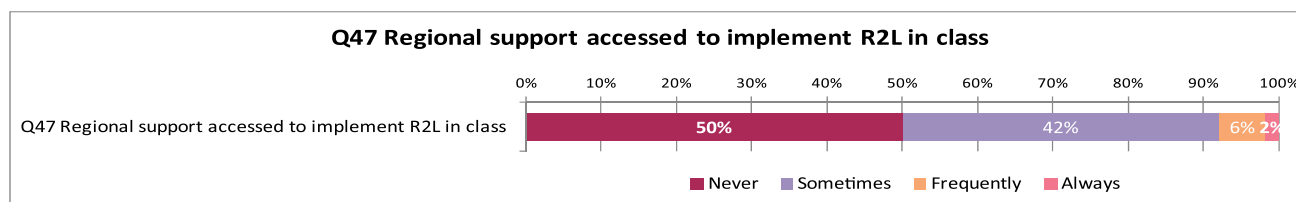
“It’s been a bit like the blind leading the blind. When you talk to Department schools they’ve had mentors and people who come in and help you. We haven’t had anything like that and so that is a factor.”

“[There was] no support and little communication.”

These teachers were frustrated that they had received so little assistance for such a major undertaking. This underlines the fact that the formal training alone was considered insufficient to ensure sound implementation of the *Reading to Learn* program.

The teacher survey yielded a similar view. Very few respondents reported frequently or always accessing such assistance, as shown in Figure 3.7. This may be attributable to the limited availability of trained regional facilitators; available only in the DEC’s Western NSW region.

Figure 3.7: Regional support accessed by teachers



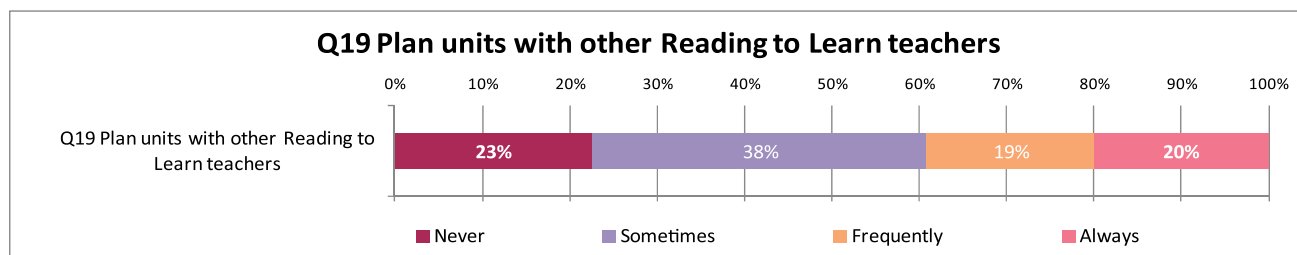
In other regional areas and systems, the NPLN coordinator or general Literacy Consultants may have been able to provide assistance, but usually these officers lacked specific training in *Reading to Learn*.

The evidence of many teacher and principal respondents was that long-term professional learning was a key factor in successfully implementing the program.

3.4.4 Teamwork and collaboration

Survey data indicates that about three-quarters of teachers now share planning with other *Reading to Learn* teachers, at least to some extent, as shown in Figure 3.8.

Figure 3.8: Shared literacy planning with other teachers



While there are no comparative data regarding the extent of collaboration occurring in the sample schools prior to the *Reading to Learn* implementation, there is clear evidence, from many teacher and executive comments, that they are now engaging in more collaborative planning and dialogue about literacy, and about teaching in general. In many schools it was noted that significant NPLN funds were committed to providing opportunities for collaborative work; releasing stage groups of teachers to work together or with *Reading to Learn* team members.

Whole-school *Reading to Learn* teams worked to involve everyone from the outset, in analysing student performance data and text selection. The importance of working collaboratively in *delivering* the program was encouraged during the professional learning program, and was strongly supported by many teachers in the seven schools visited. Having most teachers trained, preferably concurrently, had long-term benefits:

“That means we have a similar knowledge of the main elements and we have a common base to work with when we want to discuss ideas, programming, resources and assessment.”

Team activity included stage groups or pairs of teachers collaboratively planning learning cycles, dividing programming responsibilities and sharing resources. Teachers not only shared the considerable workload but reported that “*professional dialogue increased greatly*” and “*great professional discussion [occurred] between teachers*”.

In addition, schools that encouraged observation of lessons and moderation of student work, reported that this encouraged reflection, and built confidence that teachers were ‘on track’. Having access to NPLN funds was critical in providing time for many of these opportunities.

There was a sense of pride in one school that their team had succeeded with implementing the program:

“...with no help from anyone...with not much support from anyone, an expert...we’ve got it going here by [supporting] each other.”

Others built networks beyond the school with neighbouring schools and even schools in another region.

There were notable exceptions to these positive accounts. In a minority of schools, teachers did not feel there was time given to promoting teamwork or opportunities for collaboration. Some believed that more sharing of units and collaborative work would have helped in adapting to the new program. In one context it was claimed that, despite the additional funding:

“...the school continues to struggle to create the time for teachers to talk.”

There is a large body of evidence from interviews that teachers and principals value the opportunity to work with colleagues in planning and engaging in professional dialogue, and that a sense of collaboration and teamwork was a key factor in implementing *Reading to Learn*. Without these opportunities, teachers felt less able to undertake the required changes in their teaching practice.

3.4.5 Parent communication and support

Although none of the visited schools consulted with the community before deciding to implement the *Reading to Learn* program, most made efforts to inform parents and carers about the program, its strategies and the philosophy behind them. Teachers believed that “*awareness of what R2L was about*” would assist parents to understand why classroom practices were changing. They would be more able to support their children.

Principals, teacher and parent interviewees made mention of the following communication strategies:

- information nights
- newsletter articles
- parent group meeting updates
- parent workshops
- classroom lesson observations
- incidental conversations.

Most parents said they had been offered some opportunities, although there were several who believed that no information had been provided to parents. At one school, parents who were working in the school as support staff believed that they had a great advantage in understanding the program, and were concerned that other parents were not fully informed.

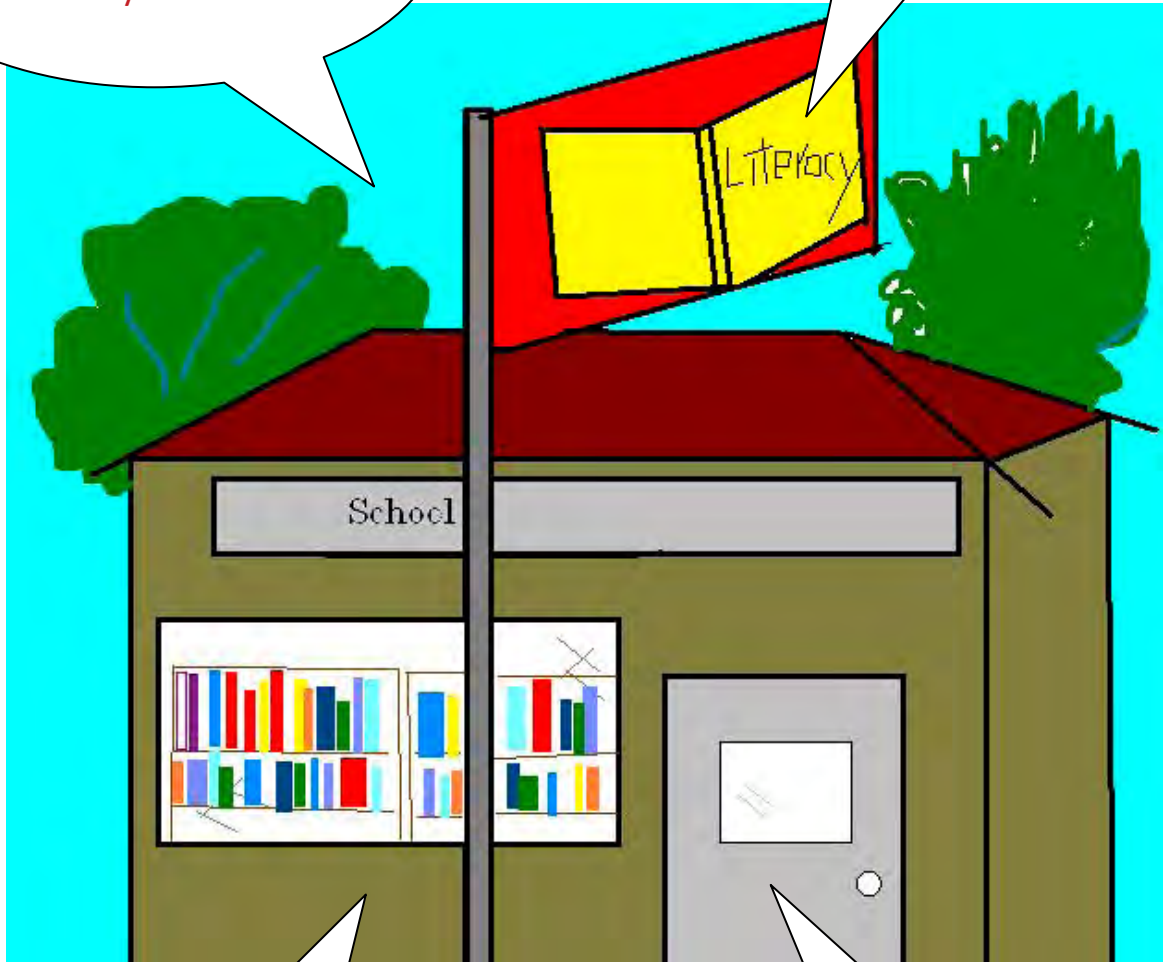
Discussion of parents supporting their students at home frequently strayed into a wider exploration of the value and practicality of homework. A number of parents indicated that they were able to support their children with *Reading to Learn* tasks sent home, such as cutting up and changing sentences. Others felt that being asked to read or support student work at home was difficult, especially when time was limited.

Teachers expressed a range of opinions about the value of sending work home. Some negative views were expressed that it was a “*hassle*” as the students most in need of practice were the least likely to receive support at home. Others had formed the impression that *Reading to Learn* did not encourage sending home tasks, despite the stated priority this is given in the program materials.

A number of parents commented that they were aware of *Reading to Learn* being implemented and saw benefits for their children’s literacy development. However, overall it appears that the potential to engage this key stakeholder group of the ‘whole school’ in this major school project has not been fully realised through the *Reading to Learn* implementation.

...we had to study in groups and it was really fun. I think that R2L should stay!

Sometimes it's too easy. It feels like you are in Kindergarten



...it's really fun, highlighting, mixing up the order, interesting and fun. Helps me to remember the text and to spell words

I'd probably not be as good at reading without R2L

4 Effects for students

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

Teachers' primary focus is on assessing student achievement in terms of syllabus outcomes. A range of strategies are used to gather information about the performance of students, including school- and class-developed assessments, program-specific strategies such as the *Reading to Learn* assessments, observations and students' 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:

- Engagement with *Reading to Learn* has improved student confidence in reading.
- Students have developed an increased capacity to use strategies to promote comprehension.
- *Reading to Learn* has improved reading and comprehension skills for many Aboriginal students involved in the program.
- Students have demonstrated transfer of literacy skills and strategies into other key learning areas.
- There has been an extension in the diversity of texts that students were engaged in reading, both in and out of school.

Based on all data sources, student learning outcomes have been observed to improve. This is more strongly evident in teachers', parents' and students' impressions of effective learning than in 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 gains in results in external performance measures. The variations in implementation patterns across schools means it is not possible to assume students have had consistent exposure to *Reading to Learn* during 2010 and 2011. Teachers and principals agreed that improvements in student reading outcomes may not be reflected in NAPLAN results for a few years.

In both data sets, NAPLAN and NPLN assessments, gains in mean reading scores were observed for all student cohorts at *Reading to Learn* schools.

Aboriginal student outcomes

NAPLAN data indicates that gain scores for Aboriginal students involved in *Reading to Learn* were about the same as those for non-Aboriginal students in both year cohorts. When the effect size of the NAPLAN means compared to state are considered, the performance of Aboriginal students in *Reading to Learn* schools decreased as did that of non-Aboriginal students.

NPLN assessment data indicates that the gain scores for Aboriginal students were similar to those for non-Aboriginal students.

4.1.1 National Assessment Program - Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN)

Table 4.1 shows in 2008, for schools in the *Reading to Learn* program, the effect size of -0.44 when compared with the state mean for the 'All students' cohort shows a general performance below state, with the *Reading to Learn* mean about half a standard deviation below the whole-state mean.

Aboriginal students had the best cohort performance compared with the state Aboriginal student cohort, at -0.29, which is nevertheless below state performance. This difference in results for Aboriginal students was not present in the Year 5 groups, as seen in the Year 5 tables below. The proportion of Aboriginal students in the *Reading to Learn* sample schools was around three to four times that for Aboriginal students in the state as a whole.

Table 4.1: NAPLAN reading, 2008 Year 3 Reading to Learn cohort

2008 Y3 R2L Cohort	Cohort No.	Cohort %	R2L Mean	State mean	R2L effect size
All Students	717	100%	374.6	412.1	-0.44
Boys	375	52%	374.2	405.0	-0.36
Girls	342	48%	375.0	419.5	-0.54
Aboriginal	111	16%	324.6	348.6	-0.29
Non-Aboriginal	593	84%	384.2	414.7	-0.36
LBOTE	58	8%	396.5	414.0	-0.21
Non-LBOTE	642	92%	373.2	412.3	-0.46

The girls had the lowest cohort performance, at effect size -0.54.

Results for the 2009 Year 3 cohorts, shown in Table 4.2, were similar to those of the 2008 group. Again the Aboriginal students had the best cohort performance compared with Aboriginal students across the state.

Table 4.2: NAPLAN reading, 2009 Year 3 Reading to Learn cohort

2009 Y3 R2L Cohort	Cohort No.	Cohort %	R2L Mean	State mean	R2L effect size
All Students	650	100%	386.2	423.7	-0.41
Boys	337	52%	385.5	414.7	-0.31
Girls	313	48%	386.9	433.1	-0.52
Aboriginal	120	19%	340.6	357.3	-0.21
Non-Aboriginal	526	81%	396.7	426.2	-0.32
LBOTE	53	8%	391.5	422.9	-0.35
Non-LBOTE	595	92%	385.2	423.1	-0.41

Table 4.3 shows the results for the 2010 Year 5 group. There was an improvement since Year 3 in reading mean scores for all cohorts, but the effect size was more negative for all the cohorts. This shows that the *Reading to Learn* schools had less improvement in performance when compared with the improvement for the whole of the state.

Table 4.3: NAPLAN reading, 2010 Year 5 Reading to Learn cohort

2010 Y5 R2L Cohort	Cohort No.	Cohort %	R2L Mean	State mean	R2L effect size
All Students	651	100%	454.7	496.9	-0.51
Boys	332	51%	450.8	490.2	-0.47
Girls	319	49%	458.8	503.8	-0.55
Aboriginal	110	17%	401.1	435.4	-0.45
Non-Aboriginal	540	83%	465.8	499.2	-0.41
LBOTE	76	12%	466.5	496.5	-0.37
Non-LBOTE	575	88%	453.2	496.6	-0.52

Table 4.4 shows the results for the 2011 Year 5 group. There was an improvement since Year 3 in reading mean scores for all cohorts. The effect size is similar to the Year 3 effect size, and also to that for the 2010 cohort, with the exception that Aboriginal students' performance moved noticeably higher and closer to the state performance for Aboriginal students.

Table 4.4: NAPLAN reading, 2011 Year 5 Reading to Learn cohort

2011 Y5 R2L Cohort	Cohort No.	Cohort %	R2L Mean	State mean	R2L effect size
All Students	639	100%	453.4	496.1	-0.51
Boys	321	50%	451.0	489.3	-0.46
Girls	318	50%	455.9	503.1	-0.57
Aboriginal	123	19%	407.9	435.4	-0.36
Non-Aboriginal	511	81%	464.4	498.5	-0.42
LBOTE	54	8%	464.6	492.1	-0.34
Non-LBOTE	582	92%	452.7	497.2	-0.53

This shows that students in *Reading to Learn* schools had similar performance in Years 3 and 5 when compared with the whole of the state, with the exception that Aboriginal students in those schools improved their performance slightly in 2011.

Comparison with NAPLAN National Minimum Standards

The comparison of mean percentages of students who performed below, at or above National Minimum Standards (NMS) in NAPLAN reading is shown in Table 4.5. The cohorts listed are students in *Reading to Learn* schools, the NPLN program schools as a group and the state as a whole, for the 2008-2010 Y5 and 2009-2011 Y5 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 8.2 increase in percentage below NMS for the 2008-2010 cohort in *Reading to Learn* 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 -11.8 for the 2009-2011 cohort in *Reading to Learn* schools).

Table 4.5: NAPLAN reading for *Reading to Learn*, comparison with National Minimum Standard

Comparison with National Minimum Standard (NMS)						
	Change in % below NMS		Change in % at NMS		Change in % above NMS	
Year cohort:	2008-2010	2009-2011	2008-2010	2009-2011	2008-2010	2009-2011
R2L schools	8.2	9.3	-2.3	2.5	-5.9	-11.8
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

It is clear that the percentages below NMS increased in Year 5 for all three cohorts and in both years. The percentages above NMS decrease 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. It applies to *Reading to Learn* schools, the NPLN schools as a whole, and the state as a whole. The change in *Reading to Learn* schools may be greater than in the state as a whole.

The utility of the comparison 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 *Reading to Learn* program.

Trends between Year 3 and Year 5

The *Reading to Learn* gain scores and differences in effect size (ES), between Year 3 and Year 5, aggregated over all schools participating in the NPLN program, are listed below:

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

<i>Reading to Learn</i>	Gain Score		Difference in ES	
	2008-2010	2009-2011	2008-2010	2009-2011
All Students	80.2	67.3	-0.06	-0.10
Boys	76.7	65.6	-0.12	-0.15
Girls	83.8	69.0	-0.01	-0.05
Aboriginal	76.5	67.3	-0.16	-0.15
Non-Aboriginal	81.5	67.7	-0.04	-0.09
LBOTE	70.0	73.2	-0.15	0.01
Non-LBOTE	80.0	67.5	-0.07	-0.12

The positive gain scores between Year 3 and Year 5 in Table 4.6 indicate higher performance in reading in Year 5 for both cohorts, more so in the 2008-2010 cohort than in the 2009-2011 cohort. The effect size measure shows a decrease in performance compared with the statewide change in reading performance and this is the more standardised measure. However, the comparability of the measures when many students in *Reading to Learn* schools are at the low end of the test score scale is problematic and the evidence is qualified in many other respects to do with program implementation at the student level.

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

4.1.2 National Partnership on Literacy and Numeracy assessments

NPLN assessment data indicates that the gain scores for *Reading to Learn* schools were about the same as those for other NPLN programs. Higher reading scores are shown in the second and third testing phases. However the data is of little value at the stage of program implementation being evaluated, for the following reasons.

There are limited broad scale comparisons available because the testing was conducted only in NPLN schools. It cannot be said whether the changes seen in NPLN assessment data are the same as, less than or greater than any changes in the state as a whole. The NPLN assessment data might be useful after 2012 and further years have passed, and if an equating study were to be done to see if NPLN assessments in Year 3 and Year 5 could be reliably equated to NAPLAN results at student level.

The candidature for the NPLN assessments is uncertain and varied. Only some NPLN schools did the assessments in the 2009 first round. All students were supposed to complete assessments in the second and third rounds but this was not always the case. The NPLN assessment data was only aggregated over the NPLN schools that did the tests. The only possible comparison would be between NPLN programs, which is beyond the scope of this evaluation.

Preliminary analysis of the data makes it clear that, even if the candidature was known with precision and comparison between programs was desirable, such comparison has little meaning. For instance, the 2011 Year 6 reading means for the different programs range from 58.0 to 60.4 with standard deviation around 8.5. The biggest effect size is just 0.2, barely different from the NPLN mean. No program shows markedly different NPLN assessment performance from the others.

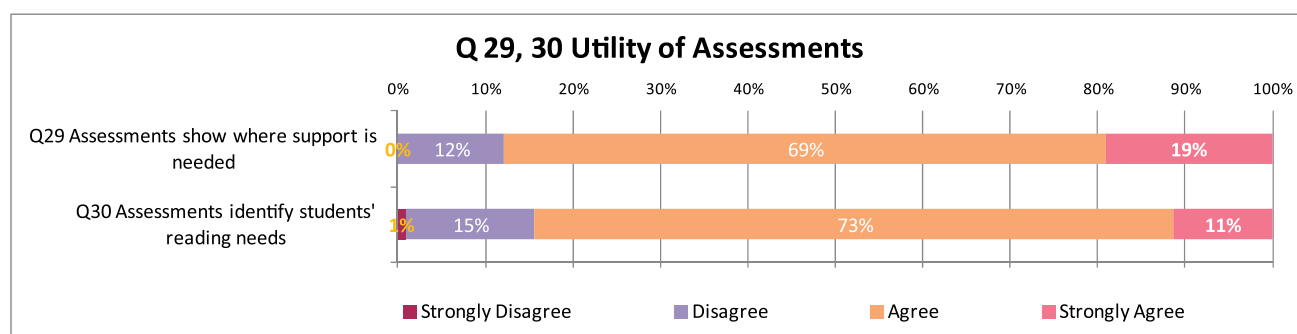
Further analysis such as tracking 2010 Year 5 to 2011 Year 6 for example, shows that the variation between cohorts is generally far greater than the variation between 2010 and 2011, or between programs. When such complex variation is added to the uncertainty about the state population's performance on the NPLN assessments, the critical limitations on the data make deeper analysis inadvisable.

In order to be able to use the NPLN assessments to provide insight into the effectiveness of programs, there is a need for repeated use of the test in future cohorts, and an equating study on NAPLAN to check whether a comparison to the state background can be made.

4.2 Local assessments by staff, students and parent community

Reading to Learn promotes a continuous process of assessment of student learning, embedded in the teaching sequence. The emphasis of formal assessment is on student writing, which is also used as the primary indicator of success in reading. Teachers are expected to monitor student performance, recording outcomes in the assessment folder.

Figure 4.1: Utility of *Reading to Learn* assessments

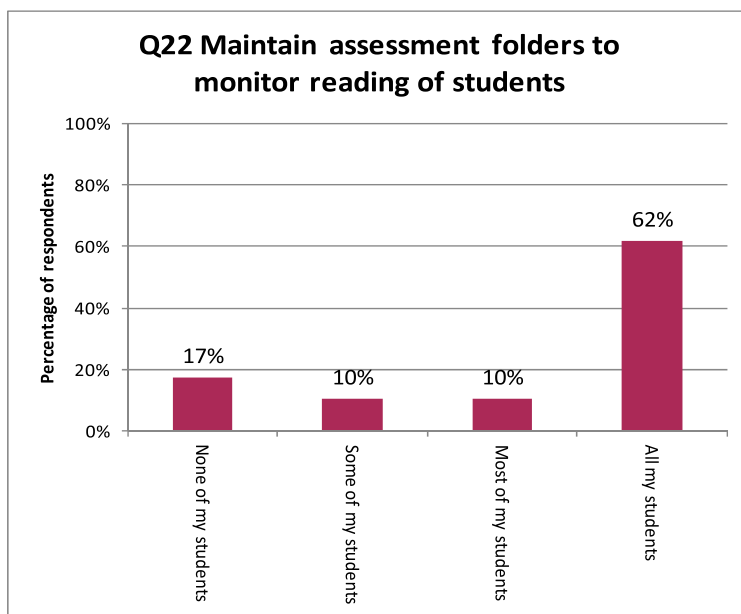


Teachers consistently indicated in their survey responses that the *Reading to Learn* assessment activities were useful in tracking student progress and identifying student needs, as shown in Figure 4.1.

Similarly, a majority of teachers successfully used the recommended assessment folder to maintain regular assessment data for most or all of their students (Figure 4.2). Interview responses confirmed that the assessment processes were largely seen to provide a systematic way of monitoring student progress.

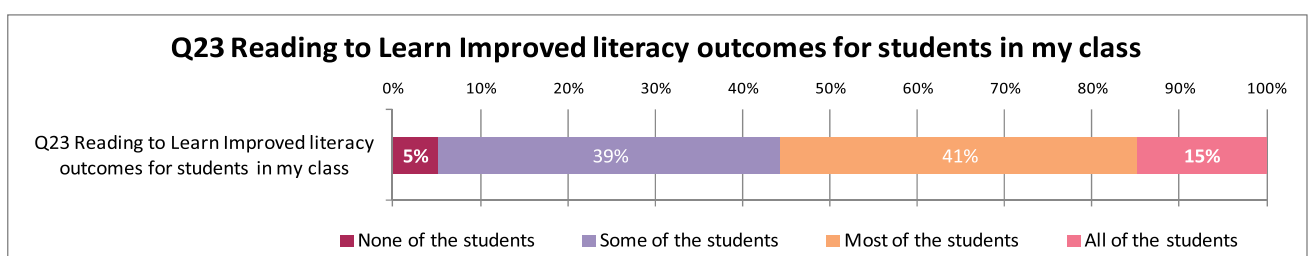
On the basis of teacher observations and the *Reading to Learn* assessments, teachers and principals generally expressed positive views that *Reading to Learn* is producing improved student literacy outcomes.

Figure 4.2: Teacher use of *Reading to Learn* assessment folders



As shown in Figure 4.3, teacher survey responses indicated that a little over half believed that general literacy outcomes had improved for all or most of their students, about one third thought that some had improved. Only a few thought that none of their students had improved.

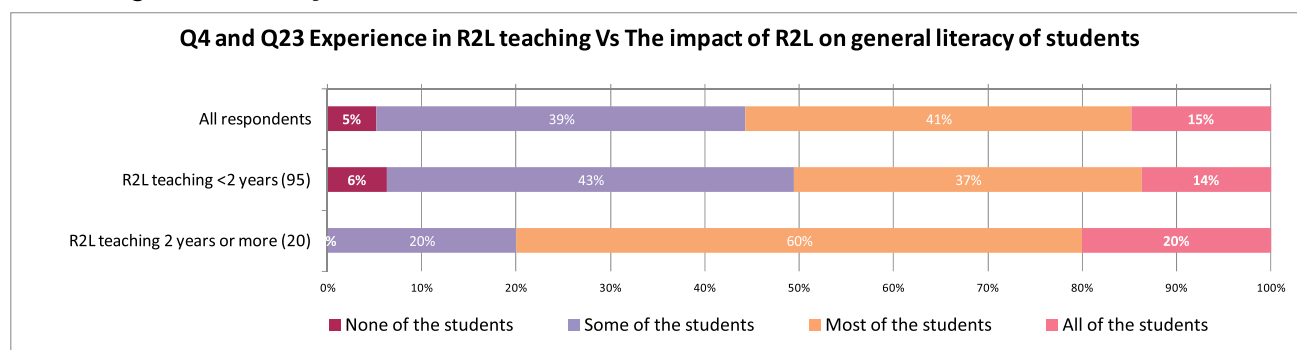
Figure 4.3: Impact of *Reading to Learn* on general literacy outcomes



There was an apparent correlation between teachers' perception of student improvement and the length of time they had been working with the *Reading to Learn* methodology.

As shown in Figure 4.4, teachers who had been engaged with *Reading to Learn* for more than two years reported greater incidence of improvement in student literacy outcomes, while those who had been using the program for two years or less reported attainment by notably fewer students. 83% of survey respondents fell into this latter category.

Figure 4.4: Experience in *Reading to Learn* teaching, related to the reported impact of *Reading to Learn* on general literacy of students

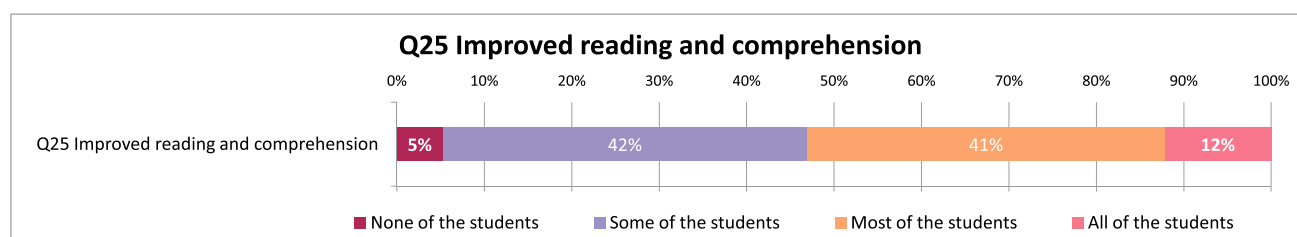


4.2.1 Reading improvement

Teacher survey responses, as well as a large number of interview comments from teachers, principals, parents and students, focussed on student improvement in reading.

In surveys, just over half of the teachers believed that all or most of their students had improved in reading and comprehension skills, leaving almost half believing that only some or even none had demonstrated improvement over the period of *Reading to Learn* implementation, as shown in Figure 4.5.

Figure 4.5: Improvement of reading and comprehension skills



The impressions of interviewees in the seven schools visited were varied, but generally more positive than the survey responses suggests. Many teachers believed that the explicit teaching strategies and student activities, led to improved comprehension, in particular. One teacher described her students as:

“...comprehending more quickly and understanding a lot more.”

These teachers claimed that the daily practice of the “mechanisms” of comprehension, embedded in the lesson sequence had a positive impact on students’ reading. The overall modelling by the teacher of reading for meaning, developing background knowledge and the use of detailed reading strategies were all identified as highly effective elements. Teachers commonly spoke of students benefiting:

“...because we talk through things, they’re guided all the way through it.”

Particular activities for students such as highlighting and circling of technical words were also considered to be very beneficial techniques for building comprehension skills.

In their interviews, a majority of students spoke of aspects of their reading that had improved. They described:

- increased confidence in reading in class
- better results in assessments
- participation in more activities, such as the *Premier's Reading Challenge*
- becoming more fluent, or
- just finding reading easier.

One student noted that it was good preparation for high school.

These positive views of the impact on reading were balanced by others expressing reservations. Some teachers believed that some specific aspects of reading, such as phonemic awareness and decoding skills, and self-correction strategies, were not sufficiently addressed by the *Reading to Learn* approach. Another teacher suggested:

“... [students'] ability to decode and read fluently has not increased... significantly.”

A parent voiced a similar concern, as follows:

“My son...we are still working on that one [comprehension]. With him it's more the sounds. He can't get the words unless he gets the sounds.”

A significant number of teachers doubted the program's claim that *“over time this supported practice enables learners to work independently at the same high level”*. Their class-based experiences led them to suggest that students had limited opportunities for independent reading. Some feared that group reading could lead to memorisation of the text, and that students do not actually read enough new words, and needed more explicit *“comprehension strategies to deal with unknown or unfamiliar texts”*.

Opinion also varied widely, on whether the strategy of repeatedly reading the same text with the whole class, benefited all students. It was acknowledged that repeating the same passage helped build confidence in students, and also allowed for intensive analysis. However, teachers frequently made comments such as:

“... [the teaching sequence] is sometimes too repetitive to keep students interested and enthusiastic about literacy activities.”

Several students expressed similar views such as:

“...if it's very easy it just gets boring and sometimes you have to do it over and over again.”

The repetitiveness of lessons was mentioned in several contexts, and appears to have a negative impact on student engagement.

A significant and positive feature of student interviews was the quality of responses to the question *“What are you reading?”*. Almost without exception students could identify texts, often volunteering details about the type of text, elements of plot, and expressing strong preferences about styles and authors. Several students and parents also commented on the increase in the amount and variety of reading occurring outside school, since *Reading to Learn* had been introduced. This appears to be a result of the range of high-interest texts being introduced to the class, and the amount of time being spent on them. Increased engagement with reading represents strong support for *Reading to Learn's* goal to build a classroom culture where students experience greater pleasure in reading, as well as success in completing tasks.

In summary, although the weight of evidence seemed to suggest that student reading outcomes have improved as a result of implementing *Reading to Learn*, there are hesitations in the minds of a significant number of respondents regarding the benefits of particular elements of the program, and its overall effectiveness in improving reading.

4.2.2 Other literacy outcomes

While the focus of this evaluation is on the effects of *Reading to Learn* on reading improvement, strong messages were delivered by all respondents about the program's impact on other areas of literacy learning, including writing, spelling and grammar.

Writing

There was overwhelming support from teachers, students and parents for the view that student writing had improved as a result of *Reading to Learn*, in terms of confidence, strategies, language choice, understanding of sentence structure and, to a lesser extent, spelling. Commonly heard comments include examples such as:

“I can see the correlation between the supportive writing scaffold and the gains in writing in my classroom.”

“Reading to Learn is extremely valuable to improving student writing and comprehension.”

Many respondents claimed that the improvement in student writing was the most significant outcome of the program, with a number asserting that it was more effective for developing writing than for reading. A large number of respondents made this point in unequivocal terms such as:

“I think it is more effective for the writing aspect of literacy than reading.”

Teachers believed that guided practice of writing, based on the close analysis of quality texts and author styles was a key factor. Exposure to rich language and texts was believed to establish high expectations and the ‘sentence making’ strategy offered support before students attempted their own writing. Teachers also reported that students’ grasp of writing structure and a variety of text types was much improved. As a result, students were *“able to put it in their own words rather than [do] a straight copy and paste”* in their assignments.

Students and parents also commented positively on writing improvement. Typical remarks included:

“My writing’s really improved from the start of the year”

“...her writing is excellent.” [Parent comment]

Grammar and spelling

In the area of grammar and spelling, however, some teachers believed that the ‘teaching in context’ model of *Reading to Learn* left gaps, and was insufficient to achieve all mandatory outcomes. One teacher added:

“We still have to do formal lessons in grammar and then bring it back to the Reading to Learn passages.”

Several schools have continued with previous commercial spelling programs to complement the program, though others believed that the strategies of ‘chunking and patterns’ were effective.

Parent comments also ranged from noting how keen their children were to *“have a go [with spelling]”* to those who believed a more systematic approach was needed.

Despite these reservations expressed by a minority of teachers, the evidence from most respondents indicates that teaching of writing is a strength of the *Reading to Learn* program. The following quotes demonstrate the enthusiasm of teachers in this respect:

“...the results for the writing are fantastic and the program itself for writing is wonderful.”

“...the writing [strategies] are brilliant and I wish I was taught how to do this in the beginning of my teaching career.”

4.3 Outcomes for Aboriginal students

NAPLAN data relating to Aboriginal students is referred to in Section 4.1. This information may support a proposition that for the Aboriginal students only, reading improved slightly more in *Reading to Learn* schools, compared to the whole-state improvement.

Survey responses from teachers with Aboriginal students in their class to questions about learning achievement indicate that about half believe that all or most Aboriginal students have improved in their general literacy skills and their reading and comprehension, with very few believing that no students have improved. Refer to Figures 4.6 and 4.7.

Figure 4.6: Improvement of literacy outcomes for Aboriginal students

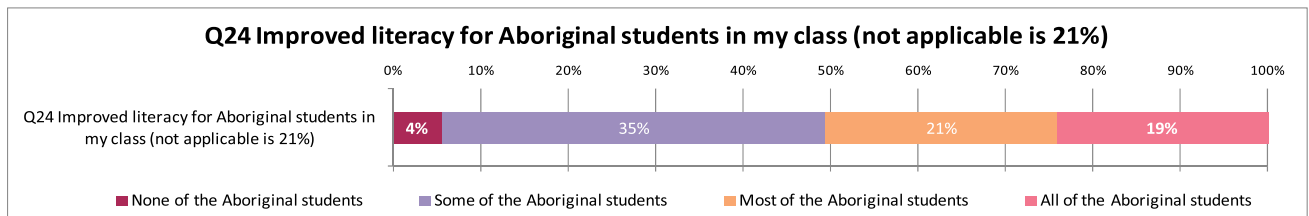
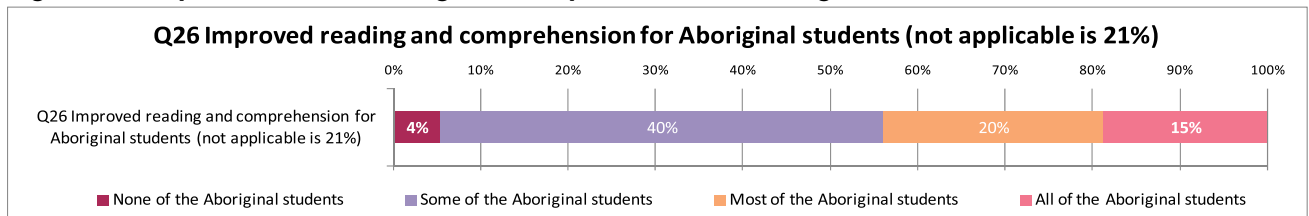


Figure 4.7: Improvement of reading and comprehension in Aboriginal students



Survey evidence is complemented by a range of interview responses in the seven schools visited. The majority of teachers stated that they found *Reading to Learn* to have a positive effect on the overall literacy progress of Aboriginal students in their classes.

Teachers perceived that the daily inclusive experience of joint oral reading and discussion encouraged weaker students to participate as noted:

“It has increased their involvement and willingness to participate more in public than before.”

Willingness to answer questions, join in hands-on activities, and generally “*have a go*” were seen by a number of teachers as indicators of greater confidence among these students, particularly those who previously would have been reluctant to join in.

A few comments addressed the benefits experienced by specific groups of Aboriginal students. A number of teachers commented that Aboriginal students with behaviour problems seemed to benefit from the positive feedback techniques and simple strategies, such as the use of highlighters to explore text passages. One school found the recommended strategy of using an emphatic voice and microphone highly effective in their context where the incidence of otitis media was high. The potential to extend higher-performing Aboriginal students was noted in a few cases, especially where students were “*interested in facts*” and learning about specific topics. They seemed quite stimulated by the background knowledge sessions.

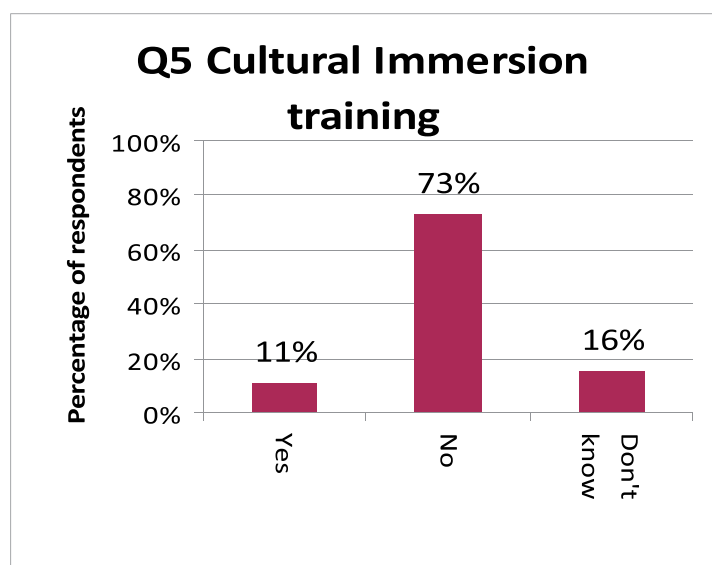
The assistance provided by Aboriginal support staff, including Aboriginal Education Officers, was particularly useful in the development of personalised learning plans and engaging parents in discussion of their children’s literacy needs.

Once again, however, opinions were divided. Some teachers expressed reservations about the effectiveness of the program for some of their Aboriginal students. For students who were “well behind” their peers in reading achievement, there were challenges in participating, with several teachers reporting that students were very *disengaged*. ‘Sentence making’ was seen as a major challenge for students with a limited vocabulary, and another teacher believed that the program’s philosophy of “pitching the text for the top learner in the class and then bringing the rest of the children along to be at that level” was not effective for the Aboriginal students she taught.

Several teachers specifically commented on the cultural appropriateness of texts, reflecting that the texts their school had chosen were not particularly suitable. As a result, they were planning to include texts with an Aboriginal focus in future. This perhaps suggests an emerging awareness among some teachers, of the significance of text choice in engaging Aboriginal students in reading, and perhaps in school in general.

Some teachers suggested that Aboriginal students in their classes were from similar backgrounds as other students (usually rural, and often lower socio-economic) without acknowledging the specific cultural implications for Aboriginal students. A common feeling expressed by teachers was that all students benefited from *Reading to Learn* in the same way; it was just as beneficial for Aboriginal students as for others. Such comments are noteworthy in light of the key goal of the NPLN to improve outcomes for Aboriginal students. Training for all teachers was intended to include sessions on cultural awareness. Only 11% of *Reading to Learn* teachers reported attending this training, as shown in Figure 4.8.

Figure 4.8: Teacher participation in cultural awareness training



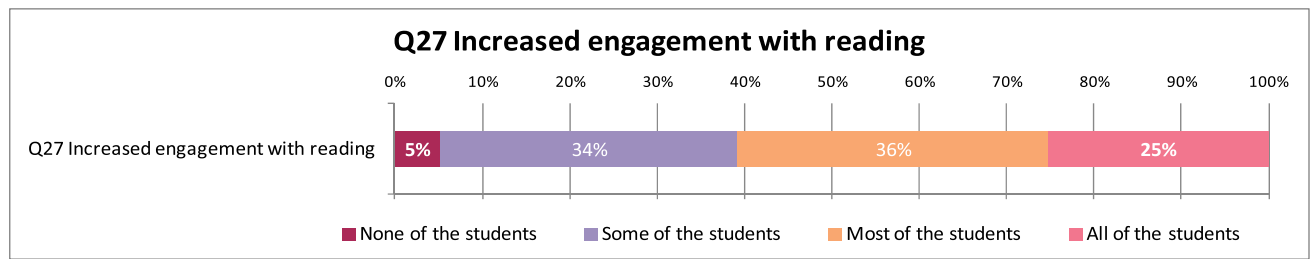
In summary, while the majority of teachers saw benefits in the *Reading to Learn* approach for the Aboriginal students in their classes, and believed that their literacy skills were improving, significant questions remained regarding its appropriateness for particular students.

4.4 Student engagement with reading

Throughout both the teacher surveys and interviews the most frequent responses related to increased student engagement with reading, sometimes for the first time.

As shown in Figure 4.9, about two thirds of surveyed teachers agreed that *Reading to Learn* had increased engagement with reading for all or most of their students, with about one third saying that some students were more engaged. This is strong support for the key goal of the program: *to create a culture of engagement and reading for pleasure*.

Figure 4.9: Increased student engagement



Interviews with all stakeholders at the seven schools visited, garnered similar, or even greater support for the idea that engagement of students in literacy activities had increased. Terms such as motivation, confidence, enjoyment and participation were regularly employed to describe students' active engagement in their literacy sessions, and sometimes in other learning activities or contexts. One principal observed:

"I know that my children are engaged. When I walk into the literacy sessions I can see them engaged in their literacy learning."

Some teachers believed that the main strength of the program is its ability to enhance students' engagement with text. Confidence and participation were key indicators of engagement for teachers and parents, with many noting that the program provided opportunities for all students, particularly weaker students, to join in and experience success with structured tasks.

The predictable routine, explicit teaching strategies, practical activities and choice of quality texts, were all credited with "getting kids involved". The daily practice and structured lesson sequence, including repeated reading, was "comfortable" for many students. The building of background knowledge supported students, being described as "setting them up for success". One teacher noted:

"I think they have a better understanding of how to tackle things and what is required of them."

Even students' enjoyment in simple activities such as highlighting and cutting up sentences was reported to have positive impact on their desire to read.

Several students believed that strategies such as highlighting, benefited them in other subjects, and that their improved reading skills helped in maths, as described here :

"... when you are in a test... it helps me to read a question and [know] what it is asking me to do".

Other students however, did not see a connection between their Reading to Learn lessons and other subjects.

As well as greater awareness, and borrowing of particular authors' work, class teachers and librarians commented that there was a renewed interest in borrowing factual texts. Transfer of *Reading to Learn* skills such as highlighting, was observed as students worked on assignments in a range of Key Learning Areas.

Students demonstrated their enthusiasm for books and writing, and claimed to be "more imaginative and interested" as a result of all the reading they were doing. Many described their *Reading to Learn* activities as fun, enjoyable and interesting. They described enjoyment in reading, in highlighting words, in hearing one another's stories read out, in being creative, and in re-writing stories together. Only a few students described being bored at various times during the literacy times; mostly when commenting on the pace of lessons or the repetition of texts.

Students also reported increased enjoyment of reading at home, at night: "when I'm meant to be asleep". These impressions were confirmed by a number of parents in the seven schools. One representative comment is:

"I like the program. I think the results that we've seen from our kids, just their excitement, their engagement, their confidence, that's been a really great thing for me to see."

Several parents backed up student claims that they are reading more and completing activities at home with much greater enthusiasm. Students were reported to “love the texts” and this was overwhelmingly confirmed in student interviews and comments from parents who also saw the texts as exciting and engaging.

In summary, although there were a few negative comments about the *Reading to Learn* approach, the overwhelming majority of opinion was that engagement of students in literacy, and specifically in reading, was a strength of the program.

4.5 Catering for the needs of different groups of students

A key claim of the *Reading to Learn* program is that it caters for every student while using a whole-class teaching approach (Rose, 2010). Accordingly, assessing its capacity to cater for, and improve literacy achievement for all students, is of particular importance. This aspect of the program attracted many comments in interviews in the seven schools visited as part of the evaluation.

Several teachers firmly believed that all students are supported to achieve at their stage level. These teachers saw great value in the *Reading to Learn* philosophy of having high expectations of all students in the class, and in the strategies of building students' background knowledge, thoroughly preparing for reading, and the detailed reading and writing activities. One interviewee claimed:

“This is THE most inclusive methodology I have seen to teach all aspects of literacy within a [whole-class] context.”

Others were unsure, seeing a gap between the philosophy and the practical application. Some teachers suggested that they needed to significantly modify or complement the program with other strategies, in order to cater for the needs of some individual students or groups of students.

Several categories of student attracted particular comment in terms of the suitability of *Reading to Learn* for their needs. These included students in different age or stage groups; students at different levels of literacy achievement; and to a lesser extent, students with English as a second language (ESL), and boys.

Students of different ages, or in different stages

There was considerable diversity of opinion regarding the appropriateness of *Reading to Learn* for various age groups.

While the NPLN initiative was aimed at Stages 2 and 3 (Years 3 to 6), many schools decided to apply a whole-school approach and so implemented the program across all year levels. Many teachers of Kindergarten stated it was difficult to apply the sequence and ‘detailed reading’ strategies, as the students did not have efficient manipulative skills required for some activities (e.g. cutting up, highlighting), and the program lacked focus on key early skills such as phonics. Other respondents, however, saw ‘detailed reading’ and using individual whiteboards as very effective strategies for younger students. They also benefited from the lesson sequence, which offered structure and routine.

The question of applicability of *Reading to Learn* for Years 5 and 6 classes elicited a range of views. A number of teachers valued the focus on factual texts and scaffolding of writing, and felt that these skills could be applied by students across various subjects, especially in preparation for high school. However, other comments suggested that activities that may be effective in literacy sessions, did not translate to improved reading of unseen texts or to other learning contexts, as suggested in the following:

“[While] whole-class activities appeared to work well, they did not translate to independent reading skills at Stage 3 level.”

Several teachers found it difficult to cater for the needs of students, where they have a wide range of ages in their class, particularly in small schools or composite classes, as expressed in the following comment:

“I think it’s very hard in a situation where you’ve got three or even two classes together, to cater for the needs of all of the children in your classroom.”

Overall, there was a lack of consensus regarding the value of the program in providing effective support for students at different ages or stages of literacy development. There were concerns that skills developed in the literacy session did not always transfer to other learning contexts.

Students at various reading levels

A stated aim of *Reading to Learn* is to enable the weakest students to succeed while challenging more advanced students at the same time. While there was no survey data directly addressing this aspect, frequent comments were made in interviews regarding students who are proficient readers and those who are less so, including students with special needs.

In assessing the potential of the program to cater for proficient readers, teachers have recounted both positive and negative experiences, with almost an equal number of comments for each position. The program was observed to provide engaging activities, motivate students, provide extension opportunities that challenge students to “*not just opt for the soft option*”.

Comments such as “*Higher students are very well catered for*” and “*Brighter children are extended*” reflect the view that the program allows capable students to move from whole-class to independent tasks. One principal noted that:

“Reading to Learn...has had a better gain for our better kids...you have great kids who are doing better.”

In contrast to this position, a larger number of teachers identify catering for more able students as a weakness of the program, as described by one teacher:

“However the brighter children get really bored really quickly. They’re through it. They can read it and they don’t want to spend time going over it again and again. There is a lot of repetition you are meant to do that we don’t do. We could probably if we had levelled abilities but it says don’t do level abilities so we have ability levels in other areas...”

Many teachers expressed concern that the whole-class strategies led to some frustration for students who “*crave independence*”, describing some students as “*bored*” and “*disengaged*” as they found the repetition of activities “*tedious*”.

Several teachers suggested that preparation and class time devoted to struggling students limited the time they could spend organising extension opportunities for their more able peers. It appears that while many higher achieving students benefit from *Reading to Learn*, there is evidence of significant concerns amongst teachers that the program offers insufficient differentiation to meet the needs of more able students.

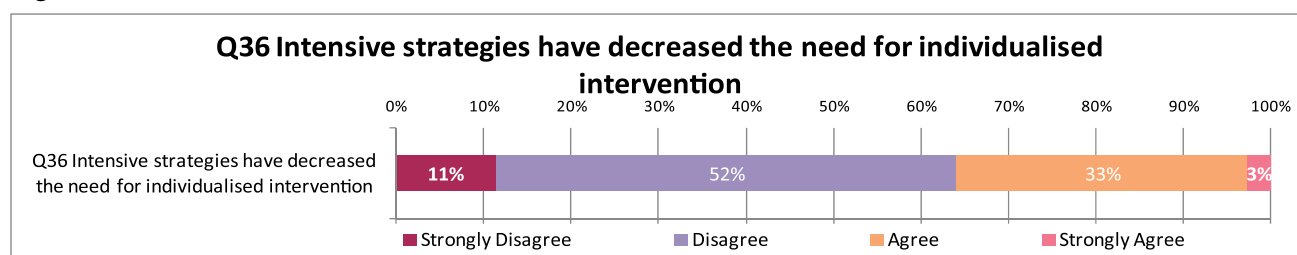
Opinions also varied as to the appropriateness of *Reading to Learn* approaches for less proficient readers, including students with special learning needs. It is noted that many of these students were also participating in the *MULTILIT* individual intervention as part of the NPLN initiative, and teachers found it difficult to separate the effects of the two interventions on student performance.

Many teachers and principals were unsure of the benefits of *Reading to Learn* for this cohort. The following teacher’s view reflects a commonly held belief:

“Reading to Learn has proven beneficial toward the middle- and upper-range ability level but falls short for lower ability students.”

In this context, the survey responses shown in Figure 4.10 regarding the impact of *Reading to Learn* are of great interest.

Figure 4.10: Need for individualised interventions



Only slightly more than one third of surveyed teachers believe that the program has reduced the need for individualised intervention, with nearly two thirds disagreeing with the statement. It appears that the whole-class teaching strategies of *Reading to Learn*, while apparently engaging for more able readers, do not take the place of one-to-one support for individuals who have very specific literacy learning needs.

A number of interview comments reinforce this impression, with teachers noting that lower ability students struggle with the program or “get lost” and still require individual assistance. The following comment reflects this common view:

“[Reading to Learn] doesn’t work for my students with very low levels of literacy.”

One parent questioned the breadth of effect, based on experience with [her] own two children, one of whom was experiencing difficulty:

“I wonder if Reading to Learn caters as well for those students that are not doing well?”

A small group of teachers believed that the explicit nature of the instructions and teaching strategies were very suitable for students with learning difficulties, often citing students’ increased willingness to ask questions and “have a go”. The scaffolding process was seen to support less proficient students as suggested by one teacher:

“I have quite a few low [performing students] in my class and I found it quite good.”

A number of comments referred to students with special learning needs, often in special education classes. Once again there was a diversity of views expressed regarding these students, though the weight of opinion appeared to be that the program did not particularly suit their needs. Teachers and principals at three of the seven schools expressed disappointment that students with mild intellectual impairment (IM) had not made the gains expected, with one teacher believing:

“It is just so prescriptive that you can’t go out of the framework enough to cater for those children.”

In other schools, teachers were more positive, with one observing:

“For the students with moderate delay, it has developed a love of reading and slightly better comprehension.”

While the program is not designed for students with severe learning needs, it appears that some teachers found the strategies beneficial for these students.

English as a second language (ESL) students

A small number of comments were made in relation to the effectiveness of the program for ESL students, with no clear trends emerging. The comment:

“For ESL students who need to learn how to read, I don’t think that the program accommodates those children as much for those who can read.”

This contrasted with other comments specifically noting improvement in comprehension for ESL students, as a result of the whole-class approach.

Reading to Learn and boys

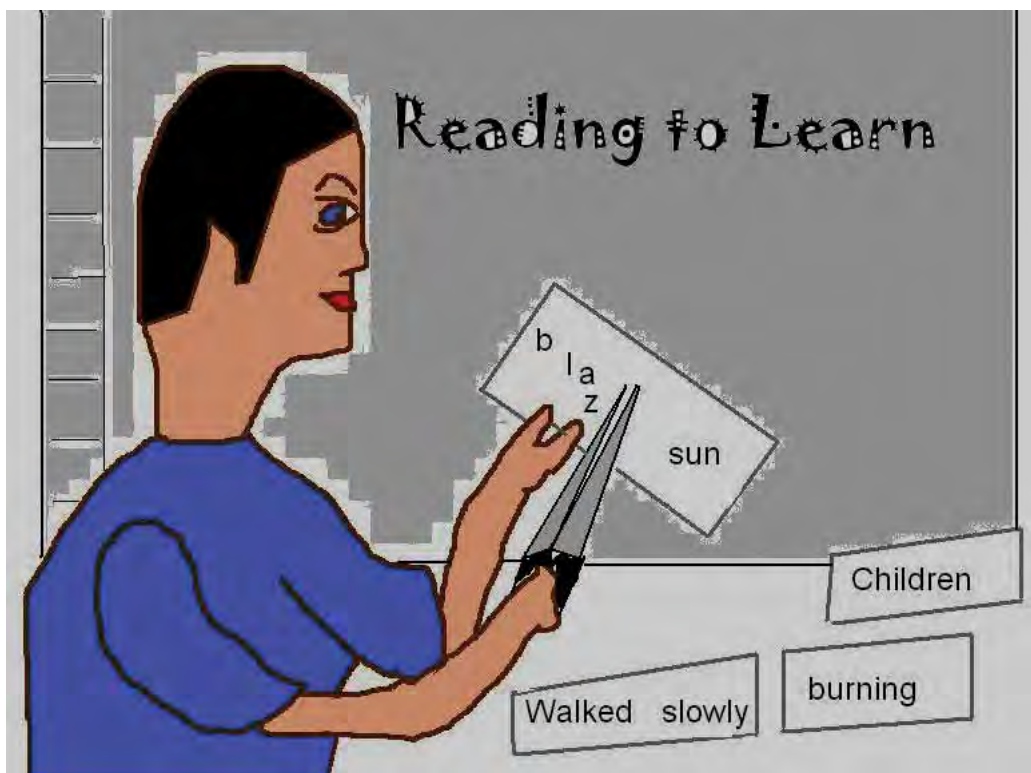
Similarly, there were only a few comments specifically related to the effectiveness of the program for boys. While it was expected that the outcomes for boys would be distinct, analysis of the data showed no clear trend.

A few teachers believed that the practical activities and questioning strategies led to greater engagement and enthusiasm amongst boys as well as girls. Others indicated that boys were sometimes impatient with the pace of *Reading to Learn* activities, finding the detailed and repetitive approaches tiresome. The following quote reflects this view:

“[The] boys can only take so much before they seem to get weary of the strategy.”

A couple of teachers suggested that the interests of boys need to be more explicitly reflected in the selection of texts. Apart from these comments, teachers did not express strong views about the general appropriateness of the *Reading to Learn* program for boys.

Overall, while many respondents found great benefit in the *Reading to Learn* approaches for their particular students, the weight of evidence from surveys and interviews does not support the program's claim that it can “enable the weakest students in a class to read and write successfully, at the same time as challenging more advanced students.”



5 Teacher perspectives

Section 4 presented teachers' insights into how well *Reading to Learn* 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.

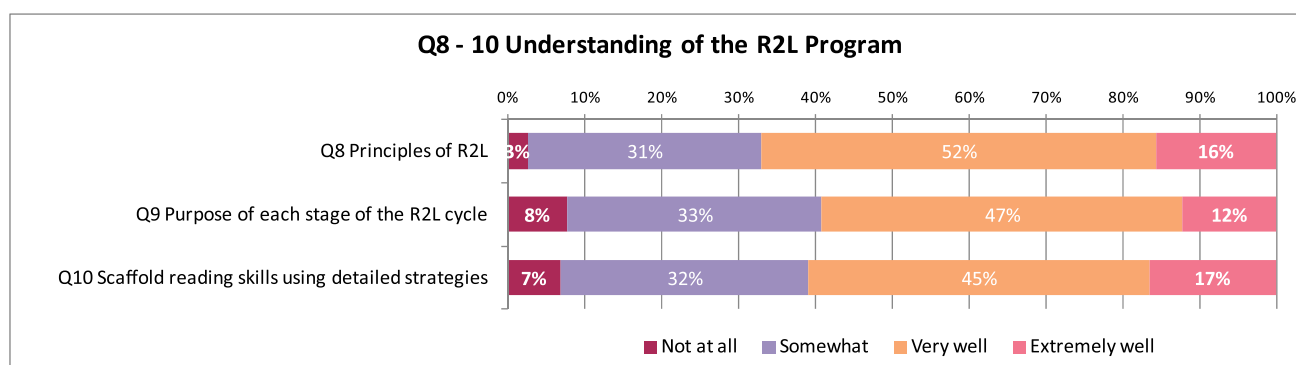
Key Findings:

- *Reading to Learn* strategies were well received by teachers and have often been incorporated into their teaching repertoires, especially more explicit reading strategies to develop comprehension skills.
- Teachers report being more reflective in their practice, and more discriminating in the selection of texts and design of learning activities.
- There has been improved teacher understanding of text types and scaffolding for writing.
- Collegial planning and joint preparation of resources has relieved workload pressures and enhanced teacher confidence.

While almost all respondents to the teacher survey indicated they had participated in formal *Reading to Learn* training (as set out in Section 3.2.1), the reported levels of understanding of the principles and purposes of the program were lower than expected.

Figure 5.1 reveals that up to 40% of teachers reported that they understand the principles and purposes of the program less than very well. A similar proportion expressed reservations about their understanding of the teaching sequence and detailed reading strategies that are at the centre of the program.

Figure 5.1: Teacher understanding of the *Reading to Learn* program



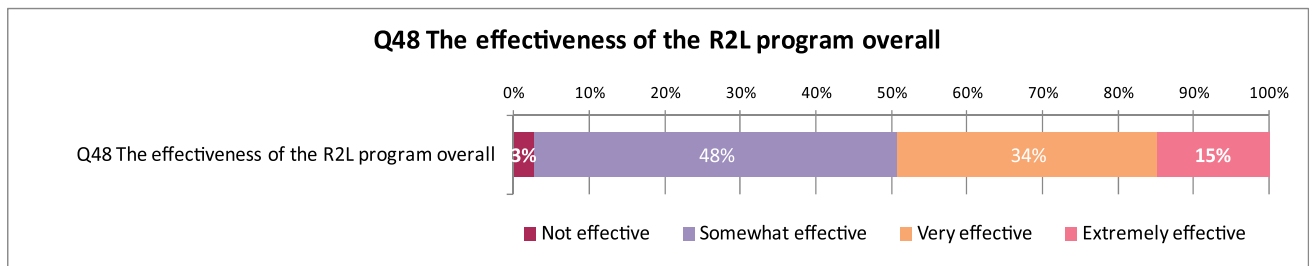
Teachers' varied responses to the initial training may have contributed to the uncertainty suggested here. Similar somewhat equivocal responses to the program and its impacts are evident in other survey responses and throughout the teacher interviews.

5.1 Teachers' overall views of *Reading to Learn*

Teachers' survey responses indicated that around half of the respondents saw *Reading to Learn* as an very effective or extremely effective program, with very few saying it is not effective, as shown in Figure 5.2. However, nine out of ten said they would recommend it to a colleague.

The majority of interviewed teachers expressed positive views about elements of the program, and saw it as a worthwhile literacy initiative. Importantly however, many commented that it needed to be adapted and supplemented to address all the required aspects of literacy and to cater for all students.

Figure 5.2: Teacher views of the program overall



Major benefits were reported to include:

- the *Reading to Learn* philosophy emphasising engagement in reading for pleasure, as well as providing for success
- using rich and engaging texts as models of good reading practice
- the structured and explicit teaching approach
- specific teaching strategies
- the potential for managing and teaching the whole class at once
- the level of engagement of students.

Comments from beginning teachers were consistent; they welcomed the training, which provided “*structure and purpose*” to literacy lessons and claimed greater confidence in teaching literacy, particularly writing.

In a few cases, teachers considered the program’s flexibility to be a benefit, however this was one of the most contested aspects of the program, seemingly linked to the messages gained through different initial training experiences. These issues are discussed in the section below.

When asked if other literacy programs were being used in addition to *Reading to Learn*, many teachers named other programs, particularly in the areas of phonics and spelling, (e.g. *Jolly Phonics*, *Spelling Mastery*, *Quota Spelling*, *PM Readers*). They consistently reported that *Reading to Learn* had insufficient focus on these areas. Other teachers expressed a lack of confidence that all the mandatory syllabus outcomes were being covered through *Reading to Learn*, with some commenting that they would continue with previous strategies such as the modelled, guided, independent reading approach.

A number of interviewees saw *Reading to Learn* as a suite of excellent strategies rather than a stand-alone literacy program, as expressed in frequent comments such as:

“...we have had to modify and adapt to make sure we are addressing absolutely everything in the English syllabus.”

“... at our school we stick to the methodology but we supplement the program.”

In summary, while most teachers saw real strengths in elements of the philosophy and methodology of *Reading to Learn*, there were many who believed that it was not sufficient in itself to address all literacy requirements in the curriculum. It appeared that the program was rarely implemented exclusively, or in its entirety.

5.1.1 Structure and flexibility

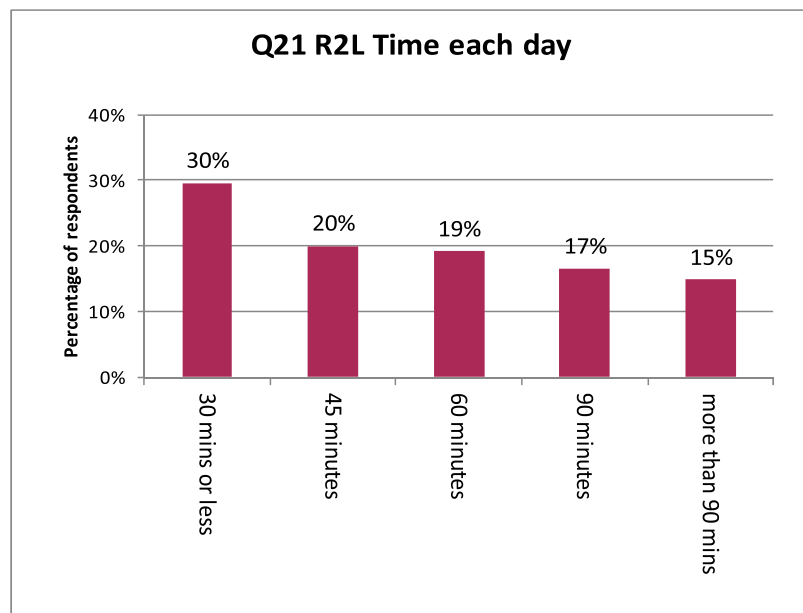
Reading to Learn was perceived to be a highly structured approach to programming and teaching, which brought both benefits and difficulties. The features of the program that teachers saw as fixed, include:

- recommended time allocation of 90 minutes per day
- teaching sequence
- structured lesson plans
- specified teaching strategies.

Meeting the recommended time allocation and implementing the full lesson sequence proved to be a challenge for many teachers. Allocating 90 minutes per day was seen as unreasonable by some teachers. Interview comments were confirmed by the survey data, which indicates that over two thirds of teachers spend 60 minutes or less each day on the program, as shown in Figure 5.3.

“I don't implement all areas of [Reading to Learn]: some of them are too time-consuming and I can't fit it in” was a frequent complaint recorded in teacher interviews.

Figure 5.3: Daily time allocation to *Reading to Learn* activities



Several schools made significant changes to their school timetables and allocation of support staff, in order to provide uninterrupted blocks of 'literacy time'. Teachers still had concerns that:

“... for what they would want you to cover every day you can't possibly do it. You'd have to be doing it all day every day to get through [it all].”

As some teachers gained experience and confidence with the *Reading to Learn* methodology, they began to adapt the program to suit their local circumstances. Teachers' sense of being able to use the program flexibly was seen as a key factor in their acceptance of the program.

In a minority of schools teachers felt compelled to teach the full cycle, for the full amount of time, causing some concern, particularly among more experienced staff. One respondent believed that:

“...the reason why (resentment) developed among the staff was because we were told it HAD to be implemented that exact way.”

Despite their reservations about times and inflexibility, the structured approach to programming and teaching, based on a core text, was seen as a key strength by most teachers. For many teachers it was a practical way of teaching, providing a scaffold for teachers as well as students. One teacher explained:

“Reading to Learn provides a clear focus for each lesson and a clear structure.”

In a few schools, more experienced teachers felt that it was too regimented. Individual teacher impressions of the flexibility or otherwise of the program were strongly affected by their training experience and the school implementation. Those who felt that they were encouraged to adapt the program were its greatest advocates and felt most strongly that their students had benefited.

5.1.2 Strategies

Even where *Reading to Learn* was seen as incomplete as a total literacy program, there was almost universal support for the key teaching strategies. Particularly appreciated were:

- developing background knowledge
- focus on authorship
- pre-teaching challenging words
- breaking down questions
- sentence making.

Specific activities such as 'cutting up sentences' and 'highlighting and circling' were referred to as engaging, practical, and fun for teachers as well as students.

Building detailed background knowledge was the most frequently mentioned strategy, obviously highly valued by teachers. It was suggested that it represents one of the biggest changes in practice, as a result of *Reading to Learn*. It is seen as a very valuable strategy for engaging students and establishing context, and building understanding in all KLAs. The following comments sum up the many comments heard during the interviews:

"[Students] are getting the message that to have success with reading you have to know what you are reading about so that background knowledge is really important."

"It helps me with every single lesson."

"...using strategies that I know are successful because I've seen them working".

The focus on analysing the author's intent and style, and students experimenting with these in their own writing, was viewed positively. Teachers, parents and teacher librarians noted a new interest, among students, in discussing particular authors and borrowing or purchasing their books, and a positive impact on students' writing. Breaking down sentences by physically cutting them up to analyse and experiment with language and sentence structure, while challenging for younger students, was also seen as a concrete way of engaging students in reading and writing.

The scaffolding process for writing was seen as especially valuable, with teachers noting that their preparation needed to be much more detailed in order to support students. One or two concerns were expressed by teachers who felt they needed to be particularly careful not 'spoon feed' students or encourage plagiarism.

Working in smaller groups on structured tasks with minimal supervision was popular with students who saw them as fun and varied. Some teachers felt that weaker readers were supported in this approach, though others felt that children could disguise difficulties in group situations.

Overall, it appears that the explicit teaching strategies are being used most frequently. Many teachers indicated that they would continue to do so regardless of whether the *Reading to Learn* program continued in the school.

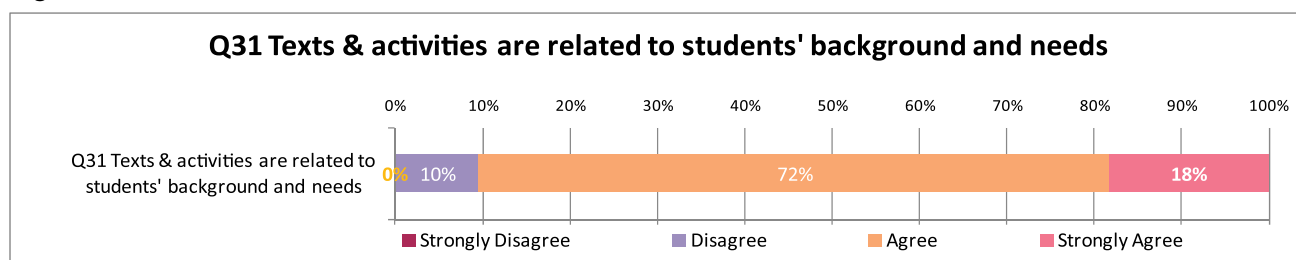
5.1.3 Choice and use of texts

A key characteristic of the program is the use of quality literature, or 'rich, authentic texts' as the focus of all literacy work. Teachers select texts in response to curriculum demands, as well to suit the needs and interests of students. Students are exposed to a wide range of quality, age-appropriate texts both for pleasure and as models of a variety of writing styles, including fiction, factual texts, poetry, magazines, comics and cartoons.

In survey responses, the vast majority of teachers expressed confidence that texts and activities suggested by *Reading to Learn* suited student needs, as demonstrated in Figure 5.4. This was the aspect of the program that received the strongest support in the teacher survey.

Unlike similar programs, there is not a list of prescribed texts in *Reading to Learn*. Rather, teachers are encouraged to select from a diversity of both factual and narrative texts.

Figure 5.4: Texts and activities are related to students' needs



Teachers were overwhelmingly positive about the variety and standard of texts they chose, as expressed by these fairly typical comments:

“...allows me to use everyday topics and class themes to develop reading skills in my students.”

“I can choose whichever quality texts I feel fit into the units of work I am teaching.”

“I have enjoyed using quality literature which my students have embraced.”

One teacher compared this approach favourably to the phonics-based readers she felt compelled to use previously.

The downside of local selection of texts comes from having to prepare teaching sequences and activities ‘from scratch’. This was frequently reported as excessively time-consuming, particularly in the early stages of implementation, when teachers’ knowledge and confidence were just beginning to grow.

Teachers reported a significant change in their text selection practices, becoming more discriminating about the quality and appropriateness of texts, seeking those with more sophisticated vocabulary, varied writing styles, and even those demonstrating particular parts of speech or language structures. Because all literacy work is linked to the core text, several teachers of senior primary classes felt a particular responsibility to select appropriate material, including factual texts and more lengthy and complex passages, in order to prepare their students for the demands of high school subjects.

There were, however, some concerns that the approach of using one text repeatedly did not suit students in all stages equally. Texts suitable for younger years did not necessarily suit detailed reading strategies, and some more capable students wanted greater variety.

Providing sufficient numbers of appropriate texts was also a challenge in some schools. Sourcing the volume and variety of texts required was a time-consuming and expensive, if rewarding task. While nearly all teachers appreciated the notion of choosing quality texts to work with, how this would be sustained beyond the period of NPLN funding was a question posed by many.

5.2 Effect on teacher work

The introduction of a new program always requires additional professional learning, commitment and effort. *Reading to Learn* is no exception. Teachers and executive staff spoke frequently about the impact of *Reading to Learn* on aspects of lesson preparation and programming.

5.2.1 Time, preparation and programming

Time pressures are a persistent issue for teachers. Initial establishment of *Reading to Learn* was seen as onerous, as teachers needed to develop detailed teaching sequences and whole units of work. Programming cycles of work as recommended in the training, proved to be overwhelming for many individual and groups of teachers. A commonly expressed view was that:

“...you don't have time to be starting from scratch as a teacher. It's very time-consuming.”

Several schools were beginning to address this programming issue by jointly developing units of work and a 'scope and sequence' so that materials could be shared and re-used over several years. Teachers acknowledged that it became easier when units were able to be re-used by classes in the same year or stage level, especially in the second year of the program.

The regular and time-consuming nature of preparing individual lesson materials also drew much comment, even from the most enthusiastic of *Reading to Learn* advocates. One teacher in a small school bluntly observed:

“...it was just ridiculous trying to photocopy, cut up strips and do all that sort of thing. We just didn't have the time.”

Similarly, a principal claimed that the amount of preparation appeared to be in excess of that required by other programs.

NPLN funds were most frequently used to release teachers from class in order to do the required programming and preparation. While highly valued, it was acknowledged that this level of funding will not continue, representing the major concern for teachers and executives in maintaining the *Reading to Learn* program.



5.2.2 Teacher commitment to implementing *Reading to Learn*

Despite the time pressures and impact on teachers' workload, the majority of principals or school leaders reported that their staff members were very committed to *Reading to Learn*.

While acknowledging the magnitude of change and demands on time, one teacher reflected:

"I just think the commitment of the staff has just been amazing. It was good to be a part of that."

A coordinator reported proudly that teachers in her school had:

"...really worked hard to implement it as it's meant to be."

Even some staff that had not undergone training showed unexpected levels of commitment, doing their best to implement the program with their classes. In some cases, casual and part-time staff who had been trained along with the rest of the school staff felt rewarded as they also contributed to the implementation the program and helped to provide greater continuity for students.

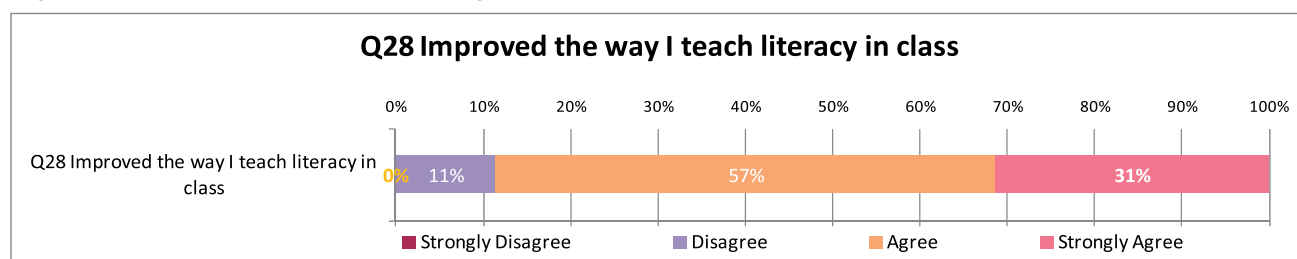
In contrast to this situation, several principals noted distinct negativity towards the program amongst staff who felt that the training had been too structured and inflexible. Concern was expressed that without commitment from the teachers, there was less likelihood of the program succeeding over time.

The level of staff confidence in implementing the program also affected their level of commitment. Where support was provided at the school level, there was a corresponding increase in teacher confidence.

5.3 Effect on teacher practices

In teacher surveys, nearly 90% of respondents claimed to have improved their literacy teaching practice as a result of implementing *Reading to Learn*, as indicated in Figure 5.5.

Figure 5.5: Improved literacy teaching



Many teachers and principals in the seven schools visited, also believe that teacher capability and practice had improved as a result of the training and implementation of the *Reading to Learn* program. The training was particularly attributed with building teachers' knowledge of how to teach grammar, language, reading and writing. In several cases teachers highlighted that this addressed gaps in their pre-service teacher training courses. One teacher explained that, for a generation of teachers who may have lacked formal learning of grammar during their own schooling, *Reading to Learn* has made them better able to teach their students.

A few teachers contrasted their previous practice of dividing the class into reading groups to do activities, with the richness of their new lessons. Others acknowledged that *"it's easy to become stale with your teaching"* but that exposure to the different teaching methods of *Reading to Learn* and pressure to implement it, had been beneficial in challenging them to *"get out of your comfort zone"*.

A minority view was expressed that the program assumed an unrealistic knowledge and love of quality literature amongst teachers.

Teachers reported a variety of ways in which the well-defined structure of *Reading to Learn* had enhanced their general teaching practices.

Overall, teachers reported:

- being more reflective about their own practice, across all their teaching
- being more discriminating in selecting topics and resources to address student interest and needs
- increased ability to develop well-structured lessons, using more explicit teaching strategies,
- feeling better prepared to assist students.

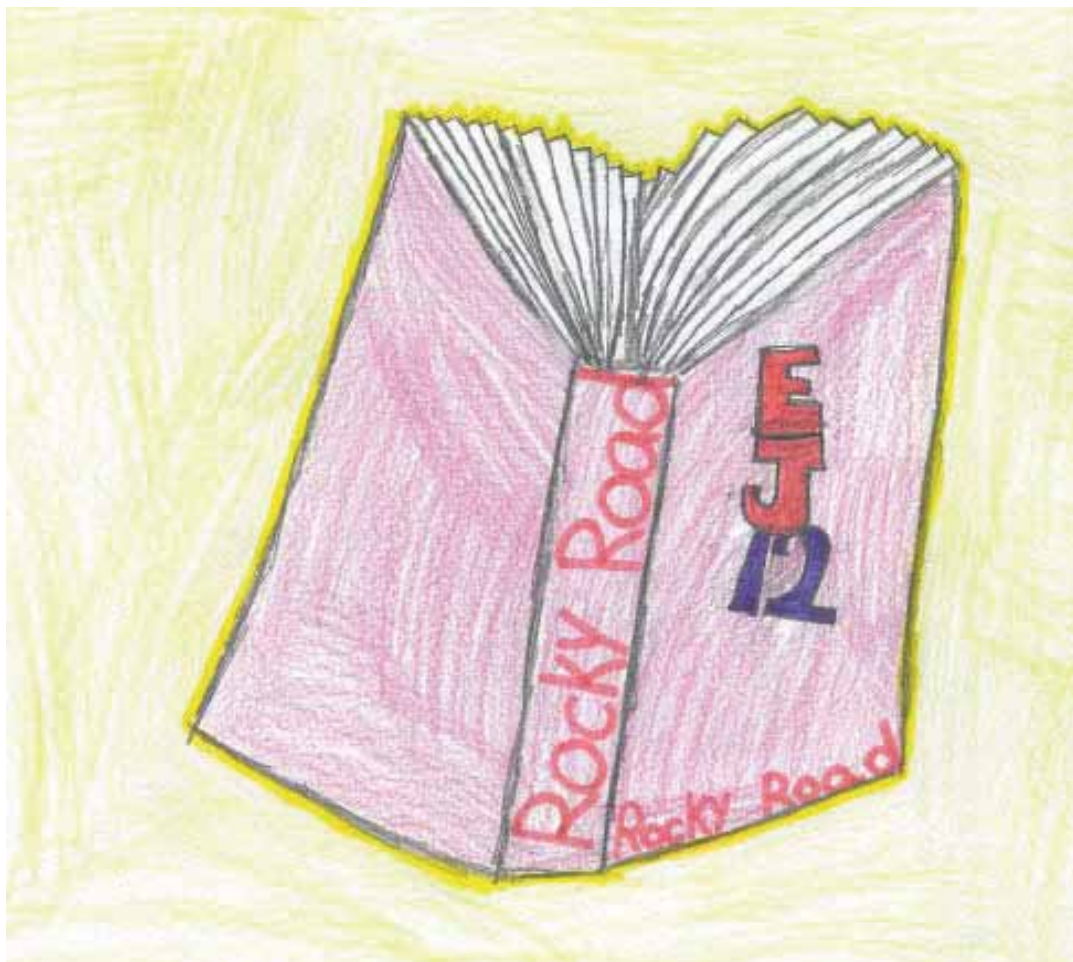
Overall, teachers spoke of being more critical and thoughtful, and more confident in planning lessons that were “*more detailed, motivational and meaningful*”.

These positive comments about the quality of teaching taking place were balanced by a small number of less encouraging remarks such as:

“We were having difficulties understanding how Reading to Learn indeed provided the school with good quality literacy teaching.”

A distinctive finding of the evaluation was the persistent occurrence of conflicting views, often within individual school contexts.

In most of the teacher interviews, there was a small but significant number of teachers for whom the *Reading to Learn* experience was not as positive as generally represented.



6 Impacts in schools

Taking a whole-school approach was seen as a critical success factor by many respondents. To be effective, introducing *Reading to Learn* required leadership and planning, training of as many staff members as possible, and involvement of parents and community.

The previous sections of this report have described how this approach influenced the implementation of *Reading to Learn* and the effects it had for students and teachers. This section examines the effect that implementing *Reading to Learn* as part of the National Partnership on Literacy and Numeracy (NPLN) has had on the organisational unit of the school itself.

Key Findings:

- Whole-school engagement with the program is identified as a critical factor influencing success.
- Teachers demonstrate increased awareness of the benefits of working collegially.
- Practices such as whole-school planning, team development and learning-focused dialogue are becoming embedded in school operation.
- Ongoing commitment and support from the school principal and leadership team is seen as essential for sustainability of the program.

While the focus of the partnership was on introducing the literacy program, it is important to remember that *Reading to Learn* 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 *Reading to Learn*. It is acknowledged that the changes described in this section have resulted from the combined effects of all aspects of the NPLN initiatives.

Cohesion and division

The most obvious of all findings of the *Reading to Learn* evaluation, is the stark difference in outcome for school communities, between those schools where the program's implementation created greater cohesion among staff, and those where it divided the school.

Three major factors appear to have contributed to the differences in impact:

- the variation in quality of initial teacher professional learning experiences
- ongoing support that either contributed to negative perceptions, or alleviated their effect
- the length of time over which training took place, influencing how soon a sense of shared implementation could be established.

Whole-school implementation was a key success factor identified by the majority of the schools visited during the evaluation. However, in a significant minority of schools this sense of shared purpose was lacking.

As many schools were unable to train all teachers simultaneously, the introduction of the program took many months to complete. As one teacher noted:

“... it will be great when all staff are trained and the whole school has taken on the strategies.”

Such difficulty was further aggravated by teacher mobility; some teachers left the school at the end of the first year; others arrived, with no knowledge of, or training in the program. At the time of the teacher survey, 83% of respondents had been using the program for less than 2 years, nearly 30% for less than 1 year. As one teacher explained:

“I don't feel that I know the program well enough yet. [It's] hard to gain momentum in just one year.”

Negative experiences during the initial teacher training had notable impact on many teachers' attitudes to the program. The greatest barrier to successful implementation came from teachers who were resistant to the changes in practice demanded by the program, and from those who chose not to take part at all.

Although some respondents didn't really mind that only some teachers and classes were using the program, many others made comments such as:

“It was really hard when we only had teachers here and there who had done it, who were really enthusiastic and wanted to start implementing things”

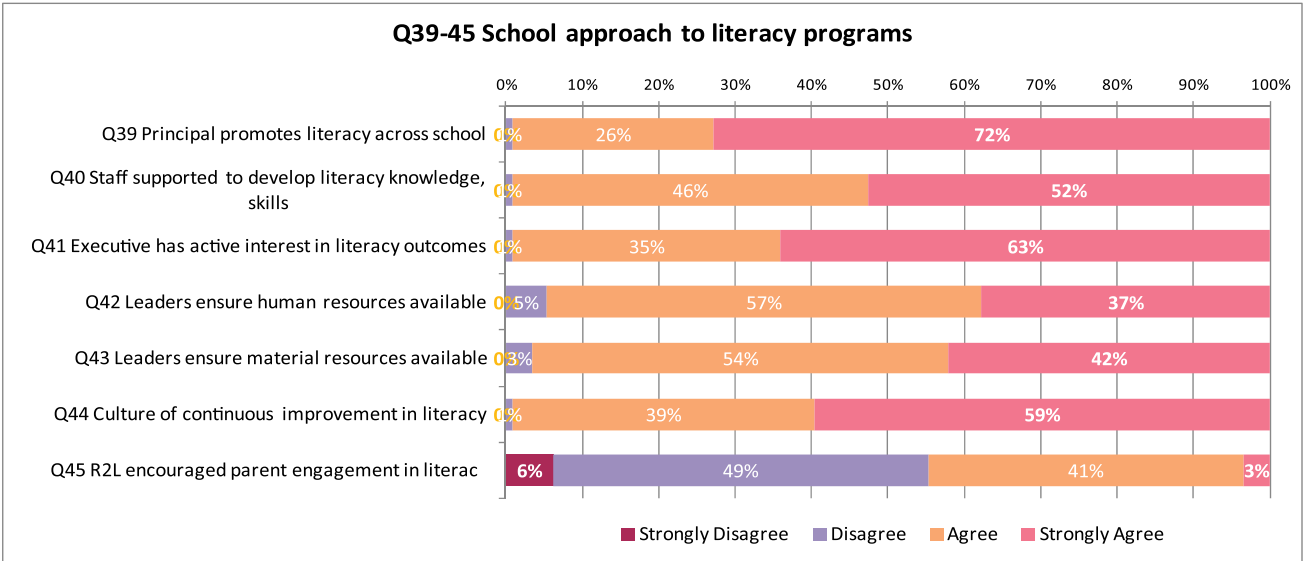
Some teachers noted that the second year of implementation was easier, as more staff worked together on the program.

6.1 Whole-school benefits

The NPLN priority was on implementation of *Reading to Learn* in Stages 2 and 3 [Years 3 to 6]. Most schools chose to introduce the program across all stages from Kindergarten, to achieve 'whole-school' implementation.

Irrespective of how successfully this intention was fulfilled, the foundation for improvement was laid by the direction provided by school leaders. The survey data shown in Figure 6.1 indicates that almost universally, respondents acknowledged the supportive role that the principal and school leaders played in establishing an increased emphasis on literacy learning. Leadership, management, resourcing and engagement across the school, were each strongly affirmed. All questions related to school management issues, received almost unanimously positive responses.

Figure 6.1: Creating an emphasis on literacy in the school



Only the question regarding encouragement of parent engagement received a more mixed set of responses. This issue is addressed further in Section 6.3 below.

Teachers frequently emphasised the importance of *“whole-school buy in to an intervention of this size”* in order to provide shared direction and support for what they described as *“massive change”* in their teaching.

Where schools achieved cohesion across the school, several benefits were described. Continuity of literacy teaching and learning, fostering collaboration and consistent experiences for students, stand out as particular gains.

6.1.1 Continuity of literacy practices

"To be effective it has to be across the whole school" was typical of comments heard in teacher interviews.

A school's commitment to *Reading to Learn* was most clearly demonstrated through its inclusion in the School Literacy Plan. Teachers noted the value in being able to refer to the plan, adding focus and direction to their planning.

Continuity for teachers

Consistency of approach was valued highly by many participants. Teachers acknowledged that having everyone engaged in *Reading to Learn*, with a common understanding of the theory and practice of literacy teaching, provided a sense of mutual support and direction, regardless of stage or year level. It allowed for moderation of student performance against common criteria, especially in writing.

The continuity of practice across classes and stages not only assisted teachers to support each other, but it also created a sense of 'shared regulation'. Shared experiences helped keep teachers *"true to the program"* ensuring they were *"teaching in the same style"*.

Even when introduction of the program was staged over several terms, some teachers found that as implementation increased across the school, and mutual support became the norm, so teachers' confidence increased.

In some cases, long-term or regular casual staff have also picked up the strategies, enhancing continuity of learning for students, even when class teachers are not available.

The disadvantage of a whole-school emphasis came when teachers felt obligated to use the program. There was some level of concern amongst Kindergarten teachers across several schools, who expressed doubts that *Reading to Learn* was really suitable for their students. However, because of the emphasis on the whole-school approach they felt compelled to trial it, despite the difficulties they encountered.

Continuity for students

Continuity of literacy experiences was often quoted as a significant benefit for students. Shared implementation of *Reading to Learn* increased pedagogical consistency across all classes in the school and supported students as they moved from year to year. It is seen as important that every class is learning the language, techniques and pitfalls, so that skills learned in early years can be transferred as a student progresses through the stages.

Unfortunately this intention was disrupted when even a few teachers chose to opt out of the program; both because the continuity of implementation did not occur, and because the remaining teachers were disgruntled that their colleagues were 'allowed' to do so.

6.1.2 Professional dialogue, collaboration and change

Major benefits of the shared professional learning are reported to be increased collaboration, sharing of resources, professional dialogue and enhanced teacher confidence.

Professional dialogue

The most commonly cited benefit to teachers from whole-school implementation is the change that has occurred in staffroom conversation. The program has stimulated lots of talk amongst teachers about their individual practices, aspects of the program and about literacy in general. Such professional dialogue is seen as supportive for all involved and sometimes as the most effective form of ongoing professional learning.

Collaboration in planning and programming

Opportunities to work together and share experiences, particularly in stage or year groups, were also frequently cited as a key benefit. The mutual support that results from shared planning and programming stimulates further learning from each other, building individual teacher and collective capacity.

In some instances, teachers' negative attitudes were mitigated by the support received from colleagues. Teachers saw sharing units and developing resources and units as a good way of supporting particularly reluctant teachers to become more familiar, willing and experienced in implementing *Reading to Learn*. Similarly, involving everyone in ongoing decision-making across the school, counteracted some of the early resentment of "being told you have to do this".

Particularly benefits that resulted from collaboration include:

- reducing the considerable workload in creating the required teacher sequences and units of work
- sharing resources within the year or stage, and across stages
- visiting classes to observe lessons
- assessing and moderating student work, particularly in writing.

Examples of typical comments includes:

"How they wanted us to plan would have taken hours and seemed unreasonable. [By working together] we've been able to cut it down."

"I was just beside myself thinking how I was going to fit it in and then I spoke to a couple of other people and we compared notes and we all realised we were doing way too much and once we had cut it down and ... that helped."

"I can take resources to my new stage 2 class next year. We swap stages every two years here, and share resources with one another."

"R2L is well supported within our school - resources, leaders, demo lessons."

Finally, one teacher described the situation that many aimed for:

"I work with my peer stage teacher; together we identify texts for the term, divide the programming and share the workload."

Survey data indicates that about three-quarters of teachers now share planning with other *Reading to Learn* teachers, at least to some extent (as shown earlier in Section 3.4, Figure 3.8). However, only 39% suggested they did so frequently or always.

Some teachers wanted more opportunities to work together, but noted that there were limited funds available to enable this to happen in school time.

Given the difficulties some schools experienced in establishing a strong school approach, it is not surprising that collaboration and shared planning were not universally embraced. In some schools a team approach was less evident or completely lacking. Teachers commented:

"The main weaknesses are the staff [who are] not willing to accept change and have a go."

Others, who were not as committed to the program, complained that:

"We didn't get any planning days - you did"

Some collaboration occurred between schools, although this was very limited. One teacher identified that the region

provided a wiki for sharing resources between schools, and more recently a Moodle environment. However, variable quality limited their usefulness. Putting in place quality assurance processes would make the resources particularly valuable to teachers.

Changing the school culture

A number of respondents commented that there had been a significant change in the culture of their school which they attributed to implementation of the *Reading to Learn* program. As one teacher observed:

“It’s really good to be a part of - it has been a massive change, but we’ve gotten through it and we’ve learnt a lot and everyone’s been on board the whole way”.

Another noted:

“I know a lot of people found it difficult especially at first to change so dramatically from what they were used to.”

One principal explained that the executive had acknowledged this challenge and put in place strategies to make teachers feel more comfortable.

Evidence of positive changes in practice across the school included:

- staff talking about teaching and learning in the staff room
- being more motivated about teaching literacy
- sharing of newly learnt strategies with other teachers and support staff
- implementation of strategies in various Key Learning Areas.

Some teachers claimed:

“I think we’re lucky that most people have taken it on willingly and it is a huge change”.

Others felt that the time frame for implementation had caused stress for teachers and that lack of commitment by some staff had the potential to break down the processes.

Overall, there is evidence that in those schools where school leaders acknowledged the significant pressures of change experienced in adopting the *Reading to Learn* program, and where they built in support strategies, there were rewards for individual teachers and the school as a whole. These went beyond literacy teaching to increased general teacher motivation and whole-school capacity building.

6.13 Commitment to ongoing support and training

For many teachers it was the ongoing support from within the school that enabled them to persevere and succeed in implementing *Reading to Learn*.

“When teachers are taking on a completely new pedagogy around teaching reading, there was a huge amount of uncertainty and a fear factor. The basic implementation of the whole program freaked people out at first because it was very different to what its been historically, the way to teach reading.”

The establishment of the *Reading to Learn* team, and funding the coordinators or mentors, enabled timely and targeted support for the specific issues or difficulties that teachers were experiencing. Sometimes the mentoring was most useful in working with stage groups, to build their willingness to work together and see each other as a resource, and well as developing collaborative planning processes that may be sustained beyond the period of the partnership.

One of the most welcome forms of in-school support was the provision of clerical assistance to alleviate the sometimes arduous load of preparing materials for students.

In-school support was particularly necessary and valued in two situations:

- to support those teachers who were not able to take part in initial training, especially part-time teachers, casual teachers and support staff
- where there were negative experiences with, or reactions to the initial training.

Teachers noted the value of casual teachers being supported:

“We’ve got new casual teachers and we’re using the support/coordinator role to sort of train them in professional learning around how to teach [R2L] and stuff. It helps us too.”

“[casuals] ...they’re probably not trained but they’re implementing the program quite well and they are well supported here at school. They’ve put lots of things into place.”

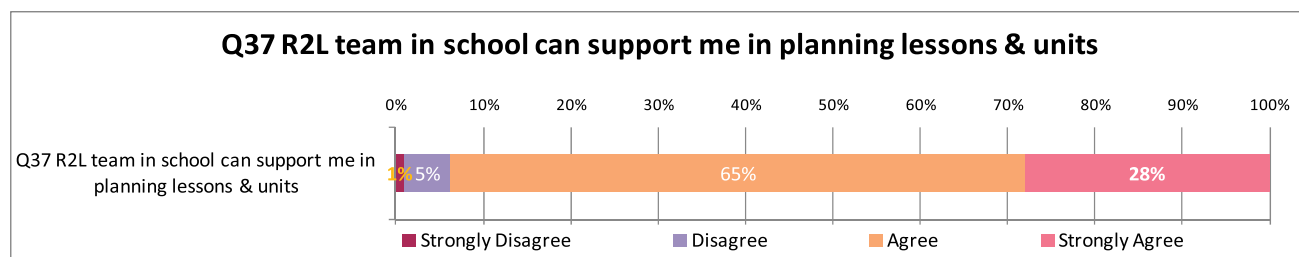
Occasionally the very negative attitudes of teachers, following their initial training, were able to be turned around by the collegial support provided at school.

Some coordinators and executives felt that many of the newly trained teachers were not receiving the support to implement the program successfully, believing all staff needed to be mentored through the program.

Building support capacity

Teachers reported great confidence in the capacity of their colleagues to provide the level of support required, as demonstrated through the survey responses shown in Figure 6.2.

Figure 6.2: Reading to Learn team support



Having acknowledged the value of the in-school support, school leaders considered ways of securing this resource, building expertise in the school to be able to provide initial training, especially for new teachers.

Regional consultants were utilised to provide trainer workshops, to build the capacity of schools to train staff in-house. Principals talked of:

“... [having] one trained person being accredited and another who is going down the process. We have two staff training this year who will also look to accreditation for next year.”

“Having [coordinator] accredited means that she can teach other staff to use R2L, she can’t accredit them, but most of our training can be done in the school in a cost-effective way. She is therefore the agent of change. Previously the training had taken four blocks of two days each, cost \$2000 per block per person, and required 50 hours of teaching coverage for each person trained, plus travel and accommodation expenses...”

Accredited trainers are more able to provide refresher sessions, as well as incidental support day-to-day and, of course, initial training for teachers new to the school.

Finally, building expertise across the school also contributes to maintaining the quality of teaching practices, summed up by one coordinator:

“...the authenticity and integrity of the program may be diminished without the ongoing professional development and support.”

6.1.4 Assessment and use of data

A notable absence in interviews with principals and teachers was discussion of working with SMART data and collaborating around the interpretation and use of assessment data in decision making.

Initially, there was some use of SMART data to identify greatest areas of need, but only occasional mention (in one school) was made of working with teachers to use data to guide decision-making. Similarly there was little or no emphasis given to developing teacher capacity in effective interpretation or use of data.

6.2 Involving parents

One of the distinguishing features of *Reading to Learn* is its recognition of the importance of the home environment in encouraging a love of reading in children. The program promotes the involvement of parents, suggesting that tuition be offered, even on a one-to-one basis.

Schools have taken different approaches to equipping parents to assist their children. In at least one school, parents reported having been trained through *Reading to Learn* demonstration sessions or parent training sessions, to which “quite a few parents turned up”. In other cases only those parents who helped in classrooms had any knowledge of the program.

A number of parents commented that they were aware of *Reading to Learn* being implemented and saw benefits for their children’s literacy development, but had little understanding of the specific strategies.

Parents expressed great willingness to take an active role in supporting their children at home. However, teachers’ attitudes to taking advantage of parent assistance were varied. Several comments were made regarding the difficulties of making this work. Some teachers described the variability of the support that was actually provided. Several suggestions were made that the effort required did not pay off, particularly for those students who needed it most.

The opportunity to engage this key stakeholder group in a major pedagogical change affecting the learning of their children, has not been fully realised through the *Reading to Learn* implementation.

6.3 Sustaining *Reading to Learn* beyond the NPLN

As reflected in Section 5, many teachers and principals saw great value in the philosophy and strategies of *Reading to Learn*, but were less persuaded that it was a complete literacy program. For *Reading to Learn*, discussions of sustaining the program took a different direction to that expected. Often the major concern related to maintaining teachers’ ability to employ the individual strategies, and maintain the richness of literacy activity, rather than employing the program as a whole.

Investment in training and resources during the period of NPLN is seen as the key to sustainability of the program. Where all teachers have been trained and at least most are committed to the program, there is a strong desire to see it maintained.

A number of teachers and principals identified other factors that will contribute to schools’ ability to sustain the program, including:

- maintenance of expertise within the school to provide refresher training and ongoing (mutual) support
- creation of banks of ‘scripts’ and unit plans to be shared for use with future classes
- establishment of strategies and practices within the school, to continue the levels of collaboration and shared planning
- careful management of the resources that have been acquired, especially class sets of books.

Most importantly, several teachers considered that *Reading to Learn* would only be maintained if it provided sufficient “evidence of benefit to students”.

Almost equal numbers of respondents identified barriers to sustainability, including:

- lack of initial training across the school
- difficulties of finding a more acceptable training model
- uncertainty around support from the region, or from within the school
- deficits identified in the program’s ability to address all required aspects of literacy learning
- ongoing budget demands of ensuring sufficient sets of books and consumable materials for class use.

High staff turnover and the associated need for ongoing professional learning is identified as the most significant barrier in all situations. Even within the implementation period some schools found it difficult to maintain training for new staff.

Schools demonstrated different responses to the challenges of sustaining the program. Three trends emerged:

- establishing a solid foundation for sustainability during the NPLN funding period
- reliance on additional funding to maintain new practices
- individual teacher implementation, either alone or in collaboration with colleagues.

6.3.1 NPLN as an investment in sustainability

Some principals were confident that the investments they had made using NPLN funds, especially in training a critical group of teachers, would enable *Reading to Learn* to be sustained for at least a few years. One school leader explained that her efforts in training and supporting teachers has paid off:

“I would say the teachers are the driving force behind it now because we can see how well it works.”

Another suggested that:

“R2L will be sustained by the staff adapting the program to suit our class needs. It will complement other programs that we have in place.”

Several schools endeavoured to build up a bank of resources, and one principal believed other funding sources could allay some of the day-to-day costs.

Only one school in the cohort has invested in supporting a teacher to become an accredited trainer. They recognised that this would allow for ongoing in-school training and support for teachers, especially when the prospect of support from the region was not assured. This is a costly option, however.

Most schools were concerned that *Reading to Learn* could only proceed with continued training for new teachers as well as updates for those already trained. One otherwise positive respondent observed:

“I have concerns that staff members that may be expected to teach using Reading to Learn strategies in the future, [and] may be reluctant to do so without the same extensive training”

6.3.2 Sustainability reliant on additional funding

Even among those who highly valued the program, sustainability was seen by principals to be dependent on further financial support. The following comment was typical of the group of school leaders who could not see how to continue without additional funds:

“We hope for sustainability of the program but maintaining the level of funding for professional development and resources will be difficult or impossible without the level of funding received as part of the National Partnership.”

A couple of principals explored a variety of different avenues for obtaining the required funds, relying on an adhoc combination of short term sources, as suggested here:

“It will be difficult to train additional staff, only half of the coordinator’s wage is covered by NPLN and when that finishes she can be topped up with NP Low SES funding in 2012, but after that the training won’t be sustainable and will be an unfunded cost for the school for any new staff. ... a SiPs school as well, so the causal days to cover training have been partly funded from that source.”

A few creative solutions were suggested, such as including the *Reading to Learn* training in teacher preparation courses or offering it as an accredited unit towards a Masters degree. The general feeling was that staff training costs would remain a significant barrier to sustainability. One principal stated that:

“...the cost of staff training would be better spent on resources.”

6.3.3 Individual teachers

There is a certain level of individual support for continuing with the strategies irrespective of whole-school decisions. Several teachers were very positive about the specific strategies they had learnt, and were confident they could continue to use them in future. One teacher commented:

“Once the methodology is accepted into a teacher’s repertoire it will always be used, it becomes self-sustaining”.

Such ongoing commitment was, however, frequently qualified, with teachers suggesting conditions such as *“if it were to be modified to suit all levels of ability”* or only if *“a modified program”*.

There were positive signs for the future however, with one teacher proclaiming:

“I will be teaching in this manner until I have a boss who says I can’t.”

Others stressed that *“the teachers will still have the skills”* and continue to implement the strategies which they believed benefited the students. Adaptability was a key issue, with many teachers preferring to *“simplify everything we have and sustain this”*.

In summary, many schools reported that practices across the school had improved as a result of the training and implementation of the *Reading to Learn* program. However, benefits of whole-school implementation, particularly in providing continuity for students, are only realised if there is long-term commitment to the program.



7 Summary of findings and conclusions

This section provides a summary of the value and impact of *Reading to Learn*, 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 National Partnership Agreement on Literacy and Numeracy, 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 practice.

Reading to Learn is presented as a comprehensive approach to learning to read and write, implemented at a whole-class level. It is argued that the teaching sequence and detailed reading strategies are incorporated into usual class literacy activities. The intention is to involve all students in common activities, creating a class environment in which all students are continually engaged in reading for pleasure and in successful completion of literacy tasks, and avoiding the creation of a differentiated curriculum aimed at underachieving students (Koop & Rose, 2008).

In order to be able to implement *Reading to Learn*, teachers participated in an extensive professional learning program, spanning a number of weeks. The focus of the NPLN was on implementation of the program across Years 3 to 6. In some schools *Reading to Learn* was implemented in all years from Kindergarten to Year 6.

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

While a finding of this evaluation was that *Reading to Learn* has promoted engagement in literacy, and specifically in reading, and improved the literacy outcomes of most students, there was significant variation in its impact between schools, and sometimes within schools. Broad findings regarding the overall program implementation, its outcomes for students and teachers and the impact on schools are outlined below.

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 *Reading to Learn*

The impact of *Reading to Learn* on student outcomes, teacher practice and whole-school change, varied greatly across schools. This appeared to be dependent on the approach taken by school leaders. Individual teachers' responses to the initial *Reading to Learn* professional learning package had a strong bearing on how the program was implemented.

7.1.1 Effectiveness of *Reading to Learn* for students

There is a notable mismatch between student performance results shown in external performance measures and the perceptions of many school stakeholders, regarding the effectiveness of the *Reading to Learn* program.

While conceding they should be viewed with caution, NAPLAN results over the period of NPLN implementation suggested that student performance had not improved as hoped in schools that implemented *Reading to Learn*.

By contrast, many principals, teachers, students and parents expressed the firm belief that *Reading to Learn* has contributed very positively to students' reading achievement. There were sufficient qualifications to these views, however, to suggest that findings are mixed in regard to literacy improvements for students.

One of the strongest findings was that student engagement with reading is heightened in *Reading to Learn* classrooms. Increased levels of participation, task completion, skill transfer and reading outside school, were all strongly described as outcomes for many students. The explicit teaching strategies and quality of texts being used were both credited with this very positive finding. The strong physical interaction with text, through highlighting, cutting up strips and sentence making activities, may also have contributed to these outcomes.

A second frequently-reported effect of the program was an improvement in student writing skills. While this aspect of literacy was not a focus of the evaluation, there were repeated and strong messages from respondents that the regular, supported practice of writing had led to widespread improvement.

There was less consensus regarding students' achievement in reading. While many teachers and students claimed that comprehension, in particular, was enhanced as a result of the explicit teaching strategies, a number of others expressed reservations about the effect of the program on students' ability to read independently. Teachers who had had less experience with *Reading to Learn*, reported far lower incidence of student improvement.

The suitability of the program for all students also drew very mixed opinions, with many reservations being expressed regarding the efficacy of the recommended whole-class approach for all students.

Teachers expressed uncertainty as to whether the model could adequately cater for the needs of lower achieving students and younger students, in particular.

7.1.2 Effectiveness of *Reading to Learn* for teachers

Building teacher capacity was a key intention of the NPLN. The majority of teachers believed that they had improved their literacy teaching practices as a result of the program. They claimed to be:

- more knowledgeable about literacy teaching strategies
- generally more reflective and discriminating in all aspects of their teaching
- more familiar and proficient in developing systematic assessment strategies
- more prepared to teach explicitly.

Several teachers claimed that the program caused them to raise their expectations of their students.

Reading to Learn was particularly beneficial for beginning teachers, who suggested that it provided support in areas such as formal grammar, which they felt they had not learnt sufficiently well in their pre-service training, nor at school themselves.

In general, teachers most appreciated *Reading to Learn*'s structured program and the use of a core text for the whole class.

Teachers were divided in their opinions of the cohesiveness of the program. Commonly it was appreciated as a set of very useful teaching strategies, rather than the complete literacy program it purports to be. They expressed positive views about elements of the program, and saw these as worthwhile additions to their literacy teaching repertoire. Many respondents indicated that the program needed to be supplemented and adapted in order to cover all curriculum requirements and to cater for all students. One teacher's comment is representative:

“R2L has a place in our school community. It's good teaching methodology but we don't believe it is the only way to teach literacy.”

At least initially many teachers regarded the increased workload and demands on their time as excessive, adding to the negative views of a notable number of respondents.

Interestingly, only 49% of survey respondents described *Reading to Learn* as very or extremely effective, and yet a very high 88% claimed they would recommend the program to others.

7.1.3 Effectiveness of *Reading to Learn* for school organisation and culture

There was great variation in how *Reading to Learn* was implemented in each school; from whole-school focussed approaches where all teachers were involved, to situations where teachers were able to opt out or were left to work on their own.

Schools where teachers and principals expressed the most positive views of *Reading to Learn*, were those where school leaders were successful in creating a shared commitment to the program, and shared responsibility for the literacy outcomes of students. This relied on:

- strong leadership from principals or other school leaders, and the development of leadership skills in other teachers
- organisational change to enable strategic and targeted planning and shared decision-making
- establishment of a *Reading to Learn* team and coordinator position
- ongoing support, especially for teachers whose experience of *Reading to Learn* training was not as successful as anticipated
- a sense of involvement in decision-making amongst teachers, and willingness to take on new roles and responsibilities.

Barriers to effective change in school practices and culture included:

- selection of a literacy program imposed on the school community
- inappropriate or unsuccessful initial teacher training
- teachers choosing not to take part, or resistant to new practices
- training provided to limited numbers of teachers and support staff.

Irrespective of the success in establishing a whole-school commitment to the program, the universally reported benefit of involvement in the NPLN was the increased emphasis given to literacy learning throughout the school.

Parent and community involvement was not a prominent feature of the program in any of the schools visited.

Some respondents indicated that a longer timeframe may be needed to establish what they perceived to be a complex whole-school change process, in addition to the “*massive change of pedagogy*” for individual teachers.

7.2 Efficient achievement of goals

Reading to Learn promises a self-contained, holistic program for teaching reading and writing. The program provides teachers with:

- a structured teaching sequence centred on a core text
- explicit activities that scaffold student skill development
- assessments embedded in the teaching sequence
- suggested resources that support student engagement in lesson activities.

Within the context of the NPLN initiative, efficient implementation was judged in terms of financial and human costs, set against the benefits for students and for schools generally. These in turn informed views about the sustainability of the program beyond the period of the NPLN.

7.2.1 Financial costs

Major financial costs included initial and ongoing training for teachers, relief for teachers to collaboratively plan and prepare materials, and purchase of resources for student use.

The initial training proved to be one of the most contested areas of the *Reading to Learn* experience. There was great variation in levels of satisfaction with, and response to different training providers. While many teachers found the initial training valuable, a number of respondents believed that it could be more effectively and efficiently delivered at lower cost and with less disruption to schools. The most successful training was characterised by trainers who acknowledged the professionalism of teachers and who encouraged teachers to adapt materials and approaches to suit local needs.

Other funded provisions such as in-school professional learning and support, however, were seen as highly valuable by most teachers, and time for collaborative planning was identified as a key success factor. Many schools see provision of training and ongoing assistance, especially for new teachers, as a significant budget challenge for the future.

The recommended resources were seen as valuable assets to school literacy programs. The class sets of good quality books were valued by teachers as necessary and beneficial elements of the program. The consumables required by students, including highlighters, large quantities of cardboard and marker pens, were identified, almost universally, as an ongoing budget requirement, that needed to be included in future school planning.

7.2.2 Human costs

Several elements were considered to be human costs, including:

- pressure to meet short timelines
- increased workload
- stresses of change.

The most significant influence on how teachers responded to these, appeared to be leadership in providing support across the school. Where direction and support was provided through well-resourced *Reading to Learn* teams or coordinators, teachers felt empowered by the joint endeavour and involved in monitoring its impact on students. When this did not occur, teachers experienced isolation and frustration.

Reading to Learn required much time and effort to implement effectively with students, especially initially. Once again, the development of a team approach with whole-school support, helped to alleviate these early pressures.

Unfortunately the development of strong support structures for the program implementation was not seen to be widespread across the sample schools. Few schools involved their support staff, such as Aboriginal Education Officers and reading tutors or community volunteers, in class-based implementation of the program.

Similarly, access to support from beyond the school was patchy. Very few respondents reported having received the desired assistance from regional consultants or other experts, further adding to the negativity of some teachers.

7.3 Addressing the mandatory reform elements of the NPLN

The NPLN comprised 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 *Reading to Learn* 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

Nearly all teachers reported that their own and other teachers' literacy teaching practices had improved as a result of involvement in *Reading to Learn*. Aspects of this improvement included:

- a better understanding of how to teach literacy
- choice of quality texts
- higher expectations for students
- employing more explicit teaching strategies.

As noted in Section 2.2.6, *Reading to Learn* program developers assert that the model is based on rigorous research and evaluations.

Many teachers indicated that they are now reflecting more on their practices. They use student assessment data more effectively to validate the use of selected strategies, and to refine and adjust them accordingly. Where this occurred, the ability to share teaching practice and student outcomes with colleagues was seen by teachers as an effective means to strengthen evidence-based practice.

The concept of evidence-based teaching was not prominent throughout the evaluation, although some schools reported an increase in the collective analysis of external student performance data to inform their whole-school planning. The use of assessment instruments provided by *Reading to Learn* was only sometimes acknowledged as a strength of the program.

7.3.2 Strong school leadership and whole-school engagement with literacy

Leadership was consistently indicated as a necessary factor in effective implementation of *Reading to Learn*. Active involvement of principals and executives in professional learning, and in teaching the program, were seen as critical to building an enhanced focus on literacy within the school.

The reverse is also true. Significant change to the leadership in one school severely hindered progress in implementing *Reading to Learn*, as well as adding to pressure that teachers felt.

Schools where staff commitment was highest reported a new sense of shared responsibility that has come from building team leadership, at stage levels across the school. The development of leadership skills for school *Reading to Learn* coordinators was also acknowledged as developing teacher confidence and competence.

A whole-school approach including strategic planning, establishing a *Reading to Learn* team and coordinator position, and training a majority of teachers, were all quoted as important factors for successful implementation. Although the NPLN targeted Years 3 to 6, those schools which included most K to 6 teachers in training reported benefits in terms of increasing staff understanding and dialogue.

7.3.3 Monitoring student and school literacy performance

As outlined in Section 4.2, there was evidence that most schools used a number of assessment strategies to monitor student literacy performance to supplement those offered by *Reading to Learn*.

In many schools student performance was tracked with a variety of instruments, and analysed by the *Reading to Learn* coordinator or committee, to inform whole-school planning and support. Individual teachers also reported monitoring student progress within their classrooms to inform the planning of their next learning sequence.

Explicit references to use of student data for individual interventions tended to focus on students with special needs or learning difficulties, and were not strongly represented in discussion of the general school population. One teacher's view that the program and the school needed to focus more on using data to monitor improvement was expressed in the following comment:

“We probably need to strengthen practice in this area so that we can... illustrate where a stronger focus is needed.”

At least one region and one diocese, designed tasks and collected assessment data at regular intervals, in order to monitor comparative school performance and to enable some moderation of standards and expectations between schools. Schools in this region reported being able to access additional professional learning support from the regional consultant when it was required. This was valued highly where available.

Other teachers referred to the continuing regional requirement to assess students against benchmarks, or Reading Recovery levels, as being an extra burden and *“[being] in conflict with the main ideals of Reading to Learn”*.

7.4 Improving the educational outcomes of Aboriginal students

Improving the broader *educational* outcomes for Aboriginal students attracted some comment from teachers and school leaders, who believed that many of the teaching strategies and practical activities were engaging for Aboriginal students, particularly those achieving below stage level. Several teachers believed that the improvement in confidence, participation and enjoyment of these students would result in enhanced literacy outcomes in the future.

Evidence of improved *literacy* outcomes for Aboriginal students within the timeframe of the program implementation was not as clear cut, with slightly less than half of the teachers who had Aboriginal students in their classes, reporting an improvement in their reading and comprehension skills.

7.5 School participation 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 *Reading to Learn*, 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 Sustainability of literacy reforms

Schools reflected on the value of the program and their capacity to continue its implementation in the future. The majority of schools deemed that, even given the financial and human costs, particularly for implementing a program for the first time and within a short timeframe, sufficient benefits for students were produced to support the program's continued implementation.

While funding was frequently the focus of discussions around sustainability, they were also a catalyst for principals and teachers to acknowledge the broader organisational and positive changes which had been effected throughout the program implementation. A number of schools believed that reforms in school leadership, planning and staff relationships were now embedded into their school culture.

Three factors particularly influenced a school's ability to sustain the program:

- leadership of literacy improvement
- whole-school participation in implementation
- funding for the program.

Strength of leadership in setting directions and fostering collegial work practices will be critical to continued commitment to the program. In some schools a positive, collegially focused environment was created, even when not all teachers were trained, or when the training was not as successful as anticipated. Where this was not well established by the end of the funding period, it seems likely that individual teachers will decide whether to continue with new practices, or not.

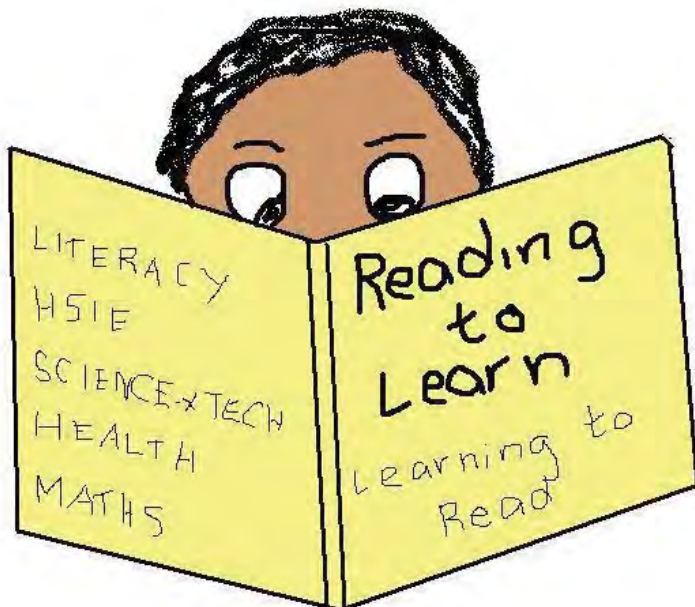
School literacy planning which defined the goals and actions for literacy development and the building of leadership capacity at a literacy team level, or at a stage level will also help sustain new practices.

Equally, valuing diversity of expertise in the school would assist in building cohesion across the school. Benefits may be enhanced by:

- encouraging greater involvement of Aboriginal Education Officers and learning support personnel in class-based literacy activities, and
- promoting informal methods of collegial support, as well as establishing formal structures such as literacy teams and coordinator roles
- involving parents and community both in decision making, and in supporting their children at home.

Finally, teachers need time and support to allow expertise to grow. At the time of the evaluation over 80% of survey respondents had been engaged with *Reading to Learn* for less than two years, almost 30% for less than a year. With continued, active support to firmly embed new methods into teaching practice, there is a greater chance that the changes indicated may be maintained, and spread throughout each school.

A caveat expressed by many principals suggested that additional funding to provide teacher training and timely in-school support would need to be maintained. The ability to do so from existing resources was only suggested in a few cases.



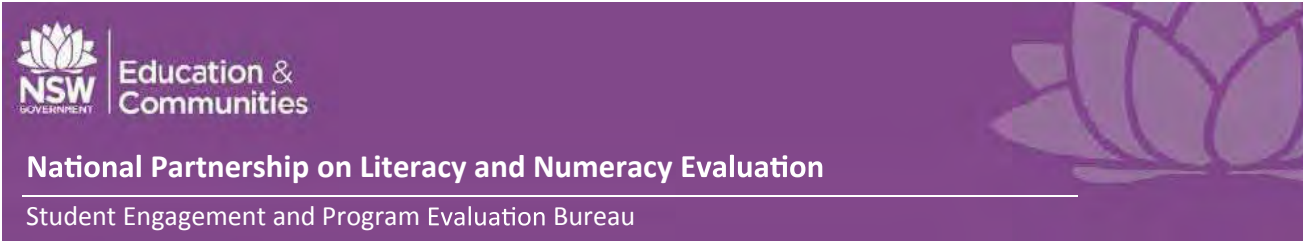
Glossary

TERM	DESCRIPTION
AECG	Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc. (NSW)
AEO	Aboriginal Education Officer
Benchmark	Standard against which performance is measured
Best Practice	Judgement of a particular practice against a stated benchmark
BST	Basic Skills Test
CEO/CEC	Catholic Education Office/ Catholic Education Commission
DASA	<i>Data Analysis Skills Assessment</i>
DEC	NSW Department of Education and Communities
Effective	Producing a desired result
Efficient	Well organised; achieving result with minimal resources, time and effort
EMSAD	Educational Measurement and School Accountability Directorate, DEC
ESL	English as a second language
Goals	Specific targets to achieve a defined objective
K-6	Kindergarten to Year 6
KLA	Key Learning Area
LBOTE	Language background other than English
Literacy	Ability to read and write to defined levels
Low SES NP	Low Socio-economic Status School Communities National Partnership
MultiLit	<i>Making Up Lost Time in Literacy</i> reading tutor program
NAPLAN	National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy
NPLN	National Partnership on Literacy and Numeracy
Numeracy	Mathematical skills needed to cope with everyday life
PERG	Program Evaluation Reference Group
Reading	Identifying and understanding the meaning of characters and words in written or printed material
Reading Recovery	Reading Recovery is a school-based, short-term literacy intervention that aims to reduce the number of students struggling with reading and writing.
SEPEB	Student Engagement and Program Evaluation Bureau, DEC
SES	Socio-economic status
SiP	Schools in Partnership initiative assists schools with significant Aboriginal student numbers to improve student outcomes through partnership with local school communities.
SLSO	School Learning Support Officer
SMART	<i>School Measurement, Assessment and Reporting Toolkit</i>
Strategies	Actions to achieve a goal in a particular program
Teaching sequence	Structured lesson activities contained within a specific program working together to achieve overall effect.

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Appendix 1 - Evaluation instruments



Program developer discussion guide

Overview

1	Tell us about <i>Reading to Learn</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>Reading to Learn</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>Reading to Learn</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? Specifically
9d	Aboriginal students?
10	Is it possible to isolate the reading component of <i>Reading to Learn</i> in terms of outcomes for students (and for our evaluation terms of reference)?
	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

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
PA	Literacy in the school	
PA1	Does the school have a whole-school literacy plan?	2b
PA2	What means does the school use to identify students who need support to improve their literacy skills?	2c
PA3	Before NPLN, what literacy programs were being used by the school?	2a, 2b
PB	<i>Reading to Learn</i> selection and purpose	
PB1	Why did the school select <i>Reading to Learn</i> as an intervention strategy?	1
PB2	Does the school also use other intervention strategies? If so what are they? <i>PROMPT: ILPs or MultiLit, any other not part of NPLN</i>	1
PC	<i>Reading to Learn</i> implementation	
PC1	What classes in your school have implemented the program? <i>PROMPT: How many? If not all classes how were they selected?</i>	2c
PC2a PC2b	How were teachers trained? How was the training organised? <i>PROMPT: Relief for all teachers to do training at the same time</i>	2b
PC3a PC3b	Were you involved in the <i>Reading to Learn</i> training? Do you feel you have an adequate understanding of the theory and practice of the program?	1, 2b
4PC PC4a PC4b PC4c	How do literacy coordinators/ <i>Reading to Learn</i> team leaders work with other teachers to: facilitate whole school professional development in <i>Reading to Learn</i> assist in developing their <i>Reading to Learn</i> teaching skills and knowledge manage student assessment data	2
PC5a PC5b	Does the school provide parents/carers with opportunities to become familiar with the <i>Reading to Learn</i> program in the school? If so, how?	2, 3
PD	<i>Reading to Learn</i> impact/outcomes	
PD1	What changes have you seen as a result of implementing <i>Reading to Learn</i> in your school? <i>PROMPT: attendance, engagement, better outcomes in reading, focused staff</i>	1,2,3
PD 2a PD 2b PD 2c PD 2d	Do you believe <i>Reading to Learn</i> has been effective in increasing students' skills in reading in your school? Aboriginal students? Particular groups of students? What evidence do you have to support this? <i>PROMPT: NAPLAN results, NPLN assessments, school/class assessments</i>	1, 3
PD 3	How do staff generally feel about the <i>Reading to Learn</i> program as a useful intervention for reading skills development? <i>PROMPT: are they engaged, passionate, seeking further professional development</i>	1
PE	Cost/Sustainability	
PE1	What financial costs have been involved in implementing and sustaining the program? <i>PROMPT: training, relief for support, cost of resources</i>	
PE 2a PE 2b	Do you believe <i>Reading to Learn</i> is a cost-effective intervention program? Will you be able to continue using it without NPLN funding?	2, 4
PE 3a PE 3b	If you had the choice again, would you choose <i>Reading to Learn</i> ? Why/why not?	1
PE 4a PE 4b	What are your plans for 2012 and beyond for literacy/reading programs in your school? If you continue with <i>Reading to Learn</i> is there other support that could/should be provided?	4

Teacher Group Interview

Program:	Data Ref:
School:	Region:
Date:	Time:
Evaluation officer:	No of teachers:

Introduction:

Reiterate purpose of evaluation:

- e. Assess the effectiveness of the program
- f. Assess the extent to which the program achieves its goals in an efficient manner
- g. Assess outcomes for Aboriginal students
- h. Assess the sustainability of the program for 2012 and beyond
- Reiterate this discussion is to add to feedback from the online teacher survey

	Discussion points	Link to ToR
TA	Reading to Learn selection and purpose	
TA1	How did you come to be involved in the <i>Reading to Learn</i> program?	2b
TA2	What do you think about the <i>Reading to Learn</i> methodology? <i>PROMPT: Is it effective? Why/why not?</i>	1
TB	Reading to Learn implementation	
TB1	Is the whole school involved in supporting the <i>Reading to Learn</i> program? <i>PROMPT: Including principal, support officers, other teachers not implementing the program?</i>	2b
TB 2	What involvement has the community (parents/carers) had in your programming and delivery of <i>Reading to Learn</i> ? <i>PROMPT: Do they do follow up with their children at home? Are they present in the classroom? Was there consultation on text choice to ensure background knowledge?</i>	1, 2b
TB 3	How is <i>Reading to Learn</i> professional development for teachers organised? <i>PROMPT: Do the team leaders or Program Facilitators organise PD? Is PD timetabled and systematic? Do Program Facilitators provide ongoing support to schools? Anyone else?</i>	2
TB 4a	What is your opinion of the <u>content</u> of the professional development workshops?	1, 2,3, 4
TB 4b	What is your opinion of the <u>presentation</u> of the professional development workshops?	

Discussion points		Link to ToR
TB 5a	Did the professional development workshops help you to develop the knowledge of <i>Reading to Learn</i> theory and practice that you need to perform your role effectively?	2a
TB 5b	Why, why not? How could this training be improved?	4
TB 6a	What do you think about the professional development and/or in-school support that has been provided to teachers for <i>Reading to Learn</i> ?	2
TB 6b	<i>PROMPT: Is release time provided for lesson observation and feedback, and planning?</i> How could this support be improved?	
TB 7	What other professional development or networking support have you engaged in during your implementation of <i>Reading to Learn</i> ?	2, 4
	<i>PROMPT: other Reading to Learn teachers in the Department?</i>	
TB 8	What criteria did you use in choosing texts for study for <i>the Reading to Learn</i> program?	1, 2c
	<i>PROMPTS: Community advice, knowledge of students backgrounds, personal preference?</i>	
TC	<i>Reading to Learn</i> impact/outcomes	
TC1a	Do you think your students enjoy the program?	1
TC 1b	Do they feel like they are improving skills?	
TC 1c	Do they use skills learned in other subject areas?	
TC 2a	Have student <u>reading</u> outcomes improved since schools in your region started implementing <i>Reading to Learn</i> teaching methods?	1, 2, 3
TC 2b	Aboriginal students?	
TC 2c	Particular groups of students?	
	<i>PROMPT: Why/why not? Evidence (NAPLAN, NPLN, AL assessments)</i>	
TC 3	How is student progress assessed in your school?	2a, 2c
TC 4	Does the student reading assessment from <i>Reading to Learn</i> give you the information you need to plan for follow-up work for the individuals needing extra attention?	2c
TC 5	What other assessment measures do you use and why?	2c, 4
TC 6	Do you share assessments of your students with other staff as they move on to higher grades?	2
	<i>PROMPT: Is the school using the program to continue building on skills learned</i>	
TC 7a	Have you completed the Data Analysis Skills Assessment (DASA)?	2c
TC 7b	If you did so more than once, have you improved your skills and why?	
TD	Cost/sustainability	
TD1a	Is the principal and executive supportive of the <i>Reading to Learn</i> approach? Do you think this is an important factor in successfully implementing <i>Reading to Learn</i> either in your classroom or across the school?	2b
TD 1b		
TD 2	Will you continue with the <i>Reading to Learn</i> methodology even if there is no support through NPLN funding?	4
	<i>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?</i>	
TE	Additional comments	
TE1	Is there anything else you would like to add?	



National Partnership on Literacy and Numeracy Evaluation

Student Engagement and Program Evaluation Bureau

Parent/Community Focus Group

Program:	Data Ref:
School:	Region/Diocese:
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)

This should be a general discussion regarding reading and *Reading to Learn* 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 point	Link to ToR
CA	Involvement in the school program	
CA1	Are you involved in any aspect of the school? PROMPT: sport, community storytelling, reading tutor assistance, Parents and Citizens Association?	2b
CA2	Are you aware of the National Partnership on Literacy and Numeracy? PROMPT: May need brief explanation	2b
CA3a CA3b	Are you aware of the <i>Reading to Learn</i> program in your child's school? What is your understanding of <i>Reading to Learn</i> ? PROMPT: May need brief explanation	2b
CA4a	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)	2a, 2c,
CA4b	By whom, or how was the information given? PROMPT: principal, teacher, school newsletter, school website	
CB	Effectiveness of the <i>Reading to Learn</i> program	
CB1a	Do your children/students talk about doing activities in reading/literacy/ <i>Reading to Learn</i> outside school hours?	1,3
CB1b	What do they say? <i>PROMPT: Do you know the texts they are reading at school? Do they enjoy the lessons?</i>	
CB 2a CB 2b	Do you think <i>Reading to Learn</i> is working for your child/students at the school? Have you noticed any difference? What? <i>PROMPT: reading more at home, reading independently, more engaged in school, attendance, better report results</i>	1, 3
CB 3a CB 3b	Does there appear to be support for literacy improvement across the school? If so, in what way is this support shown?	2b
CB 4a CB 4b	Do you think <i>Reading to Learn</i> has benefited your child? Would you like to see it continue to be used as a program in the school?	1, 2, 3, 4
CB 5a CB 5b	Anything else you would like to comment on regarding the program or improving reading?	



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.
- Remind students why you are meeting with them (to see how good the literacy program they are doing is).
- Bring up event in 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 *Reading to Learn* 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, reading.

	Discussion point	Link to ToR
SA	Engagement	
SA1	What is the first thing you think about when I say the word "READING"?	1, 2, 3
SA 2	Did you have a choice in the text you are currently using in your literacy lesson? If so, why did you choose this book?	2b
SA 3	Do your parents or carers know what book you are currently working on at school?	2b
SA 4a SA 4b	Do you like the book you are currently working on? What about the book/story do you like?	1

	Discussion point	Link to ToR
SA 4	Do you know what <i>Reading to Learn</i> means? PROMPT: reading/writing etc, scaffolding, learning quickly, everyone does it together	1
SA 5	Do you know exactly what it is you will be doing the following day at school in literacy?	1, 2
SA 6a SA 6b SA 6c	Do you like your <i>Reading to Learn</i> lessons? If so, what do you like about them? What don't you like? PROMPT: spending too long on a text, transformations, spelling, working in groups, too easy "know the answers"	1
SB	Skill development	
SB1a SBb	Do you think you are reading better now than when you were at the beginning of the year? (*they will say yes) Why do you think that?	1, 3
SB2a SB2b	With the current book you are working on <insert title>, do you think you can read and understand what the author has written better now than you could the first day the book was shown to you? (*they will say yes) Why do you think that is?	1, 2, 3
SB3a SB3b SB3c	Have you done any reading assessments? Do you know what your results are? Have you improved your reading according to these tests?	1, 2c
SC	Other benefits	
SC1a SC1b	Do you read at home for pleasure? If so, what sorts of things do you read?	1, 2
SC2	Think about all the subjects you do at school. How do you think your <i>Reading to Learn</i> classes help you with these?	1, 2
SC3	Anything else you would like to say about your literacy lessons?	

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: *Reading to Learn*

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>Bill Tomlin Manager Planning and Evaluation ☎ 02 9244 5697 ✉ bill.tomlin@det.nsw.edu.au</p>	<p>Meg Dione Senior Evaluation Officer Program Evaluation Unit ☎ 02 9244 5168 ✉ meg.dione@det.nsw.edu.au</p>	<p>Judith Henderson 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).....agree to participate in the evaluation project described below.

TITLE OF THE PROJECT: *Reading to Learn*

EVALUATION OFFICER/S:

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

Reading to Learn teacher survey results

Including comments on item responses

Teaching Background

Q1 Teaching Qualifications

Bachelor degree	68%
Diploma in Education	42%
Special education (degree or diploma)	4%
Masters	5%
Doctorate	0

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. 13% have both a Bachelor Degree and a Diploma in Education.

Q2 Teaching Experience

Less than a year	2%
1 to less than 2 years	5%
2 to less than 3 years	4%
3 to less than 4 years	4%
4 to less than 5	5%
5 or more years	81%

Key points: Most respondents have at least five years teaching experience. Four-fifths of respondents have 5 or more years teaching experience. A small proportion have less than three years experience.

Q3 Time teaching at the school

Less than a year	5%
1 to less than 2 years	15%
2 to less than 3 years	6%
3 to less than 4 years	7%
4 to less than 5 years	10%
5 or more years	58%

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 *Reading to Learn* program

Q4 *Reading to Learn* teaching experience

Less than a year	27%
1 to less than 2 years	56%
2 to less than 3 years	8%
3 to less than 4 years	4%
4 to less than 5 years	0
5 or more years	6%

Key points: Most respondents were in their first or second year of teaching *Reading to Learn*. Most have less than two years teaching *Reading to Learn* while very few have four or more years.

Q5 Have you participated in cultural immersion training?

Yes	11%
No	74%
Don't know	16%

Key points: Only about one in ten definitely have had cultural immersion training, while three-quarters have none.

Q6 *Reading to Learn* formal professional development programs(s) (tick one or more)

<i>Reading to Learn</i> workshops	79%
School based <i>Reading to Learn</i> professional development	53%
<i>Reading to Learn</i> trainer workshops	13%
None of the above	9%

Key points: Almost all have had specific *Reading to Learn* training; some had several forms and some were trainers. Four out of five were trained in the *Reading to Learn* workshops while half have had school based professional development and one in eight had the trainer workshops. Almost one-third had two forms of professional development and about one in eight had three forms of professional development.

Understanding of the *Reading to Learn* program

Q8 I understand the principles of *Reading to Learn*

Extremely well	16%
Very well	52%
Somewhat	31%
Not at all	3%

Key points: Generally the principles are well understood, with only about one-third of respondents saying they understand less than very well.

Q9 I understand the purpose of each stage of the *Reading to Learn* teaching cycle

Extremely well	12%
Very well	47%
Somewhat	33%
Not at all	8%

Key points: Many respondents stated that the purpose of stages are well understood while one third claimed somewhat well understood and a small proportion said they do not understand at all.

Q10 I can scaffold reading skills using detailed reading strategies

Extremely well	17%
Very well	45%
Somewhat	32%
Not at all	7%

Key points: Two out of three respondents said they can scaffold reading skills well. A small proportion said they cannot scaffold reading skills using detailed reading strategies.

Q11 I manage my students through the use of inclusive strategies

Never	5%
Sometimes	23%
Frequently	52%
Always	21%

Key points: Almost all respondents say they use inclusive strategies to some extent. Very few do not use inclusive strategies.

Q12 Reading to Learn website

A little more than half of the respondents have accessed the *Reading to Learn* website.

Implementation of the *Reading to Learn* program

Q13 When you implemented *Reading to Learn* in 2009, what year level(s) did you teach at that time? (tick one or more)

Kindergarten	11%
Year 1	11%
Year 2	10%
Year 3	15%
Year 4	13%
Year 5	16%
Year 6	15%
Not applicable	61%

Key points: *Reading to Learn* was implemented in 2009 by two out of five respondents, with slightly greater frequency in Stages 2 and 3.

Q14 When you implemented *Reading to Learn* in 2010, what year level(s) did you teach? (tick one or more)

Kindergarten	21%
Year 1	22%
Year 2	19%
Year 3	21%
Year 4	27%
Year 5	26%
Year 6	23%
Not applicable	18%

Key points: Most respondents implemented *Reading to Learn* in 2010. It was implemented slightly more in Years 4 and 5 than in the other year levels.

Q15 When you implemented Reading to Learn in 2011, what year level(s) did you teach? (tick one or more)

Kindergarten	18%
Year 1	19%
Year 2	18%
Year 3	23%
Year 4	27%
Year 5	29%
Year 6	25%
Not applicable	24%

Key points: Three out of four respondents implemented *Reading to Learn* in 2011. It was implemented slightly more in Years 3 to 6 than it was in Kinder to Year 2.

Opinion of the support materials and services provided

Q16 The *Reading to Learn* training manuals are a useful reference.

Strongly Agree	35%
Agree	57%
Disagree	6%
Strongly Disagree	3%

Key points: Almost all respondents said the *Reading to Learn* training manuals are a useful reference.

Q17 I found the *Reading to Learn* demonstration lesson DVD useful.

Strongly Agree	25%
Agree	60%
Disagree	13%
Strongly Disagree	3%

Key points: Most respondents said the *Reading to Learn* demonstration lesson DVD is useful.

Q18 I utilise the suggested classroom resources (e.g. sentence making boards).

Always	22%
Frequently	39%
Sometimes	29%
Never	11%

Key points: Three out of five respondents said they utilise the suggested classroom resources frequently or always.

Q19 I plan units of work with other *Reading to Learn* teachers in the school

Always	20%
Frequently	19%
Sometimes	39%
Never	23%

Key points: Most respondents plan units of work with other *Reading to Learn* teachers at least sometimes, while one in four never plan this way.

Q20 I feel supported by the school Reading to Learn team leader/coordinator

Always	33%
Frequently	26%
Sometimes	23%
Never	6%
Not applicable (e.g. you are the team leader/coordinator)	12%

Key points: Most respondents who are not team leaders said they are at least sometimes supported by the team leader, while just over half said they are always supported. A small proportion said they are never supported.

Q21 The approximate length of time I spend teaching Reading to Learn each day is

30 minutes or less	30%
31-45 minutes	20%
46-60 minutes	19%
61-90 minutes	17%
91 minutes or more	15%

Key points: Seven out of ten respondents teach *Reading to Learn* for up to an hour each day. About one in seven teach between 61-90 minutes. One in seven teaches more than 90 minutes.

Q22 I maintain student assessment folders which monitor student performance in reading for

All my students	62%
Most of my students	11%
Some of my students	11%
None of my students	18%

Key points: Most respondents use student assessment folders, with three out of five using the folders for all students.

Impact of the Reading to Learn program

Q23 Reading to Learn has improved general literacy outcomes for most or all students

All the students in my class	15%
Most of the students in my class	41%
Some of the students in my class	39%
None of the students in my class	5%

Key points: Many respondents said *Reading to Learn* has improved general literacy outcomes for most or all students. Two out of five said some have improved while very few respondents said no students improved.

Q24 Reading to Learn has improved general literacy outcomes for

All of the Aboriginal students in my class	19%
Most of the Aboriginal students in my class	21%
Some of the Aboriginal students in my class	35%
None of the Aboriginal students in my class	4%
Not applicable	21%

Key points: Half of the respondents with Aboriginal students in their class said *Reading to Learn* has improved general literacy outcomes for most or all Aboriginal students. Many other respondents with Aboriginal students in their class said some Aboriginal students have improved. Very few said no Aboriginal students improved.

Q25 *Reading to Learn* reading strategies have improved reading and comprehension skills in

All the students in my class	12%
Most of the students in my class	41%
Some of the students in my class	42%
None of the students in my class	5%

Key points: About half of the respondents said *Reading to Learn* has improved reading and comprehension skills for most or all students. Two out of five said some have improved while very few respondents said no students improved.

Q26 *Reading to Learn* reading strategies have improved reading and comprehension skills in

All of the Aboriginal students in my class	15%
Most of the Aboriginal students in my class	20%
Some of the Aboriginal students in my class	40%
None of the Aboriginal students in my class	4%
Not applicable	21%

Key points: Almost half of the respondents with Aboriginal students in their class said *Reading to Learn* has improved reading and comprehension skills for most or all Aboriginal students. Almost all of the other respondents with Aboriginal students in their class said some Aboriginal students have improved. Very few said no Aboriginal students improved.

Q27 *Reading to Learn* has increased engagement with reading for

All the students in my class	25%
Most of the students in my class	36%
Some of the students in my class	34%
None of the students in my class	5%

Key points: About two-thirds of respondents said *Reading to Learn* has increased student engagement with reading for most or all students. The rest of the respondents mostly said some have improved while very few respondents said no students improved.

Q28 *Reading to Learn* has improved the way I teach literacy in my class

Strongly Agree	32%
Agree	58%
Disagree	11%
Strongly Disagree	0%

Key points: Nine out of ten respondents said that *Reading to Learn* has improved the way they teach literacy in their classes.

Q29 *Reading to Learn* assessments provide evidence of where support is needed

Strongly Agree	19%
Agree	69%
Disagree	12%
Strongly Disagree	0

Key points: Most respondents said that *Reading to Learn* assessments provide evidence of where support is needed.

Q30 *The Reading to Learn* assessment activities are useful in identifying students' reading needs

Strongly Agree	11%
Agree	74%
Disagree	15%
Strongly Disagree	1%

Key points: Most respondents said that *Reading to Learn* assessment activities are valuable in identifying student reading needs.

Q31 *The Reading to Learn* texts and activities chosen for my class are related specifically to students backgrounds and learning needs

Strongly Agree	18%
Agree	73%
Disagree	10%
Strongly Disagree	0%

Key points: Most respondents said they chose texts and activities related specifically to student background and learning needs.

Help received from the support services and resources provided by the *Reading to Learn* program

Q32 *Other school community personnel have participated in Reading to Learn* intensive strategies for school learning support officers, tutors and parents

Always	10%
Frequently	20%
Sometimes	43%
Never	28%

Key points: Three out of ten respondents said that other community personnel participated in formal training frequently or always. Most respondents said those personnel participated only sometimes or never.

Q33 *A school learning support officer plays an active role in my Reading to Learn* lessons

Always	9%
Frequently	15%
Sometimes	38%
Never	15%
Not applicable (i.e. no school learning support officer in my lessons)	25%

Key points: One quarter of the respondents had no school learning support officer in their *Reading to Learn* lessons. One third of those respondents who had a school learning support officer said the school learning support officer always or frequently played an active role. Two thirds said the school learning support officer played an active role only sometimes, or never.

Q34 *The Aboriginal education officer plays an active role in my Reading to Learn lessons*

Always	0
Frequently	3%
Sometimes	14%
Never	43%
Not applicable (i.e. no Aboriginal education officer in school)	40%

Key points: Many respondents did not have an Aboriginal education officer in their school. Of those who did, almost all said the Aboriginal education officer never or only sometimes played an important role in *Reading to Learn* lessons.

Q35 *Reading tutors/community volunteers play an active role in my Reading to Learn lessons*

Always	0
Frequently	6%
Sometimes	18%
Never	40%
Not applicable (i.e. no tutors/community volunteers)	36%

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 *Reading to Learn* lessons.

Q36 *Reading to Learn intensive strategies have decreased the need for individualised intervention*

Strongly Agree	3%
Agree	33%
Disagree	53%
Strongly Disagree	11%

Key points: About one third of respondents said *Reading to Learn* has decreased the need for individualised intervention.

Q37 *Reading to Learn team members in my school have the experience, skills and knowledge to support me in planning lessons and units of work*

Strongly Agree	28%
Agree	66%
Disagree	5%
Strongly Disagree	1%

Key points: Almost all respondents said *Reading to Learn* team members support them in planning lessons.

Q38 *Reading to Learn team members in my school are given release time to plan lessons and units of work together*

Strongly Agree	23%
Agree	45%
Disagree	28%
Strongly Disagree	4%

Key points: Two-thirds of respondents said *Reading to Learn* team members are given release time to plan together.

Participation of the school in literacy programs

Q39 *The school principal promotes literacy across the school*

Strongly Agree	73%
Agree	26%
Disagree	1%
Strongly Disagree	0

Key points: Almost all respondents said the school principal promotes literacy across the school.

Q40 *School staff are supported to develop literacy knowledge and skills*

Strongly Agree	53%
Agree	46%
Disagree	1%
Strongly Disagree	0

Key points: Almost all respondents said school staff are encouraged to develop literacy knowledge and skills.

Q41 *The school executive shows an active interest in student literacy outcomes*

Strongly Agree	64%
Agree	35%
Disagree	1%
Strongly Disagree	0

Key points: Almost all respondents said the school executive shows an active interest in student literacy outcomes.

Q42 *School leaders ensure human resources are available*

Strongly Agree	38%
Agree	57%
Disagree	5%
Strongly Disagree	0

Key points: Almost all respondents said school leaders ensure human resources are available.

Q43 *School leaders ensure material resources are available*

Strongly Agree	42%
Agree	54%
Disagree	4%
Strongly Disagree	0

Key points: Almost all respondents said school leaders ensure material resources are available.

Q44 *A culture of continuous improvement in literacy outcomes is promoted and supported*

Strongly Agree	60%
Agree	39%
Disagree	1%
Strongly Disagree	0

Key points: Almost all respondents said a culture of continuous improvement in literacy outcomes is promoted in the school.

Q45 *Reading to Learn has encouraged parent/caregiver engagement in literacy*

Strongly Agree	4%
Agree	41%
Disagree	49%
Strongly Disagree	6%

Key points: Respondents were evenly divided about whether *Reading to Learn* has encouraged parent/caregiver engagement in literacy.

Q46 *I would recommend the Reading to Learn program to a colleague*

Strongly Agree	30%
Agree	58%
Disagree	11%
Strongly Disagree	1%

Key points: Nine out of ten respondents would recommend the *Reading to Learn* program to a colleague.

Q47 *I have accessed regional support to implement Reading to Learn in my class*

Always	2%
Frequently	6%
Sometimes	42%
Never	50%

Key points: Almost all respondents said they sometimes or never accessed regional support to implement *Reading to Learn*.

Q48 *My involvement in Reading to Learn has led me to conclude that the program overall is*

Extremely effective	15%
Very effective	34%
Somewhat effective	48%
Not effective	3%

Key points: Half of the respondents said that overall *Reading to Learn* is effective or extremely effective. Almost all of the remainder said it is somewhat effective. Very few said it is not effective.

Q49 *Comment on the strengths and weaknesses of Reading to Learn in relation to improving students' reading skills.*

Number of open responses: 115

Q50 *Comment on the extent to which is Reading to Learn is sustainable in your school. You can include comments on your willingness and capacity to implement Reading to Learn in your classroom without the present funding level of professional development and support.*

Number of open responses: 115

Note: Free text answers have been included in the analysis of the evaluation interviews and focus groups.

Appendix 3 - Online survey response statistics

NPLN: *Reading to Learn* SURVEY RESPONSE STATISTICS

There are 15 public schools and three Catholic Education primary schools in NSW implementing the *Reading to Learn* program through National Partnership on Literacy and Numeracy funding.

Of these, 16 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	<i>Reading to Learn</i> Schools	Number of survey respondents	% of total survey respondents (115)	Teachers in school	Total student enrolment	Aboriginal student enrolment	% Aboriginal students
Bathurst Diocese	St. Joseph's School, Portland	4	3.5%	7	63	2	3%
Bathurst Diocese	St. Michael's School, Dunedoo	0	0	6	50	0	0%
Bathurst Diocese	St. Patrick's Primary School, Lithgow	5	4.3%	22	369	22	6%
Hunter Central Coast	Abermain Public School	7	6.1%	13	207	24	12%
Hunter Central Coast	Scone Public School	13	11.3%	24	440	30	7%
Hunter Central Coast	Weston Public School	9	7.8%	11	157	30	9%
New England	Tamworth West Public School	1	0.9%	25	117	58	50%
Western	Bathurst South Public School	11	9.6%	13	198	30	15%
Western	Bathurst West Public School	18	15.7%	21	306	67	22%
Western	Bletchington Public School	18	15.7%	25	539	37	7%
Western	Bourke Public School	6	5.2%	20	201	133	66%
Western	Bowen Public School	3	2.6%	13	121	54	45%
Western	Condobolin Public School	2	1.7%	27	153	141	92%
Western	Kelso Public School	2	1.7%	20	197	81	41%
Western	Narromine Public School	8	7.0%	16	234	162	69%
Western	Trangie Public School	0	0	20	64	50	78%
Western Sydney	Plumpton Public School	3	2.6%	29	499	18	4%
Western Sydney	Seven Hills Public School	3	2.6%	9	109	4	4%

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