

# Lucknow School

## Sabbatical Report, Paul Grundy

*To review teaching and leadership strategies proven to enhance accelerated progress for priority learners in literacy. In particular the success and sustainability of accelerated learning in literacy initiatives in school settings and how these can be further developed.*

### *Acknowledgement*

*I wish to thank the Board and Staff of Lucknow School for supporting my sabbatical. I also acknowledge the Ministry of Education and the NZEI for the provision of sabbaticals through the PPCA. I am very grateful to schools' staff and facilitators involved in ALL for their time and honest reflection during my visits and correspondence.*

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## *Introduction*

The main aim of this study is to improve my understanding of approaches that have been shown to be effective in raising achievement for students identified as 'priority learners' under the Ministry of Education's (MOE) current definition. In achieving this I aim to be better equipped to support the improvement of practice at my school to support these learners. In addition I believe there is a real need to improve how we, as teachers and leaders, review and monitor the impact of these programmes. This is crucial for ongoing planning of curriculum delivery and for decisions we make about interventions selected for students at risk.

I have selected Accelerating Learning in Literacy (ALL) interventions in particular because my school has been involved in this project over 3 years (2011-2013). My inquiry is focused on what makes interventions effective and how can we sustain this effectiveness. My report will be written in 3 parts;

1. A review of some of the current literature (in particular within the NZ context)
2. The ALL experience at Lucknow School; our findings and conclusions
3. A summary of experiences of some schools currently involved in the ALL project in the Central North region; their reflections and conclusions.

## *Literature*

Before beginning a discussion of current literature it is important to define some of the language referred to in this report. This language is being used more and more in our schools since the introduction of National Standards and its use in official documents and Ministry of Education material has seen the normalisation of several new concepts. The language relates to Government goals and priorities against National Standards, rather than the curriculum aims stated in the New Zealand Curriculum.

If discussions in my school setting are anything to go by, this language of standards and accountability is not being consistently understood or applied across the sector. It is my belief that there needs to be discussion to clarify these definitions both within schools and across clusters.

The following definitions are used within this report;

### **‘Accelerated progress’**

Progress is said to be accelerated when students’ achievement moves from well below to below, at or above a National Standard or from below to at or above. Education Review Office (ERO) evaluations consider both short and long-term acceleration of progress. (ERO (a), 2014, p6).

Acceleration is defined slightly differently in the ALL Theory of Action. Here, acceleration is described as the learner’s progress showing; a noticeably faster, upward movement than might otherwise been expected by the trend of their own past learning; and is faster than classmates progressing at expected rates in order to catch them up. This rate of progress brings the learner achievement level to that consistent with, or beyond, a set of benchmarks or standards (National Standards). (MOE, 2014, p1).

### **‘Priority learners’**

Priority learners refers to Maori and Pacific students who are not achieving successfully at school; students with special learning needs; and students from low income communities, who are below or well below the literacy and mathematics National Standards (ERO, 2013, p4)

### **‘Sustainability’**

“Sustainability, in our view, is a process of organisational learning, where schools use inquiry and knowledge building cycles to improve valued student outcomes” (Lai, McNaughton, Timperly & Hsiao, 2009, p11)

## Literature Review

I will begin my review of current literature with a Waikato University research report, 'Evaluation of Literacy and Mathematics Additional Learning Programmes for Students 2011', (University of Waikato 2012), which evaluated the pilot project in Literacy and Mathematics which later became ALL and ALiM. This is the only piece of literature found which evaluated data from these programmes specifically. New Zealand Council for Education Research (NZCER) has since collated data from the ALL interventions in 2013 and are collecting data from 2014 to evaluate the extent of acceleration provided by these interventions. However, this data was not available at the time of my inquiry.

The 2012 Waikato University report seeks to determine the extent to which student learning accelerated and the pedagogical practices had contributed to these gains. Of the 240 schools in total, 94 were involved in literacy projects. For the writing project (which Lucknow School was involved in), pre and post e-asTTle writing and overall teacher judgments were collated. Principals, teachers and students also completed pre and post intervention surveys.

The majority of students accelerated their learning in reading, writing and mathematics during the programmes (these were interventions of 15 weeks). In the case of writing, students improved on average by at least one level on the e-asTTle test. Over half of the teachers' ratings of students in relation to National Standards had improved. These gains occurred for NZ European, Maori and Pasifika students.

The factors determined by the evaluation team to be most crucial to the success of the programmes were;

- Detailed planning
- Lesson length of at least 30 minutes at least 4 times a week
- Focus on particular curriculum content
- Detailed and regular feedback to students
- Teacher expectation and enthusiasm

- Principals' involvement in selection, support and resourcing

The evaluation outlined how some schools were investigating ways to spread the positive outcomes from the programme school wide. These included;

- Teachers sharing their learning across the school
- Teachers applying the approaches used with groups into practice in the classroom

A second and more recent report from the Education Review Office (ERO), 'Raising Achievement in Primary Schools; ALiM and ALL', (ERO, 2014) also specifically relates to ALL initiatives. The report outlines the findings from evaluative questions given to 93 schools involved in ALL and ALiM in 2013. ERO determined that just over half of the schools reviewed had been effective and strategic in responding to underachievement. It concluded that the following capabilities impacted on this effectiveness;

- **Leadership capability;** designing and implementing a coherent whole school plan focused on targeted support for students and teachers
- **Teacher capability;** teaching as inquiry used effectively to respond to student strengths and interests
- **Assessment and evaluative capability;** understanding and using a range of data, and knowing what works for different students (when and why)
- **Relationship capability;** developing a strong school community partnership
- **Curriculum capability;** designing and implementing a school curriculum which is engaging and authentic for learners.

The report recommends that a plan for school improvement would therefore include short term supplementary responses (eg. ALL), as well as long term responses to underachievement. These would be aimed at strengthening each of the above capabilities.

A second ERO report, 'Raising Achievement in Primary Schools', (June 2014) makes similar conclusions. Both reports challenge schools to transfer the learning found to be best practice in supplementary interventions to expected practice for all teachers.

Those schools currently involved in Programmes for Students (Pfs) such as ALL and ALiM will be able to make the connection between the findings of the ERO reports previously referred to and the 'Theory of Action; a design for 2014' (Programmes for Students, 2014). It is worth 'unpacking' the elements of the Theory of Action (ToA), as the design has been a response to reviews into earlier New Zealand literacy interventions. The ToA programmes that accelerate progress for students are designed to *supplement* effective classroom teaching. These supplementary programmes need to make clear connections to students' daily classroom instruction.

A school curriculum and achievement map (or plan) is included as part of the ToA design. This describes worthwhile learning, achievement and how the school will respond if students are not achieving. This design presumes that school would have a number of support programmes available in mathematics and literacy available for at risk students, over time.

A further aspect of the design is the formation of a school's supplementary inquiry team (SIT). Their leadership role is to sustain and embed effective practice; that is, transfer what has been learnt from the supplementary programmes into effective classroom practice.

### **Sustaining improvements in student achievement**

School improvement plans, as outlined in recommendations made by ERO, and school curriculum and achievement plans designed in Pfs both aim to *sustain* improvement in student achievement. How can schools sustain these improvements and what factors would contribute to this? There are a number of research reports within the New Zealand context which I found useful to answer these questions.

The work of Mei Lai, Stuart McNaughton and Selena Hsiao from Auckland University is significant and involved research around the Teaching and Learning Research Initiative. This reading comprehension intervention involved 7950 mostly Maori and Pasifika students, 120 teachers and 29 school leaders. It is cited as being one of the few studies which shows a sustained and continued improvement in achievement after the intervention programme had finished.

Results showed that after the intervention, achievement continued to accelerate in the clusters of schools at the same rate as during the intervention. The researchers concluded that the following 3 factors contributed to this sustainability;

- Organisational learning through inquiry and knowledge building cycles, ensuring that teachers continue to inquire into the needs of students as those needs change
- Embedding inquiry into the school's core business, this included a common framework of programs developed and pursued over a sustained period of time
- Interdependence with other experts, within schools, across schools and using outside providers.

The research team then identified two areas to help schools increase student achievement

1. The need to identify specific learning needs from data and,
2. The ability of schools to enhance the effectiveness of inquiry by developing greater pedagogical content knowledge (PCK).

These factors are explored further in a chapter of 'Weaving Evidence, Inquiry and Standards to Build Better Schools', (Timperly and Parr, 2010). In the chapter titled "Theories for Improvement and Sustainability" (Lai, Timperly and McNaughton, 2010, p53-70) the authors discuss that any 'theory for improvement' should include a plan for sustainability. They stress this is not something that is planned for after an intervention but that it should be considered early in the intervention cycle. A plan for continued improvement may mean extra resources, including input from external sources from time to time.

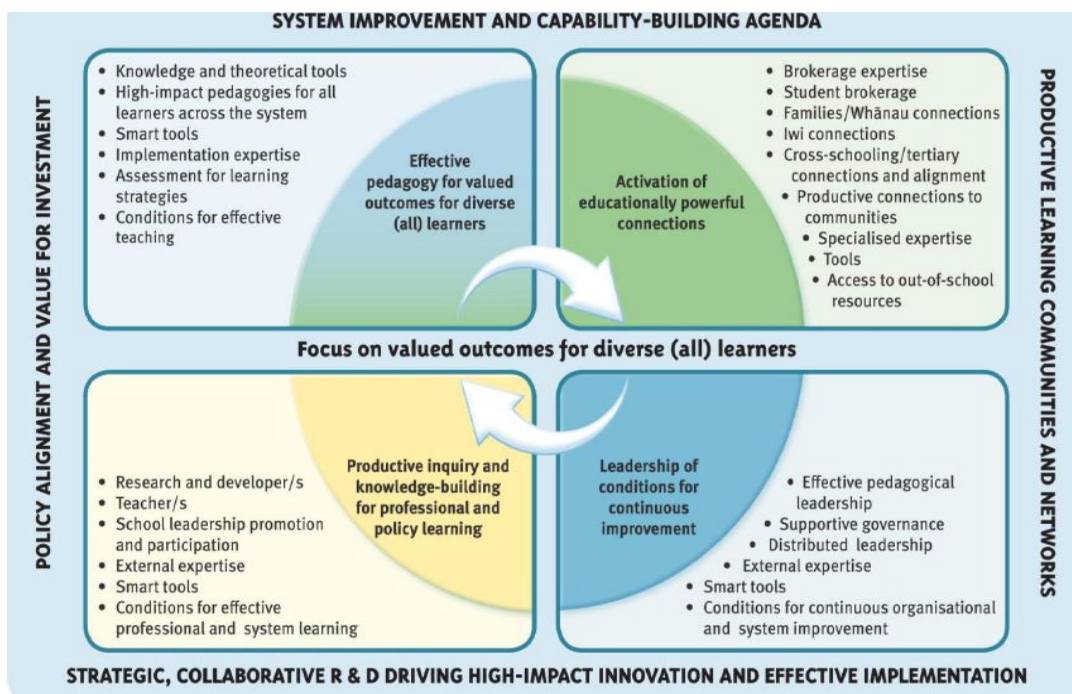
The writers discuss the importance of building teachers' pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) as a crucial part of the inquiry cycle. It is vital that teachers understand the day to day knowledge of how students understand or misunderstand subjects. This improved PCK enhances collegial discussion around achievement data. An example in action would be teachers discussing common student needs across classrooms.

The Manaikalani project (Jesson,R., 2014) has been researched by the University of Auckland and is an ongoing evaluation project. The researchers report on acceleration of achievement in reading, writing and mathematics across classrooms, schools and the cluster of schools in Glenn Innes during 2013-2014. The project involves students from Year 4 to Year 13.

It is an important piece of N.Z. research in terms of investigating the benefits of a long term collaborative approach between schools. The analysis includes data from student assessments, classroom observation and student/teacher/school leader surveys. Achievement data (2013-2014) showed sustained acceleration of achievement in reading comprehension in writing and mathematics; the pattern was one of accelerated gains during the school year but drops occurred between one academic year and the next (commonly called the ‘summer effect’).

Alton Lee’s publication ‘The Use of Evidence to Improve Education and Serve the Public Good’ (2012) discusses the findings of the Best Evidence Synthesis (BES) exemplars which were shown to bring about the effect of accelerated improvement. A system improvement model developed out of the BES program is shown in the diagram attached (fig 1). This will be familiar to PfS participants and has links to previous literature I have reviewed in this report.

(Fig 1) - ***“Accelerated improvement requires a whole system to function as a collaborative learning community that is advancing progress on the four areas of leverage: pedagogy, educationally powerful connections, professional learning and leadership”.***





## Summary

This is an appropriate place to wind up the review of literature, as my intention was to look at effectiveness and sustainability at the school level, rather than to investigate at a systems level. There are obvious connections between the recommendations of ERO in recent reports, the findings of NZ researchers, and the design theory of Programmes for Students with the recent Government policy announcement on Investing in Education Success (IES). Whether the introduction of IES will add to, or distract from, schools achieving coherent and sustainable programmes for school improvement, remains to be seen. This issue certainly requires rigorous consultation within the sector.

I would conclude that evidence of *sustainability* of intervention programmes in the research material was negligible, (whereas accelerated *progress* is reported regularly). NZCER findings from 2013-2014 ALL and ALiM projects, when available, will no doubt be able to show the extent of acceleration gains made by students on these programmes. Whether the gains have been sustained by students in the years following intervention remains to be seen and this was the question I sought to explore in my investigation into the findings of schools who have been involved in these interventions over a significant time.

This investigation began with findings from my own school.

## *Lucknow School - our ALL experience*

In 2011, our school was invited to participate in a Literacy Intervention pilot project with the MOE. In 2012 we were part of the Accelerating Literacy Learning (ALL) project and in 2013 we made a school-based decision to sustain this intervention using Board funding. We have committed seriously to improving the programme as well as exploring how we can sustain similar interventions when the funding and support ceased. In 2014 we are involved in Accelerating Learning in Mathematics (ALiM), so continue to learn how the Programmes for Students (Pfs) are evolving.

### **School context**

Lucknow is a U5, decile 5 contributing school in Havelock North. We have a roll of 300 students with Maori students comprising 38%. The roll is diverse in terms of economic disparity, with a significant portion of our students coming from low socio-economic backgrounds. We have sustained a strategy to improve Maori student achievement over several years, with a particular focus on strengthening partnerships. ALL and ALiM programmes play a significant role within this strategy.

### **2011 project**

The 2011 Literacy Intervention Pilot focused on accelerating writing progress for students in years 4 to 8, ours was a year 6 group. The focus of the teacher's work centered on building relationships with students and whanau. A school leader and an external mentor supported the teacher, mainly around improving the teachers' formative practice. This had high impact, with all 6 students showing accelerated progress over the 10 week intervention. Attitudinal data showed significant growth in students' belief in themselves as writers.

We identified the teacher's willingness to improve, her being open to new learning and her making strong connections with students and families as being the important drivers of improvement in this project. We do not have longitudinal data for these students as they have all left the school and are now at secondary school. During our initial involvement in the pilot programme we did not specifically consider the need to sustain improvement for these learners; this was an issue that emerged during our continued involvement in the project.

## **2012 Project**

During the 2012 ALL project, the model for intervention shifted to a Professional Learning Group (PLG) approach. This had the benefit in terms of design in enabling the lead teacher (our literacy leader), to coach three teachers of Year 3/4/5 students. Again, there was support from an external mentor who was the same provider as in 2011.

In this second year we saw accelerated learning for the new group of 16 students involved over the period of the 15 week intervention. All students made at least one writing 'sub-level' gain against curriculum levels, using our school's written language curriculum matrices as the measure. Attitudinal data measured using a student voice survey showed significant improvement in students' self-efficacy. We evaluated the following as being significant factors leading to progress for these students;

- collaborative inquiry model of the PLG
- improved formative assessment in terms of pedagogy change
- release from class for 30 minutes 5 days a week
- relationships developed, response to cultural and individual differences
- high expectation that students would make accelerated progress

At the start of the intervention, all 16 students were assessed at being below or well below National Standards. Of the 8 remaining students in our school in 2014, 4 remain well below National Standards as Year 6's, 3 are below National Standards in Year 6 and one is at National Standards as a Year 5.

With only a small proportion of the original target group remaining, it is difficult to draw conclusions. However, despite the whole group making significant gains initially in 2012, almost all have not maintained this accelerated gain. A significant change in our process, if we were to repeat such a programme, is that our Supplementary Inquiry Team would use the Theory of Action design to deliberately plan further intervention or remediation for these students. This *may* impact on the sustainability of these students' progress.

### **Sustaining ALL**

In 2013, we planned to sustain ALL based programmes, funded by our school as part of our professional learning and development (PLD) plan. This supported a school-wide focus on raising Maori student achievement and was also part of a leadership inquiry into the effectiveness of PLD undertaken by our DP/Literacy Leader.

Over the year, two interventions of 10 weeks occurred. Each involved three teachers and was facilitated by our literacy leader. We implemented a PLG focus which aimed to accelerate the progress of at risk readers in Year 1. This involved 12 students, all tracking below National Standards after 1 year at school or after 2 years at school. All students made accelerated progress over the period of the intervention and were on track or closer to meeting National Standards.

A year following the intervention, the following mid-year OTJ data was collated from this target reading group;

10/12 students remain at our school

4/10 students are below National Standards

6/10 students are at National Standards.

A second PLG focus aimed to accelerate the progress of at risk writers in Years 2/3/4. This involved 17 students, all of whom were assessed below or well below National Standards. All except 1 student made accelerated progress during the intervention period, in that they were assessed to make at least one 'sub-level' curriculum gain (using school matrices).

Three terms following the intervention (2014), the following mid-year OTJ data was collated from this target writing group;

16/17 students remain at our school

7/16 students are at National Standards

7/16 students are below National Standards

2/16 students are Well below National Standards

What conclusions can we draw from these small 2013 sample groups?

- All students (except 1) made accelerated progress over the term of the intervention
- It is clear that for some this progress is not maintained
- Of the 26 students remaining (from both 2013 groups) approximately 42% are now at National Standards (mid-year OTJ)
- It is impossible to separate 'teacher effect' from the input of the intervention.

What did we identify as being significant factors in the effectiveness of this model of PLD?

- Teachers identified the release component as being crucial if this is to supplement the curriculum programme
- Collaborative inquiry was a strong scaffold for teachers
- Visiting other schools
- Staff identified that their pedagogical content knowledge had improved
- Working within a group of similar ability lifted student confidence

- Whole staff benefitted from ALL teachers sharing their inquiries

Our evaluation also asked, was this a sustainable model for intervention?

- During the year (in just over 2 terms) we supported 31 'at risk' students and 6 teachers. I have estimated the cost at between \$7000 and \$8000, although using banked staffing reduced the potential cost significantly. External expertise added significant cost; we found that we had sufficient capability within our school, so became more selective in employing outside providers
- We reflected on the needs of other students in the class during the intervention period. That is, what was the impact on the classroom programme, given their teacher was not available to them during this time?
- There is also an impact on staff workload during the intervention, given this is additional to their normal meeting/development requirements over the term.

## **Conclusion**

What does *sustainability* actually mean for us as a school? Having read and thought about this during my sabbatical, I believe we still have a way to go to achieve this as a team. I considered the definition of sustainability used earlier in this report;

*“Sustainability, in our view, is a process of organisational learning, where schools use inquiry and knowledge building cycles to improve valued student outcomes”*

(Lai, McNaughton, Timperly & Hsiao, 2009)

It is my view that schools need to be responsive to the changing needs of students as well as the development needs of teachers. At our school, we now need to start questioning at a much deeper level than just identifying gains made by students post intervention.

The questions we will be asking as a Supplementary Intervention Team will be;

- What have teachers learnt from their inquiry and how has this changed practice in their classroom?
- How will our team support teachers to respond to the next group of priority learners? (who will have different needs)
- How do we monitor and respond to the ongoing needs of priority students? (especially if progress is not maintained)
- How do we embed these systems and plan to transfer these across the school?
- When the Ministry support ceases, how do we resource these interventions?

In my visits to schools as part of my sabbatical inquiry, these were the questions that second and third year ALL leaders were seeking solutions to. The final part of my report focuses on their efforts to attain sustainability in each of their settings.

### *Visits and discussions with ALL schools in the Central North region*

I am indebted to colleagues from Hastings and Gisborne region schools who gave their time willingly to share their experiences of the ALL project with me. These five schools were identified by our region's ALL facilitator as being successful second and third year project participants. It was encouraging to see the parallels between these schools in terms of the decisions they are making and the process of inquiry they are implementing. This is despite their diversity in terms of school setting, size, roll description and decile. I was certainly able to see 'coherence' in action within this small snapshot of project schools.

My report collates the findings of the schools generally, but also includes some individual responses to questions I posed. These questions were around the following themes;

1. Which factors have contributed to the effective of ALL and other interventions at your school?
2. How is your school ensuring the sustainability for ALL and other interventions?

3. What is your evidence telling you about the effectiveness/sustainability of ALL and other interventions?

### **Factors contributing to effectiveness of interventions**

All schools were able to discuss their improvements during their time on the project. They were able to draw upon previous years' findings to improve their plans and extend the interventions and processes wider. All schools spoke of the importance their facilitator played in mentoring, support and being able to ask the right questions at the right time. School leaders and teachers were all positive about the 'Theory of Action' design and it was clear to me that being involved in the project over time enabled their schools to embed the inquiry process as 'the way we do things around here'. The impact days were seen as an opportunity to learn from others' successes and challenges.

It was no surprise to find that each of these schools had a very capable Supplementary Inquiry Team (SIT) driving this school improvement. These teams were all putting careful thought into sustaining and continuously improving the processes they were implementing. The SIT model was seen to be strength by all schools. In comparison, our school's earlier experience lacked this coordinated approach involving an ALL facilitator and SIT.

Programmes developed for students are designed to meet students' need and teachers are better equipped to know what deliberate acts of teaching are likely to meet these needs.

*We've become better at unpacking/acting on data. This has involved a lot of moderation across the school. The CaAP defines the trigger points, we are now more targeted. It has fine-tuned our data use.*

School D, Year 3 ALL



*We were able to plan for an intensive project involving 4 teachers; about 12 weeks 'on the ground'. During this time teachers have met regularly with the SIT. This has allowed for great dialogue.*

School A, Year 2 ALL

*Being a smaller school, we've been able to be flexible with time and support; it's given our teacher time to observe the (target) students in class.*

School C, Year 2 ALL

*We have used the inquiries to drive PD across staff. Last year's findings have informed this year's PD/appraisal goals and progress towards Registered Teacher's Criteria.*

School B, Year 3 ALL

### **Ensuring sustainability of intervention**

In all of these second and third year ALL schools, there was a commitment to seeing long term shifts in achievement. There was a clear focus on building confidence and capacity within teaching and leadership teams. Schools all reported that conversations across their teams had improved. The coaching of teachers and teams through teacher collaboration were seen as the catalysts for continued improvement.

*The conversations within school, for example between our literacy leader and numeracy leader, have grown.*

School E, Year 2 ALL

*This is about building capacity within schools- with the people you've got.*

School E, Year 2 ALL

*Teachers will continue to have target groups and our team (SIT) meetings will continue. This now embedded in our school.*

School D, Year 3 ALL

An experienced Principal considered ALL to have driven the most effective professional development her school had been involved in. It was ongoing, had been well supported by facilitators and involved working alongside teachers to develop their strengths. This Principal added that in the third year of their involvement in ALL their focus will be to extend 'capacity building'.

### **What is your evidence telling you about effectiveness and sustainability?**

Third year ALL project schools' data showed the effectiveness of interventions (acceleration) and their SIT had started to collate longitudinal data for Priority Learners (sustainability). Those students who had not maintained progress were identified in an 'at risk' register and their 'best fit' achievement levels within National Standards were highlighted. This ensured that their progress was clear to teacher and the Supplementary Inquiry Team (SIT).

I saw strong examples of Theory of Action in practice in these Year 3 schools, with this developing in Year 2 schools. Teachers in School B, Year 3 ALL, are coached to develop deliberate acts of teaching for targeted students as part of this plan. These are regularly monitored across teams with coaching support in a six week cycle of review; in reading, writing and mathematics. In School B and D, both Year 3 ALL, there was a planned approach to raising the capability of teachers across the schools, with close links to appraisal and PLD. Teachers were strongly supportive of this collaborative coaching model.

All schools recognised the need to monitor their priority learners well beyond the period of intervention. They discussed how systems were improving to enable this. The requirement to continue effective monitoring of priority learners has been identified as a necessity throughout my reading, my reflection on my own school's practice and discussion with colleagues in other ALL schools.

Student confidence and attitude to writing was a common theme of discussion. These schools were deliberately planning for students to see the purpose of their writing and for acceleration and achievement in writing to be celebrated.

- Parents in School D were invited to observe lessons and students shared writing with them
- School A allowed for a double booking at Learning Conferences to give families time to share progress and goals
- Students in School C have seen that their writing has cultural connections as it was integrated into a learning inquiry.

All schools identified the need for systems to remain in place and to continue to develop. This was clearly seen as a process of continual improvement.

## **Conclusion**

Since my school's experience with the Literacy Intervention Pilot and ALL in 2011/2012, there have been some key changes to the Programmes for Students design in 2013/2014.

I was able to investigate the improvements to these programmes with the support of colleagues from five schools and their ALL facilitator. These discussions have clarified how this 'Theory in Action' could support sustainability of programmes to accelerate progress for priority learners in my school setting.

The Theory of Action provides teams with a model to respond strategically to students who are at risk of not achieving National Standards. These supplementary programmes for priority learners are just that - they are designed to *supplement* effective classroom teaching within a high quality, rich curriculum.

With leadership from Supplementary Intervention Teams, teachers are supported to inquire into improvement strategies which are deliberate and resourced. These strategies are then responsive to the needs of new groups of students and to those intervention students who have not made expected progress.

I saw how SITs are developing systems to evaluate the impact of these programmes. As a result of improved use of achievement data, schools are able to resource more strategically. Resourcing was highlighted as a major challenge.

All of the schools I visited are committed to achieving sustainability of these programmes. I found them to be determined to embed improvement in their teaching practices through collaborative inquiry. In doing so, their focus has shifted from the acceleration of individual students to achieving long term (sustained) improvement in student achievement.

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