



# Effective contexts for Accelerated Literacy Schools

## Background:

In 2007, Gill Westthorp was commissioned to evaluate the South Australian Accelerated Literacy Program, with the question 'What makes an effective AL school?'. Surveys, interviews and focus groups were conducted with AL teachers and principals. By comparing factors from teacher surveys with 2007 LaN data, implementation factors which seemed to impact on student outcomes in literacy were identified.

## Factors which matter

Many factors impact on student success in literacy. Only some could be investigated in the research. The following list contains those over which we, as educators and school leaders, have control. For six of the seven factors below, there were statistically significant differences in student learning outcomes in schools with 'high, medium or low' levels of the factor being considered. The other factor – the four lesson guideline – was calculated on a teacher, rather than a school, basis, but still showed a statistically significant difference in scores.

### ➤ 4 lesson guideline

AL requires that teachers who take it up teach AL as their core instructional learning time at least four days a week (or four hours). This factor alone accounted for about one point's difference in LAN scores (or about four months worth of learning time).

### Adequacy & organisation of teaching & learning resources

This factor included whether each class had their own, adequate supply of physical resources for AL (eg whiteboards, paper strips, sentence makers, A4 flip charts), whether or not there was a central store of resources for teachers to top up when required, and whether systems to look after and manage teaching resources are well organised, understood by staff, and implemented (e.g. texts looked after, HOBOLines removed from shared texts, texts returned on time). This factor had a strong correlation with student success.

### ➤ Support for teachers to attend PD

This factor assessed whether teachers received moral support and encouragement to attend professional development, as well as various forms of practical support: paid release time to study for accreditation, paid release time to attend professional development workshops, travel costs to attend professional development. It also included whether or not there was a 'study group' of teachers at the school who support each other.

### Teacher voluntarism

Another strong correlation: teacher voluntarism covers both teachers already in the school who volunteer in an informed way about what they are committing to, and also teachers who, when offered a job, are told that the school is an AL school and given a choice, on that basis, about whether to accept employment at the school. Student learning outcomes were better when teachers volunteered.

- **Medium levels of administrative support**  
Interestingly, medium, not high levels of admin support were associated with improved student outcomes. Is this because teachers talk to each other as they are preparing sentence strips, or is it because teachers can develop an over-dependence on SSO help to get them going and therefore have less ownership?. Or did this reflect something else altogether? We don't know.
- **Less interruptions to AL lessons**  
There was a clear link between student success and schools which organise to reduce interruptions to AL classes (by phones, loudspeakers, as well as excursions, and events. "Interruptions" also included withdrawing students from AL classes.
- **Good 'structures'**  
The 'structures' factor included having AL on the staff meeting agenda, having well organised systems for collecting data about AL, and then analysing the data and using it in planning.
- **Not one 'magic bullet' but 'good implementation overall' makes the difference**  
Unfortunately, it is not one thing which makes the difference, but all the above factors put together. When these factors are aggregated and compared with student outcomes, the difference between an effective implementation and a half-hearted implementation is up to 4 points (depending on the indicator) or about 16 months of student learning. This is almost the same as moving one category of disadvantage.

The full report can be downloaded from the SAALP website.