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The author would also like to express sincere thanks to the participants and leaders who participated in this study.
Executive Summary

This report details the findings of a research evaluation of the Practice Changing Practice professional development program funded by the NSW Department of Education. The program was implemented in 2019 in partnership with the School of Education at Western Sydney University and was open to teachers working in schools that were members of the NSW Department of Education Bungarribee, Quakers Hill and The Ponds networks.

The Professional Development Program

The program was designed and implemented in partnership with Mr Peter D’Ermilio and Ms Nicole Parker (Metella Road Public School) and academics at Western Sydney University. The program aimed to:

- Develop a depth of high-quality leadership practices that are contextualised to schools, supporting succession planning.
- Develop a community of practice and strengthen collegial support for school leaders.
- Create a culture of action research within schools.
- Cultivate an ongoing partnership with Western Sydney University.

Participants attended a program that consisted of three face-to-face full day sessions and two after-school support sessions delivered via Zoom video-conferencing software. The sessions spanned a period of six months. The program provided development in action research methodology and it was a requirement that participants, either individually or within teams, were able to identify a problem of practice within their schools, articulate a research question, and conduct and evaluate action research. On conclusion of the program the participants submitted a research report and took part in a conference-style poster presentation during the final face-to-face session.

In addition to the formal program the participants were assigned an external critical friend (an academic staff member from WSU) and a coach (a participant from the 2018 pilot program) to assist and support teachers with their action research.

The Research Evaluation

The research evaluation was undertaken using a qualitative approach. Data was collected from participants using questionnaires and interviews at the beginning and end of the program. Data was also collected from coaches via interviews at the beginning and end of the program. The data was collected by researchers who were not involved in the delivery of the Practice Changing Practice program.

The following research questions were used to explore the effectiveness and impact of the professional development program:

1. In what ways does action research as sustained professional development develop a school culture of action research?
   - What are the perceptions of participants with regard to the Practice Changing Practice program as sustained professional development?
   - What are the perceptions of in-school coaches with regard to the Practice Changing Practice program?

2. Is action research considered an effective method to improve practice by participants of the Practice Changing Practice program?
   - In what ways has action research influenced practice?
   - How have perceptions of action research changed as a result of participation in the program?

All program participants (36 participants and 11 coaches) were invited to take part in the evaluation. Approximately one third of participants and two thirds of coaches consented to participate in the research.
Findings

The professional development program promoted school cultures of action research within participating schools in the following ways by:

- Promoting the development of an evidence-based approach to leadership and teaching;
- Encouraging the development of critical reflection within individuals and collectively for those working in teams;
- Creating a culture of professional discussion;
- Building leadership capacity amongst experienced and early career teachers;
- Providing participants with a sense of agency regarding their ability to cause change through their actions and the actions of others;
- Providing professional development and support systems to ensure the practice of action research is ongoing and sustainable;
- Providing the opportunity for participants to apply professional learning that was relevant, individualised and contextualised;
- Building connections and networks within and amongst schools and academics at Western Sydney University;
- Providing opportunities to develop coaching skills and deepening the action research skills of participants from the Practice Changing Practice pilot program; and
- Exposing participants to current research and providing opportunities for the translation of research into practice.

Reactions to the Practice Changing Practice program as a model for sustained professional development were overwhelmingly positive. This was particularly obvious when participants compared the program to traditional, one-off professional development sessions. Participants and coaches reported changes to their teaching and leadership skills as a result of their participation in the program. Features of the program that contributed to its success as perceived by participants were the face to face sessions that included guest speakers, access to current research literature, opportunities to work together and gather peer feedback, and the opportunity to work with University academics. One feature of the program that some participants felt needed improvement was the use of video-conferencing software to conduct meetings after school.

The opportunity to learn about and conduct action research as part of the program was highly valued by participants. Although some were initially overwhelmed and uncomfortable with the open-ended nature of action research, the ability to conduct actual evidence-based research within their individual contexts was well received by all participants. The provision of two layers of support via coaches and external critical friends was also an element of the program that differentiated it from other professional learning programs.
Recommendations

The following recommendations are provided to assist in the development of future iterations of the Practice Changing Practice professional development program:

- It is recommended that future iterations continue with the use of coaches. The selection of previous participants to coach and support new cohorts of participants is critical to the success of the program. Coaches provide insight into action research methodology and are able to use corporate knowledge to assist in supporting and facilitating action research.

- The 2019 program used a combination of coaching models that used coaches located within the same school as participants and in some cases, coaches located at different schools. It is recommended that where possible, coaches are located within the same school to ensure ease of access to support.

- Program structure should be face to face rather than digital. While Zoom sessions could be utilised for more informal support sessions or meetings, face-to-face meetings will provide a higher level of interaction and therefore more opportunities for support from the program facilitator and coaches.

- The ultimate goal of action research is to improve student outcomes and experiences. It is recommended that in future iterations of the program facilitators and participants should be encouraged to place a heavier emphasis on student learning, measuring the impact of the action research on students as well as on teachers and leaders.

- The ongoing commitment from schools that have participated in the program is important in the development of a culture of action research within schools and within the participating networks of schools. It is recommended that principals of past participant schools continue to support teachers and leaders to take part in the Practice Changing Practice program.

- It is recommended that Practice Changing Practice continues to be researched in order to investigate the long-term effects of participation in the program. Such evidence is critical if programs such as this are to be scaled up across a larger number of schools and networks.
1. Introduction

The Practice Changing Practice (PCP) professional learning initiative evolved from a need to build leadership capacity amongst teachers working in schools that were members of the Bungarribee, Quakers Hill and The Ponds networks within the NSW Department of Education. Prior to PCP, the combined school networks had provided professional learning for aspiring leaders via the delivery of a range of seminars. In 2018 leaders representing the groups of schools approached Western Sydney University, via the Education Knowledge Network within the School of Education, to explore the possibility of working together to develop and deliver a different model of leadership development that would build capacity amongst teachers and leaders.

The PCP initiative began in 2018 with a pilot program. The pilot involved a group of leaders (22) from nine schools who received professional learning at Western Sydney University. The program involved an introduction to action research methodology and required the pilot participants to develop action research within each of their individual school contexts. The premise behind this pilot was that if school leaders were to encourage and support staff to engage with action research, they needed to ‘walk the talk’. That is, they would need a strong understanding of action research methodology and the challenges and benefits associated with such an approach in order to support their colleagues in future iterations of the program. This approach of having leaders become involved in the professional development of their teachers is widely supported by literature (Cordingley et al., 2015).

Pilot program participants were required to identify an issue within their practice to be addressed, articulate a research question and formulate a plan of action based on evidence gathered within the school context and from the evidence-based research drawn from the broader field of education. Participants attended three face-to-face sessions that provided peer feedback and critique during the process of the action research. Three support session were conducted during the period of research that allowed participants to share ideas and provide ongoing feedback and support, developing a community of practice (Wenger, 2000) in action research. Participants completed the program by submitting a research report and presenting their findings at a showcase session. The program was deemed to be successful and received positive feedback from participants and it was decided that it would be offered to teachers and leaders across the three networks in 2019.

This report presents findings from research conducted during the 2019 iteration of the PCP program. The first section of the report provides brief background literature pertaining to the teacher professional development and action research as sustained professional learning. Following this, an overview of the PCP program is provided. The research methodology is then presented and this is followed by the research findings. Finally, a series of recommendations complete this report.
2. Background

A recently released report from the Grattan Institute claims the large investments in teachers who are leading professional development in Australia through initiatives such as the instructional leader roles has not worked (Goss & Sonnerman, 2020). Goss and Sonnerman indicate we must do better in light of Australia’s declining performance in international tests in reading, science, and mathematics. The intention of the Practice Changing Practice program was not to focus on specific leadership roles such as instructional leaders, rather, the program is inclusive of teachers operating at all levels, under the premise that all teachers are leaders in education and have critical roles to play in improving student learning.

Practice Changing Practice as Sustained Professional Learning

Common models of teacher professional development are the traditional, off-site sessions, seminars or conferences or more contemporary, reform-based activities that incorporate study groups, networking, mentoring and meetings that occur in-situ (Lee, 2007). Findings from a review of teacher PD in the UK indicate the majority of teachers report participation in courses, workshops and in-service training in outside organisations, but significantly lower participation in more in-depth activities such as action research (Cordingley et al., 2015) and it is reasonable to expect that these practices would be similar in the Australian context.

While the majority of teachers engage with traditional, short programs of PD, sustained programs have overwhelmingly been found to be more effective. Duration of PD has been identified as a significant characteristic in determining effectiveness (Cordingley et al., 2015; Lee, 2007). Literature refers to duration in terms of time, space and support to develop teachers’ confidence, ability and skills (Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009; Desimone, 2009). Some research suggests that PD programs offering substantial contact hours (ranging from 14 to 100 hours in total) with a duration spread over six to 12 months show a positive and significant effect on student achievement (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009) and this was the model adapted by the Practice Changing Practice program, spanning across three school terms and consisting of 30 hours of accredited professional learning.

Further evidence of the influence of duration is provided by Darling-Hammond et al., (2009) and Darling-Hammond and Richardson (2009), who found changes in teacher practice and student learning responded to “intensive and sustained PD activities, especially when they include applications of knowledge to teachers’ planning and instruction, have a great chance of influencing teaching practices and, in turn, lead to gains in student learning” (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009, p.44). In addition, programs that have a narrow focus result in considerably more lasting impact than those that have a broader or more generic focus. PD programs that aim to result in organisational and cultural change, as with Practice Changing Practice, need to run for at least two school terms (Cordingley et al., 2015).

An additional element of effective PD particularly relevant to the participants in the Practice Change Practice project is the opportunity for collective and collaborative participation to build a professional community within and amongst the schools (Borko, 2004; King, 2014), thereby promoting the development of a broader community of practice. Other literature supports the building of a professional community through PD as a new paradigm in effective PD, promoting sustained, embedded and collaborative teacher learning strategies (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009).
2. Background

However, all PD programs, regardless of duration and focus, are not without challenges. Two commonly experienced barriers relate to time pressures and insufficient support from school leadership. Fletcher-Wood & Zuccollo (2020) posit that leadership support is an important barrier to ensuring PD has sustained effects, hence the Practice Changing Practice program was designed to include school leaders in the pilot program, and again in the 2019 iteration. Other known barriers to effective teacher PD are those associated with high teacher workload, particularly when programs are designed by external providers. To avoid this, the Practice Changing Practice program was designed in collaboration with the school leaders. When professional learning interventions are well-designed and appropriate to the needs of the school they are generally well supported and positively evaluated by teachers. Fletcher-Wood and Zuccollo recommend professional development programs are designed to minimise the demands they place on teachers, making change “easy, attractive, social, and timely” (p.15). With this in mind, action research was selected as the core element of the Practice Changing Practice program.

Action Research as Professional Development

Action research is an approach utilised by educators to improve practice and is particularly useful for bringing about change within a local setting (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018). The approach is particularly useful for solving specific, context-specific problems, to pose problems, or to pursue areas of interest for professional development (McNiff, 2010, as cited in Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018). Action research can be conducted by individuals, collaboratively amongst groups of teachers within a school or network, and alongside other interested external parties such as university academics. It is considered to be a transformative, collaborative and democratic approach to educational research (Wood, 2020).

“To engage with research, teachers need to engage in it” (Stenhouse, 1979, as cited in Cordingley, 2015, p. 237). Cordingley (2015) asserts there are a range of ways and contexts in which education research contributes to effective teacher professional development. Benefits of teacher action research include improvements in student achievement, attainment and engagement and improved willingness to experiment and expand teaching practices. Engaging in the research of others also improves teachers’ ability and readiness to identify the rationales underpinning new approaches to practice. Action research is considered an effective form of professional development because of its context specific nature and its relevance to participants and their day-to-day experiences and aspirations for teachers’ own practices and their students (Cordingley et al., 2015).
The Action Research Approach

The action research approach typically consists of a four-step process that, depending on the research and the teachers’ reflections, can become a sequence of cycles (Figure 1). Rather than being focused on researching a problem of education, action research requires practitioners to focus on a problem of practice (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018). During the initial cycle, the teacher researcher identifies a problem of practice or an area of interest to be addressed. A plan is then formulated and put into action. At each point in the action research cycle the researcher collects and analyses evidence to assist in evaluating the success of the research and to assist in the planning of future cycles.

The Practice Changing Practice program required participants to work through a process of identifying a problem of practice either collaboratively or individually and articulate a research question prior to devising a plan of action for their first cycle of action research. An important element of devising a plan was to explore the research of others. This would ensure their plan was research informed. As each team or individual research focus was unique, there were no set expectations regarding the number of cycles that would be completed prior to the end of the program. Rather, the expectation was that the cycles of research would continue beyond the professional development program and, in time, become part of each teacher’s practice and a part of the culture within each of the participating schools.
3. The Practice Changing Practice Program

The aims of the PCP program were as follows:

- Develop a depth of high-quality leadership practices that are contextualised to schools, supporting succession planning.
- Develop a community of practice and strengthen collegial support for school leaders.
- Create a culture of action research within schools.
- Cultivate an ongoing partnership with Western Sydney University.

The 2019 PCP program consisted of the following session structure.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Program Sessions</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 9th May          | Full day, face to face at WSU     | • Introduction to PCP  
• Keynote Address: Professor Peter Grootenboer, Griffith University  
• Introduction to Action Research  
• Identifying a problem of practice and articulating a research question |
| 29th May         | Afternoon Zoom session            | • Review of the Action Research process  
• Reporting on progress  
• Feedback |
| 15th August      | Full day, face to face at WSU     | • Keynote Address: Emeritus Professor Wayne Sawyer, Western Sydney University |
| 15th October     | Afternoon Zoom session            | • Reflecting on Research  
• Reflecting on Personal Growth  
• Reporting on progress  
• Feedback |
| 22nd November    | Full day, face to face at WSU     | • Keynote Address: Sharon Ford, Acting Executive Director, Leadership and High Performance, NSW Department of Education  
• Panel Session  
• Poster Sessions  
• Reflection Activity  
• Future Directions  
• Closing Keynote: Professor Peter Grootenboer and Associate Professor Catherine Attard |
Participants attended three face-to-face sessions that provided opportunities to hear from high calibre keynote speakers and to promote collaboration, peer feedback and critique. Working with colleagues from within and outside teachers’ own schools promoted shared risk-taking by providing practical and emotional support (Cordingley, 2015). Support sessions, using the Zoom video conferencing platform, were conducted to allow participants to share ideas and provide ongoing feedback and support, developing a community of practice in action research and increasing motivation to persist and engage with the professional learning program. These sessions were scheduled after school hours to minimise disruption to teaching and learning programs.

In addition to the formal program as described in Table 1 above, the participants were assigned an external critical friend (an academic staff member from WSU) and a coach (a participant from the 2018 pilot program) to assist teachers with their action research. The role of the external critical friends was to provide bespoke support to individual researchers and research teams, to be negotiated between the teachers and the academic (up to a maximum of 10 hours). The use of external experts is supported in literature on professional development (Cordingley, 2015) with claims the use of specialist expertise serves a range of functions including exposing teachers to new approaches and providing scaffolding to assist teachers in taking control of their learning about new approaches. In addition, specialist experts can provide objective information relating to current realities and promoting a sense of planned purpose for experimentation and risk taking. The participants also had the added internal support of coaches who were either from the same school or a different school and had each participated in the program during 2018.

The concluding session in November was a showcase event held at Western Sydney University to celebrate and highlight the research findings of participants. Individuals and teams presented their action research in the form of a written report and poster presentation to illustrate their research methods, findings, implications and impacts.

Participants

The 2019 cohort of Practice Changing Practice consisted of:
- 36 participants from 10 schools (Refer to Table 2 for school details)
- 15 coaches and 37 participants
- 10 external critical friends from Western Sydney University School of Education

Action Research Topics

As the purpose of the PCP program was to provide opportunities for participants to research problems of practice within each of their contexts, a broad range of investigation topics emerged. In some schools, participants worked in teams to investigate a shared topic and in others, participants worked individually on topics that were identified as an area of need within each individual teacher’s practice. Table 2 lists the range of research investigations undertaken by participants.
## 3. The Practice Changing Practice Program

### Table 2: Participating schools and research programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Coach</th>
<th>Research</th>
<th>Individual/Team</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bert Oldfield</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Differentiation in mathematics</td>
<td>Individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blacktown North</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Creating consistent teacher judgement when assessing LBOTE students’ writing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blacktown South</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Investigating the key features of an effective writing program</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caddies Creek</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>Investigating how leaders can facilitate more uptake of professional learning to create shifts in classroom practice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kings Langley</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1. Quality assessment practices</td>
<td>Individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Quality numeracy practice in the classroom</td>
<td>Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. The impact of teaching practice and classroom design on student engagement</td>
<td>Individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marayong</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1. Facilitating a shared understanding of comprehension strategies</td>
<td>Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Facilitating educators to become critically reflective in sustained shared thinking strategies</td>
<td>Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. How do classroom teachers facilitate conflict resolution in kindergarten students?</td>
<td>Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metella Road</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>How do leaders ensure there is a continuity of pedagogy to build a shared understanding of student learning in writing from Year 2 to Year 3?</td>
<td>Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quakers Hill</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Developing a culture of reflective practice that empowers staff to seek feedback and build capacity as reflective practitioners</td>
<td>Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Ponds School</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Supporting teachers through the PDP process to build capacity and a culture of growth</td>
<td>Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vardys Road</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Implementing a system for assessing the growth of high-ability/high-potential students</td>
<td>Individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Rose School</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Cultivating reflective practitioners in a complex setting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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In order to investigate the efficacy of using action research as an approach to sustained professional learning, a qualitative approach was undertaken.

The following research questions were investigated to determine the effectiveness and impact of the program:

1. **In what ways does action research as sustained professional development develop a school culture of action research?**
   - What are the perceptions of teachers with regard to the Practice Changing Practice program as sustained professional development?
   - What are the perceptions of in-school coaches with regard to the Practice Changing Practice program?

2. **Is action research considered an effective method to improve practice by participants of the Practice Changing Practice program?**
   - In what ways has action research influenced practice?
   - How have perceptions of action research changed as a result of participation in the program?

### Evaluation Participants

All program participants were invited to take part in the research evaluation, forming two specific groups: Program participants, and coaches. Data was collected at the beginning of the program and again on conclusion of the program. Researchers who were not involved in the delivery of the professional development program conducted the data collection in order to avoid researcher bias.

### Ethical Procedures

The research methods used in this evaluation were approved by Western Sydney University’s Human Research Ethics Committee (approval number: H13247). All prospective participants were provided with a plain language information sheet about the research. This research was conducted with program participants who provided informed consent.
Data Sources

Data informing this research was gathered from the following sources:

Questionnaires

Questionnaires were utilised in this study to allow the individual participants to provide feedback. The questionnaires were simple and concise and addressed the Research Questions 1 and 2 regarding perceived outcomes of the professional development and the resulting action research conducted by the participants within their school contexts. Questionnaires were administered following the first professional development face to face session and on completion of the final face to face session (see Appendices 1 and 2). The intention of conducting the questionnaires was to allow the researchers to gain feedback from the maximum number of teacher participants. Participant numbers are detailed in Table 3.

Interviews

Semi-structured group or individual interviews with participating teachers were conducted to allow the researchers to address each of the research questions in depth. Interviews were carried out early during the PD program and again on completion of the program. Participants from the same school took part in group interviews. Where only one teacher at a school participated in the PD program, he or she took part in individual interviews.

Semi-structured individual interviews with coaches were also conducted early during the PD program and on conclusion to allow the researchers to gain a different perspective of participant experiences and allow for triangulation of data.

Data Collection Instruments

The following questions served as open-ended prompts for participants and coaches to respond to:

Teacher Interview 1

1. What is your current understanding of action research?
2. What are your current perceptions of action research as a form of professional development?
3. What is the current intended group (or individual) focus of your action research in this professional learning program?
4. What do you hope to improve in regard to student learning?
5. What are you hoping to learn about action research?
6. What, if any, are your concerns in relation to participation in this program?

Teacher Interview 2

1. What is your current understanding of action research?
2. What are your current perceptions of action research as a form of sustained professional development?
3. What was the group (or individual) focus of your action research in this professional learning program?
4. What changed as a result of your action research in relation to a) teaching, and b) learning?
5. What was the value of working as a group?
6. In what ways did having an external critical friend assist in the professional development program?
7. What advice would you give others who were considering action research as professional development?
8. Any other comments or feedback regarding the program?
Table 3: Number of Research Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Questionnaire 1</th>
<th>Questionnaire 2</th>
<th>Interview 1</th>
<th>Interview 2</th>
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<td>Coaches</td>
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<td>N/A</td>
<td>8</td>
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**Coach Interview 1**

1. What is your current understanding of action research?
2. What are your current perceptions of action research as a form of sustained professional development?
3. What is the current intended group (or individual) focus (or foci) of the action research being undertaken by those you are coaching?
4. What do the group/s hope to improve in regard to student learning?
5. What are you (or your school as a whole) hoping to gain in relation about action research?
6. In what ways are you hoping to support the groups in your role as coach?
7. What, if any, are your concerns in relation to participation in this program?

**Coach Interview 2**

1. What are your current perceptions of action research as a form of sustained professional development?
2. What was/were group (or individual) focus (or foci) of the action research being undertaken by those you are coaching?
3. What did the group/s improve in regard to student learning?
4. What have you (or your school as a whole) gained in relation about action research?
5. In what ways did you support the groups in your role as coach?
6. In what ways did having an external critical friend assist in the professional development program?
7. Do you have any other comments or feedback in relation to the program and your role as a coach?

**Data Analysis**

Data from teacher and coach interviews was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. All qualitative data was analysed using nVivo software. Questionnaire data was collated and analysed using descriptive statistics. The combination of interview and questionnaire data was then used to seek responses to the research questions and the analysed again to identify emerging themes within those responses.
5. Program Results

The Practice Changing Practice program was initiated to provide sustained and effective professional development for current and aspiring leaders and participants in schools from the Bungaribee, Quakers Hill and The Ponds networks of schools.

The original intention of the program was to provide a sustained program that moved away from the one-off, seminar style approach to a program that would result in increased leadership capacity and sustained change in school culture. While it is not possible to measure a change in culture over such a short period of time, this research examines the effectiveness of the implemented mode of PD and the participants’ and coaches’ perceptions of the program.

This section provides the findings drawn from the analysis of questionnaires and interview data to respond to the research questions:

1. In what ways does action research as sustained professional development develop a school culture of action research?
   a. What are the perceptions of teachers with regard to the Practice Changing Practice program as sustained professional development?
   b. What are the perceptions of in-school coaches with regard to the Practice Changing Practice program?

2. Is action research considered an effective method to improve practice by participants of the Practice Changing Practice program?
   a. In what ways has action research influenced practice?
   b. How have perceptions of action research changed as a result of participation in the program?

I have found this has been amazing professional development that I think is – the impact’s been huge. Because normally, you go to professional development, you listen to the speech and you’re like, yeah, that was nice. This is actually getting us to trial and test things, in our own context, and giving it a go, but it went beyond that.

(Teacher, Interview 2)
Participants’ Perceptions of the Practice Changing Practice program

The final questionnaire conducted on conclusion of the PCP program was completed by nine participants. Likert Scale responses aligned with the qualitative data and strongly indicated positive responses to the structure and focus of the PD program (See Appendices 3 and 4 for Questionnaire 1 and 2 Likert scale results). While this data gives us a snapshot of the success of the structure of the program, the qualitative questionnaire responses and interview data provided further insight into the perspectives of participants and their coaches, providing an opportunity for an in-depth exploration of the benefits, effects and challenges of the program.

Analysis of the data revealed a range of perceived benefits by the participating teachers. One of the most significant benefits for participating teachers was the use of action research as professional development as opposed to the traditional mode of PD where teachers are positioned as consumers rather than producers of knowledge. The contextualised and individualised nature of the program appeared to have a significant impact on the participants and the following quotes are representative of the overall responses:

“This is more having to think about our setting, our students and our staff, and it’s very much based on us rather than someone else who’s telling us, this is how it is and good luck trying to implement it within your classroom or your school.” (Participant, Interview 1)

“It’s more put on yourself to do the research and make the change where when you go to [PD] they provide all this information for you and they’re kind of like, this I what you could do, you could do this, go back and implement it. (Participant, Interview 1)

“I think other PLs that we go to is a kind of a one-hit wonder type thing. You go there, gather information. No one really follows you up in the way you’re implementing it or how you’re actually going with it, so it’s all up to your own ownership, sorry, if you’re going to go forward and implement that in your pedagogy. With this, this flips it – or my interpretation of it, anyway – my idea of action research has flipped it in a way that you can actually use this way of thinking in your daily actions.” (Participant, Interview 2)

Ownership of Learning/Responsibility

The very nature of action research requires teachers to take control of their learning and act upon it within their own school contexts. While the formal sessions of the program were somewhat structured in terms of providing generic input on action research methodology, participants had responsibility for conducting and evaluating their own action research. Several of the teachers spoke about the effectiveness of having to take ownership of their learning.

“With professional learning, you’re sitting there thinking, this is not relevant to me or that was a waste of two hours I’m never going to get back kind of thing. Whereas, I think this - if it’s a waste then it’s sort of put onto us a bit. Like we’ve got the ownership of it. Also too, as much as I had the fluidity of it – that it can change – I think it’s also good that if we get to a point and we go, oh this is not working, we can change it to suit us.” (Participant, Interview 1)

“It’s more put on yourself to do the research and make the change where when you go to [PD] they provide all this information for you and they’re kind of like, this I what you could do, you could do this, go back and implement it.” (Participant, Interview 1)

“It’s not just this is given to you and you can either choose to take it or leave it. It’s more open ended, I guess.” (Participant, Interview 1)
The requirement of participants to submit a four-page research report and provide a conference-style poster presentation at the final face-to-face session provided motivation for some participants to actively engage with the action research. It was also perceived as a useful tool for reflecting on the program:

“\textit{It made us actually really reflect on what it is that we had achieved even if it wasn’t [unclear] impact on staff and students [unclear] achieved quite a lot over the nine-month period. So, it was a little daunting to have to put together the report and the poster and we were lucky enough that our senior exec gave us some time to do that. But when we actually did sit down and reflect, we were quite proud of what we’d achieved.} (Participant, Interview 2)

\textbf{Leadership Capacity}

A major objective of the PCP program was to improve leadership capacity and some participants expressed this as a personal goal during the initial interview. The quotes below also express a desire to share any learning with the participant’s broader school community:

“\textit{I think it will be nice to have that leadership opportunity to be able to then pass it to the other preschool teachers and the teachers in kindergarten as a continuity for all of the students just so that they’re aware} (Participant, Interview 1)

“\textit{I’m aspiring to be a leader. So I’ve only been in a leadership position for about a year and a half now. So I’m hoping to, as part of this, also build up on my leadership skills and being able to lead something within the school. Being a whole school program, just having that under my belt and being able to extend my leadership skills into an area that I’m actually not fully comfortable in. So taking me outside of that comfort zone.} (Participant, Interview 1)

The responsibility of conducting research that often involved other non-participating colleagues appeared to have been effective in building the leadership capacity of the participants. It is also evident that in some cases, individual and collective growth occurred due to the collaborative nature of the action research and of the PD program itself. The following quotes confirm this and indicates the development of a community of practice within the school and the beginnings of a culture of action research:

“\textit{It really had an impact on developing us as leaders. That was something that came out of it that, personally, I didn’t think that that would happen. So, when you look at it from that perspective, the amount of learning that we have done, and because we’re actually embedding it in our school, something we talk about all the time.} (Participant, Interview 2)
Here, we now have effected change for the whole school. We talk about it. Every stage is now talking about writing, and that would never, ever have happened. If we just went to a PD that talked about writing, there’s no way we could have ever affected that. We were eating, breathing, sleeping it, for a very long time. (Participant, Interview 2)

Participants who were not already leaders saw the program as an opportunity to gain a broader perspective of their school beyond their own individual classrooms:

“I was really excited by this prospect to actually get the opportunity to move myself away from just a classroom aspect, to have more of an input in assisting a whole school initiative or a whole school focus area and developing the skillset alongside, obviously, executive. (Participant, Interview 1)

The benefits of working as a cohort
The structure of the PCP program required participants to conduct action research within their schools which resulted in a broad range of unique research foci. While no two research foci were the same, the participants still found it beneficial to come together as a cohort during the course of the program:

“I felt that despite doing individual projects we’ve still collaborated and supported each other in a really productive and kind of efficient way. (Participant, Interview 2)

“Working as part of the broader PCP group I think has been hugely motivating to see what other schools are doing and how they’re applying – how similar problems exist across contexts or how they don’t and being able to recognise why that is. We’ve discussed seeing some schools have not had the opportunity to engage in different professional learning programs and so are we can see are at the beginning stages of journeys our school has already travelled. (Participant, Interview 2)

Supporting Participants Through Internal Coaching and External Critical Friends
An integral part of the PCP program was the support provided to participants in the form of coaches (previous participants of the PCP pilot program) and university academics who were available as external critical friends. The roles of the coaches and critical friends were flexible to ensure the research groups or individual researchers were able to access support in ways that were beneficial to their specific research focus. Some of the coaches were located within the same schools as the participants, and others were located at different schools. Overall, the expertise of coaches and critical friends were valued:

“It was really good to have that other person that had experience and we could bounce ideas off. (Participant, Interview 2)

The majority of participants found the coaches and critical friends were helpful, although for some, logistical challenges made it difficult to access critical friends in a timely manner.
5. Program Results

Perspectives of Coaches

The role of coaches was an integral element of the PCP program in 2019. Each of the coaches had participated in the 2018 pilot program and their involvement in 2019 allowed them the opportunity to support others while continuing to deepen their understanding of action research and perhaps continue with the research they undertook in 2018. Data was gathered from coaches during the early stages of the 2019 program and again at the end of the program to provide an understanding of their perspectives of action research as sustained professional learning.

The coaches who participated in this research were overwhelmingly positive in regard to the structure of the program, the value of action research and the importance of their roles as coaches. Several coaches spoke of their hopes for action research to become an embedded element of their school culture. The following comment is a typical response:

“We’re hoping that through our involvement in coaching them, because I found that valuable to me, that we will help them to make that part of their learning constantly throughout school. Like they’re always, when they’re doing their professional learning or programming or something, they start to use that in practice just as everyday practice.”

(Coach, Interview 1)

The sustainability of the program appeared to be evident at an early stage when several of the coaches indicated they had continued their research from the pilot program into 2019, while coaching new participants. This evidence is important in building an ongoing culture of action research through the schools, particularly as new participants were able to see action research in progress. Coaches were modelling action research and it is likely that this encouraged participants to engage with the PD at a deeper level. This quote is one of several that describe continued action research:

“I am still using what I learned there and making a difference at school this year. So, our action research...is still ongoing. So, I’m finding this to be a lot longer-lasting and I find myself going back to it constantly, if not on paper, in my mind as we move through our school plan to get to where we would like to be.

(Coach, Interview 1)

When interviewed at the end of the program, several of the coaches discussed the improved leadership skills of the participants they had coached, regardless of whether the participants were classroom teachers or formal leaders within their schools:

“I found that the great thing with being part of it was that the idea that some of my teachers who may not have considered themselves as leaders were gaining this strength as part of being part of the action research. That strength has built their capacity, not only in their classroom which the kids get the benefit from, but their ability to work across grades and to work with other teachers in other areas of the school they probably wouldn’t have so closely in the past.

(Coach, Interview 2)
While it is clear there was benefit to the 2019 participants, it appears that learning also occurred for the coaches. Several of them spoke about how they had strengthened their understanding of action research and other discussed how their skills as coaches had been refined. The following comment illustrates how the coaching relationship became somewhat reciprocal:

"I mean, the last meeting I had with them, they’d taken my resources and they’d actually added stuff to them that I hadn’t even thought about. So, that was a benefit for me too because I sat there and they said, you know, we’ve just added this little section and I thought wow, that’s awesome. Like, that’s really good for me. I can then take that information and use it if I need to. So, it worked both ways. I think the coaching, you know, I learned a lot from them and I gained from them as well which was lovely.
(Coach, Interview 2)

A further perceived benefit of the program was the opportunity for coaches and participants to work with academics from Western Sydney University. The coaches recognised that having an outside perspective was valuable in terms of providing feedback to groups along with the face to face PD on action research methodology:

"While we could support from a school perspective and think about this is where we’re at and this is where we’re going and know the people probably better than an external expert, the expert had that high level of thinking. First of all, that contact for current research, that idea of not just within the school, okay, what – because they’ve got more experience or a broader picture in their mind, they were able to take it out of our setting and say have you considered this.
(Coach, interview 2)

In summary, the coaches perceived the PCP program to be high quality professional development that could result in whole school improvement including increased leadership capacity and in turn, resulting in improvements in student achievement.
5. Program Results

Challenges of the Program

While the responses to the program were generally positive, it did pose some challenges and concerns for participants and coaches that have implications for future iterations of the program. Initial questionnaire and interview data revealed that a small number of participants were concerned about the time needed to engage in the program and in action research, followed by concerns about the expected increase in workload:

“I don’t really know, yeah, what to expect at the end. I don’t want to kind of get to the end and we’re sharing and we just realise, oh gosh we haven’t actually achieved a lot in comparison to other groups.”  
(Participant, Interview 1)

An interesting concern was linked to the participants feeling uncertain because of the nature of action research itself. Some participants initially felt they had a lack of clear direction in terms of their research because it was personalised and unique to individual contexts, which differentiates action research from other more traditional PD that provides highly structured tasks. Uncertainty regarding the outcome of their research and having to struggle to articulate a research question pushed some of the participants out of their comfort zone. However, many of these concerns were allayed over the course of the program due to the support provided by coaches and critical friends.

Several of the participants were also concerned about the levels of observable change that would occur as a result of their research. They were challenged in terms of wanting to see big changes either in their own practice or the practice of others, and in student outcomes. However, as each cycle of action research typically focuses on a small change in practice, the effects of which may not be observable until several cycles of research have been conducted.

There were also some minor challenges and concerns regarding the online element of the program. Three video-conference sessions were conducted via the Zoom platform. The intention of having online afternoon sessions was to save time for the participants. However, due to the large size of the group the sessions were not beneficial to all participants, with some of them preferring face to face meetings.

Finally, the perennial challenge of time limitations was cited as a concern for some participants and coaches throughout the program. While some teams were provided with time off class over the course of the project to work on their research, others had to find time to meet outside their usual timetable. This included participants who were conducting individual research.

Coaches also had some challenges. These were linked to the actual process of coaching. Several coaches noted that it was challenging not to direct the participants in their research. Rather, they needed to facilitate them and challenge them. The following quote illustrates the dilemma and also acknowledges the value of the action research conducted by participants:

“This year, I feel like, as a coach, it’s really hard for me to put my brakes on, and not kind of [steer] the people that are driving the action research, in the way that I would like them to. Because it’s about their journey. So, that particular part of it has been really tricky for me. But, if it’s carried on, and people aren’t doing it as an end result, but something that’s going to carry on throughout the school, over a period of three to five years, I believe that it’s a really strong tool for a school.”  
(Coach, Interview 2)
The Influence of Action Research on School Culture

A long-term goal of the Practice Changing Practice program is to develop a culture of action research within the participating schools. In this research evaluation we sought to understand participants’ perceptions of if and how the engagement in action research influenced their practice and whether it had begun to develop as an integral part of school culture.

**Action Research Influencing Practice**

Responses to the initial questionnaire regarding teachers’ expectations of changes to their practices as a result of the PCP program were somewhat dependent on individual action research foci. The following is a summary of participants’ initial expectations during the early stages of the program:

- Increase the uptake of professional learning (within the participant’s school) to ensure the best use of this time
- Improve teachers’ pedagogy when teaching writing
- Two participants hoped to embed the action research cycle into their pedagogy
- Make effective and relevant changes to improve pedagogy across the school
- Building positive strategies to change teachers’ mindsets
- Use assessment meaningfully to plan for high ability students to ensure academic growth.

In the final questionnaire participants indicated perceived changes in their practice which aligned with their initial beliefs about effective professional development. In the first questionnaire shifting teaching practices and beliefs about student learning was regarded as a beneficial outcome of any professional development program and this, according to the respondents, was an outcome of participation in the PCP program. Respondents also identified improvements in self-efficacy in the final questionnaire which aligned with responses from the initial questionnaire.

While the questionnaire data indicated some changes in teaching practice, the interview data highlighted changes in both teaching and leadership practices and capacity. For example, two classrooms teacher spoke about their personal leadership growth:

- "I always knew I wanted to have a bigger role in a school than just always being a temp or a classroom teacher. So this was a really good foot in the door for me to really feel as if I’m helping to change things at a school that I will be at long term." (Participant, Interview 2)

- "I think I’ve learned a lot from that, especially having that time to research and then talk with the leadership team and just get more information from them and really reflect it on my own practice." (Participant, Interview 2)

The opportunity for many of the participants to work in teams also appeared to have improved leadership and teaching practice including increasing the occurrence, depth and quality of professional conversations:

- "I think as a leadership team, we’ve probably shifted our thinking a little bit. I think reflective practice, which was our overarching theme for our Action Research, I think it’s become a really valued component of what we do as leaders within the school. It’s become a focus for driving where we’re moving in the future and how we can embed that into our workflows and school plans and things like that. So, I don’t know that we’ve seen any impact on in terms of staff and students but definitely as a leadership team, I think we have developed." (Participant, Interview 2)

Participants also reported increased levels of collaboration and an increase in individual and collective reflective practice. Several participants spoke about how they now question their practices and pedagogical decisions and are more critically reflective of their own and the practices of others.
5. Program Results

Questionnaire data relating to the shift to evidence-based practice aligns with the data gathered from interviews. The requirement to submit a research report and participate in a poster presentation was a contributing factor to the increased reliance on evidence, and this appeared to have also influenced general practice beyond the PCP program.

“ I just felt really lucky to feel this shift in the way that I’m viewing teaching and my professional practice so early and that I’m not - I’m at a place now where I don’t feel as reactionary, that I’m just trying to keep my head above water. But that I can pause and think about what I’m doing and really be more purposeful and intentional in the things I’m implementing in my classroom. 

(Participant, Interview 2)

Expected Changes in Student Learning

Changes in practice should lead to changes in student learning outcomes. Initial questionnaire data indicated the key expected changes were an improvement in students’ skills within specific key learning areas (project dependent) and more emphasis on data to provide evidence of the growth of student skills and knowledge in these areas. Another relevant area was assessment and its role in improving the teaching-learning cycle. By using more accurate and effective assessment participants were hoping they would be better placed to provide authentic learning experiences. It was also hoped that by making changes to teachers’ practice, students would be more engaged, lessons would be effectively differentiated, and students would change their attitudes to learning.

Resulting Change in Student Learning

The final questionnaire data indicated that for five participants there had been no observed change in student learning outcomes, with many stating it was too early to expect improvement. Two participants observed a change in teacher practice and felt this would eventually lead to improved student outcomes. Two participants used evidence from student work samples to determine there had been improvement in student learning. One participant reported a 23% increase in the class average based on a pre- and post-assessment but acknowledged limitations in their data. Three participants had not yet noticed a change, but this was expected. For the others, there was an emphasis that student learning outcomes should be central to any changes in a teacher’s practice. Others felt that students’ learning had been improved due to greater consistency of teacher practice across the school.

A noticeable shift in the cohort occurred the between the initial and final questionnaires regarding how teachers measure the effects of professional learning. At the start of the program some participants indicated they used student engagement as a measure of success/failure of the implementation of professional learning. Some mentioned using data to show improvement. In the final questionnaire, many felt that while it was too early to see improvements in learning from the PCP program, there was a shift to more data-driven changes as a result of undertaking research. This implies a shift from simply looking at student engagement to looking at student data to interpret the success/failure of professional learning.

Interview data had high alignment with the questionnaire responses. Teachers spoke about classroom observations that showed improvement in teacher practice as a result of action research. Others piloted changes to practice and while they could see improvements amongst those students involved, they were yet to see broader changes because their research had not progressed to implementing teaching strategies more broadly. Others were optimistic that with time, changes in student learning would occur.

It makes you more motivated to come back to these events and be able to share what you’ve done and contribute to the development of practice at a - at the level of the profession not just within your own classroom.

(Participant, Interview 2)
Developing a Culture of Action Research

In order to explore the developing cultures of action research within participating schools, it is important to understand participants’ reactions to learning about the action research process and their perceptions of the outcomes of that research as individuals and as members of a broader school community.

Learning About and From Action Research
On completion of the program, final questionnaire data indicated five participants described action research as an ongoing cycle that leads in different directions. While the open-ended nature of action research caused initial concern, participants reported that they were more comfortable with this after conducting their own research. They also perceived action research as a driver for change in school environments. When asked if they had advice for future participants, three respondents identified that action research requires commitment, hard work and passion in order to achieve results. One of these also identified how rewarding the process of action research was when collaborating with committed peers.

At the start of the program questionnaire data indicated that most participants were hoping to learn how to use action research to identify and overcome issues within their own context. The participants understood the need to address cultural and contextual issues using a school driven solution as opposed to fashionable PD programs or quick-fix solutions.

Some participants were hoping to gain an understanding of the process of action research, where to begin, and how to ensure action research is sustainable. Similar data was gathered via initial interviews.

Final questionnaire responses regarding action research were varied, with most participants discussing improvement within the research focus area of the school/participant.

As a result of learning about and engaging in action research participants noted an improved capacity to act as leaders in their school context and another area that seemed to have some prevalence was a modification in how problems of practice and challenges within their school context were viewed. Issues were now identified not as problems but as opportunities to learn new ways of doing things, and this was done by enacting small changes and conducting the action research cycle. Action research was viewed as a positive means to solve challenges.

Some of the participants indicated improved self-efficacy for both leadership and critical thinking when approaching pedagogical tasks as a direct result of their action research. This was indicated by a willingness to try a variety of teaching and assessment strategies, conducting professional development for staff as part of their action research. Teacher reflection was viewed as a positive change with teachers becoming more aware of student learning needs and aligning these to curriculum and the learning progressions.

Overall, the interview data reflected the responses from the questionnaires with regard to the value of action research and the way it fits naturally with day-to-day teaching practices. The process of researching literature, putting a plan into action and evaluating it provided the participants with validation and a sense of agency:

“...So, this is something that as teachers we’re doing constantly, always thinking about ways that we could do something better or that didn’t work, how do we do it differently. But I think this way it gives us a way of documenting what we’ve done and when we’re thinking and [finding] the Actual Research to follow up our theories. (Participant, Interview 2)
5. Program Results

Initially we came into this project quite stereotypically, as teachers, presuming that we know the answers and then we know all the multiple ways to get there, but this really stripped it back for all of us, I think. The process of stripping it back to letting your data project the area that you’re going to go with your research. That was really interesting to change the way that we think about that, and I’ve even done that in my own pedagogy now, in the classroom, in the ways that I go forward with trying to figure out issues and resolve anything that’s going on there.

(Participant, Interview 2)

Emerging Cultures of Action Research

While it takes time to build a school culture of action research, the data indicates a strong willingness for this to occur amongst the coaches and participants of the PCP program. There is evidence that this culture has already begun to develop amongst leadership teams and that there is excitement and motivation to continue the practice of action research beyond the PD program. The following quote synthesis the general sentiments of the participants:

“The one-off professional learning opportunities that teachers go to aren’t effective. That’s probably why we’re not getting buy-in. But when you start the community of practice where a group of teachers come together in the context of their own school based on a problem that they see in their own classrooms then that’s the way we’re headed.

(Participant, Interview 2)

At the end of the day we’re here for the students. So if it benefits them and for us to critically reflect on what we are doing as educators then it’s a huge benefit.

(Participant, Interview 1)
6. Summary

This research evaluation of the Practice Changing Practice professional development program (2019) posed the following questions:

1. In what ways does action research as sustained professional development develop a school culture of action research?
   a. What are the perceptions of teachers with regard to the Practice Changing Practice program as sustained professional development?
   b. What are the perceptions of in-school coaches with regard to the Practice Changing Practice program?

2. Is action research considered an effective method to improve practice by participants of the Practice Changing Practice program?
   a. In what ways has action research influenced practice?
   b. How have perceptions of action research changed as a result of participation in the program?

The following is a summary of the findings presented in the previous sections in direct response to the research questions.

In what ways does action research as sustained professional development develop a school culture of action research?

The professional development program promoted the development of cultures of action research within participating schools in the following ways by:

- Promoting the development of an evidence-based approach to leadership and teaching;
- Encouraging the development of critical reflection within individuals and collectively for those working in teams;
- Creating a culture of professional discussion;
- Building leadership capacity amongst experienced and early career teachers;
- Providing participants with a sense of agency regarding their ability to cause change through their actions and the actions of others;
- Providing professional development and support systems to ensure the practice of action research is ongoing and sustainable;
- Providing the opportunity for participants to apply professional learning that was relevant, individualised and contextualised;

- Building connections and networks within and amongst schools and academics at Western Sydney University;
- Providing opportunities to develop coaching skills and deepening the action research skills of participants from the Practice Changing Practice pilot program; and
- Exposing participants to current research and providing opportunities for the translation of research into practice.
6. Summary

Is action research considered an effective method to improve practice by participants of the Practice Changing Practice program?

Reactions to the Practice Changing Practice program were overwhelmingly positive. This was particularly obvious when participants compared the program to traditional, one-off professional development sessions. Participants and coaches reported changes to their teaching and leadership skills as a result of their participation in the program. Features of the program that contributed to its success as perceived by participants were the face to face sessions that included guest speakers, access to current research literature, opportunities to work together and gather peer feedback, and the opportunity to work with University academics. One feature of the program that some participants felt needed improvement was the use of video-conference software to conduct meetings after school.

The opportunity to learn about and conduct action research as part of the program was highly valued by participants. Although some were initially overwhelmed and uncomfortable with the open-ended nature of action research, the ability to conduct actual evidence-based research within their individual contexts was well received by all participants. The provision of two layers of support via coaches and external critical friends was also an element of the program that differentiated it from other professional learning programs.
7. Recommendations

The following recommendations are provided to assist in the development of future iterations of the Practice Changing Practice professional development program:

» It is recommended that future iterations continue with the use of coaches. The selection of previous participants to coach and support new cohorts of participants is critical to the success of the program. Coaches provide insight into action research methodology and are able to use corporate knowledge to assist in supporting and facilitating action research.

» The 2019 program used a combination of coaching models that used coaches located within the same school as participants and in some cases, coaches located at different schools. It is recommended that where possible, coaches are located within the same school to ensure ease of access to support.

» Program structure should be face to face rather than digital. While Zoom sessions could be utilised for more informal support sessions or meetings, face-to-face meetings will provide a higher level of interaction and therefore more opportunities for support from the program facilitator and coaches.

» The ultimate goal of action research is to improve student outcomes and experiences. It is recommended that in future iterations of the program facilitators and participants should be encouraged to place a heavier emphasis on student learning, measuring the impact of the action research on students as well as on teachers and leaders.

» The ongoing commitment from schools that have participated in the program is important in the development of a culture of action research within schools and within the participating networks of schools. It is recommended that principals of past participant schools continue to support teachers and leaders to take part in the Practice Changing Practice program.

» It is recommended that Practice Changing Practice continues to be researched in order to investigate the long-term effects of participation in the PCP program. Such evidence is critical if programs such as this are to be scaled up across a larger number of schools and networks.
8. References


9. Appendices

Appendix 1: Teacher Questionnaire 1

Name:

School:

Number of Years Teaching:

We are interested in your personal perceptions of professional development and your expectations of the Practice Changing Practice program. Please respond to the following questions from an individual perspective rather than a group perspective. Group perspectives will be explored during interviews.

Prior Professional Development

1. What has been the most effective form of professional development that you have been engaged in, and what made it effective?

2. Please rate the following elements of professional learning in terms of its importance to you as a teacher:
   
   I. Content Focus
      a. Not important
      b. Somewhat important
      c. Neutral
      d. Important
      e. Very important
   
   II. Active Learning
      a. Not important
      b. Somewhat important
      c. Neutral
      d. Important
      e. Very important
   
   III. Coherence
      a. Not important
      b. Somewhat important
      c. Neutral
      d. Important
      e. Very important
   
   IV. Duration
      a. Not important
      b. Somewhat important
      c. Neutral
      d. Important
      e. Very important
   
   V. Collective Participation
      (interaction and discourse)
      a. Not important
      b. Somewhat important
      c. Neutral
      d. Important
      e. Very important
   
3. In what ways has previous professional development resulted in a change in your teaching practice?

4. Have your previous professional development experiences resulted in improved student learning, and how?

5. What is your current understanding of action research?

6. What is the current intended focus of your action research in this professional learning program?

7. As a result of your participation in this professional learning program, what do you hope to learn about teaching practice?

8. What do you hope to improve in regard to student learning?

9. What are you hoping to learn about action research?

10. What, if any, are your concerns in relation to participation in this program?
Appendix 2: Teacher Questionnaire 2

Name: 

School: 

We are interested in your personal perceptions of the Practice Changing Practice professional development program. Please respond to the following questions from an individual perspective rather than a group perspective. Group perspectives will be explored during interviews.

Prior Professional Development

1. What has been the most effective aspect of this professional development program for you as an individual teacher, and what made it effective?
2. What has been the least effective aspect of this professional development program for you as an individual teacher, and why?
3. Please rate the following elements of this professional learning program in terms of your experiences in this professional learning program:
   I. Content Focus in relation to action research methodology
      a. Not addressed 
      b. Minimally addressed 
      c. Neutral 
      d. Addressed at an appropriate level 
      e. Thoroughly addressed 
   II. Active Learning Opportunities during PD sessions 
      a. No element of active learning 
      b. Somewhat active 
      c. Neutral 
      d. Appropriate levels of activity 
      e. Highly active 
   III. Coherence of content delivery and expectations 
      a. Not coherent 
      b. Somewhat coherent 
      c. Neutral 
      d. Appropriately coherent 
      e. Very coherent 
   IV. Duration of PD program 
      a. Inappropriate 
      b. Somewhat appropriate 
      c. Neutral 
      d. Appropriate 
      e. Excellent 
   V. Collective Participation – working as part of a community of practice 
      a. No opportunities for collective participation 
      b. Minimal opportunities for collective participation 
      c. Neutral 
      d. Opportunities for collective participation 
      e. Many opportunities for collective participation
4. What was the focus of your action research in this professional learning program?
5. In what ways has this professional development resulted in a change in your teaching practice?
6. Has this professional development experience resulted in improved student learning, and what is the evidence?
7. Are there any other noticeable changes in your teaching or student learning at your school that have occurred as a result of your participation in this program?
8. What, if any, impact has this professional development had on other colleagues at your school?
9. As a result of your participation in this professional learning program, what have you learned in regard to teaching practice?
10. As a result of your action research, what has changed in regard to student learning?
11. What have you learned about action research?
12. What are your overall perceptions of action research as professional development?
   a. Ineffective 
   b. Somewhat effective 
   c. Neutral 
   d. Effective 
   e. Extremely effective
Appendix 3: Questionnaire 1 Likert Scale Responses

Please rate the following elements of professional learning in terms of its importance to you as a teacher:

**Content Focus**

![Content Focus Bar Chart]

**Active Learning**

![Active Learning Bar Chart]
Appendix 4: Questionnaire 2 Likert Scale Responses

Please rate the following elements of this professional learning program in terms of your experiences in this professional learning program:

Content Focus in Relation to Action Research Methodology

Active Learning Opportunities
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