



## OVERVIEW

Literacy teaching and learning occurs in the broader context of our schools and society, and that context can enable (or hinder) successful teaching and learning of literacy. This fact sheet is based on our research in Tasmania<sup>21</sup>, supported by other research, that points to four *key enablers of good practice*<sup>5,7</sup> that make positive literacy achievements possible.

## STRONG AND STABLE LEADERSHIP

**School leaders** include principals as well as other leaders, such as Advanced Skills Teachers. In our research constructive leadership within schools that supports literacy was described as:

- drawing on a repertoire of leadership styles and practices to suit different situations<sup>5,7</sup>, including
  - *Instructional*: leaders sharing good practice across the school and building a coaching and mentoring culture within the school
  - *Strategic*: focused on organisational change and innovation that is 'transformational'
  - *Shared or distributed*: involving many staff in democratic and collaborative decision-making
  - *Relationship-oriented*: that centres on people, rather than tasks.
- reflecting the AITSL Professional Standard for Principals<sup>1</sup>,
- characterised by stability of the school leadership team and approach<sup>14,19</sup>.



"I feel totally supported by this team, and I feel really valued and I love what they're trying to achieve with literacy and I love being a part of that".

**System leadership** at executive and business unit levels of education systems can also enable literacy teaching and learning<sup>10,20</sup>. In our research these key areas were highlighted:

- fostering state-wide consistency among schools, extending the idea of a 'whole school approach' to a 'whole Department approach',
- providing more support for school leaders alongside greater accountability,
- ongoing access to external literacy expertise for all school leaders to implement the state-wide approach,
- easing the pressures on teachers by providing useful guidance as well as by promoting positive images of the work of teachers and schools in the media and community.



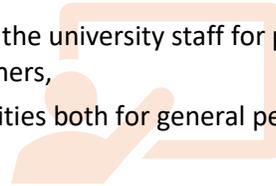
"There has to be something about a whole Department approach as well, because if whole school approaches [to literacy] create better outcomes, then surely whole Department approaches create better outcomes as well".

## CAPABILITY-BUILDING

**Professional learning** is widely considered essential for further enhancing the capability of school staff to improve literacy teaching and learning.

Enabling factors identified in our research for **pre-service learning**<sup>3,6</sup>:

- a strong sense of shared responsibility between school-based staff and the university staff for preparing pre-service teachers as well as possible for their work as graduate teachers,
- increased support for pre-service teachers to develop practical capabilities both for general pedagogical skills and for teaching literacy specifically.



Enabling factors identified in our research for **in-service learning**<sup>4,12</sup>:

- tailored to the learning needs of individual staff and to whole school learning, involving
  - internal, school-based professional learning using an inquiry cycle approach and involving professional learning communities (PLCs) and professional learning teams (PLTs)
  - one-to-one coaching, mentoring, and collegial observation and peer feedback
  - targeted external workshops and seminars provided by recognised literacy experts.
- **inter-school collaboration** to learn from each other's experiences.

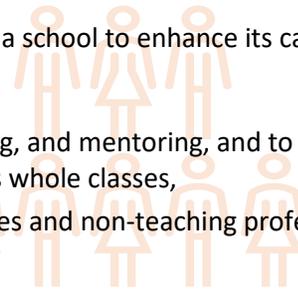


“The challenge, then, is to bring all teachers up to the level of the high-performing teachers. We know the teacher makes the biggest impact on students' learning. If we can get a model that supports building the capacity of staff to that high level, then our student outcomes will improve”.

## RESOURCES

**Human resources**<sup>11,17,24</sup> were identified as the most valuable resource within a school to enhance its capacity to make a significant difference to literacy outcomes, including:

- more teaching staff to release teachers for professional learning, planning, and mentoring, and to reduce student-staff ratios; and more qualified teacher assistants to work across whole classes,
- enhanced access to appropriately qualified staff, including literacy coaches and non-teaching professional support staff—in particular speech pathologists and psychologists,
- reducing staff turnover, especially in 'hard-to-staff' schools.



**Material resources**<sup>9,13,22</sup> were also valued, including:

- high quality reading books for students, including readers to take home,
- information and communication technologies, both hardware and software,
- physical learning environments that are engaging and safe for learning, including play-based learning.



“What I'm seeing is more support ... in the classrooms from different people—parents, teacher aides—is actually impacting a lot on the kids ... Now that they're in smaller groups that are really specifically focused, those kids are moving much better than they were before”.

## FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Interconnected factors in students' lives beyond the classroom also influence their literacy development<sup>15,18</sup>. Actively involving parents and carers in their children's learning has substantial benefits<sup>2,8,16,23</sup>.

**Positive relationships with families** form the foundation of sustainable family and community engagement. Strategies in our Tasmanian schools included:

- ensuring parent-teacher discussions are genuinely two-way, for example by explicitly asking parents to share their expertise about their children,
- creating spaces in the school where families and community members feel welcome,
- inviting families to join celebrations of students' reading and writing successes, for example through assemblies, Book Week parades, art exhibitions, performances, and festivals.



"Teachers might be the experts on how to actually teach reading, but we're never going to be the expert on that child. The parent is the expert on that child. They're the ones that come with that insight, so we need to work together".

**Effective channels of communication** were recognised as vital for enabling parents and carers to be active partners in their children's learning and literacy development. For example:

- traditional methods, such as information sessions and newsletters,
- online resources and communication tools, such as sms, email, and commercial digital apps.



"Now communications avenues are established, the next step is to use these to empower parents to support their child at home. Communicating classroom learning intentions, filming instructional phases of a lesson, providing useful tips to support students reading and spelling".

**Involving family and community members** into the life of their school in general, as well as with literacy programs, was evident across all schools in our research. This included:

- using an 'open door policy' to welcome parents and carers and provide tailored support
- encouraging families to participate in home reading and/or before school reading programs
- engaging families and community members as literacy volunteers in class, especially for guided reading.



"Every morning from 8:30 to 9:00, we have morning reading, where we encourage parents to come and read with students before school and have a free Milo".

**Formal Tasmanian Department of Education initiatives** were also embraced in schools, in particular:

- Launching into Learning (LiL) is for families with children from birth to four years of age and is available at all Tasmanian Government schools and Child and Family Centres
- Learning in Families Together (LiFT) is for families and children in Years K-2 in some Tasmanian schools.



"Start all those reading habits really early with our little ones".

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<https://publicdocumentcentre.education.tas.gov.au/Documents/Literacy-Plan-for-Action-2019-2022.pdf>  
For information about the review, other factsheets and five detailed reports, see:  
<https://www.utas.edu.au/underwood-centre/research/completed-projects>

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**For more information please contact:**

The Peter Underwood Centre, Private Bag 7, Hobart TAS 7001  
Phone: (03) 6226 5735 Email: [UnderwoodCentre.Enquiries@utas.edu.au](mailto:UnderwoodCentre.Enquiries@utas.edu.au)  
Website: <https://www.utas.edu.au/underwood-centre>

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