



3 Mistakes Leaders Make When Building Their Whole School Literacy Plan

Let's unlock the most common mistakes other school leaders make when building their Whole School Literacy Plan so you can write and implement a Literacy Plan that is effective, realistic and truly impacts the literacy outcomes for your students.

The Literacy Plan Key

Hi, I'm Hayley Harrison - an Education Consultant specialising in Curriculum and Whole School Literacy. I help school leaders to understand the wider context of their literacy practises and how true systemic literacy change comes from conscious and purposeful planning, balanced with consistently consolidated actions.

I do this by building a clear picture of the literacy context within the school and breaking down the barriers currently blocking literacy development. I focus on purposeful, actionable and entirely realistic processes to ensure the leaders I am working with have full confidence in the work they then implement throughout their school.

Literacy initiatives and programs are constantly changing with current research and this constant modification to the literacy foci in a school often leaves leaders (and their teachers) feeling like they are stuck in a cycle of relearning and restarting.

So, allow me to share the three most critical mistakes I see leaders making when trying to write and implement a Literacy Plan in their school to ensure you learn how to overcome these hurdles and create a Literacy Plan that actually works!

Hayley Harrison



A stack of approximately 15 books of various colors (red, yellow, blue, green, black, white) is placed on a round wooden stool. The books are stacked vertically, with their spines facing left. The stool is made of dark wood and has a thick, rounded top. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

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Mistake #1 - Leaders think they have to start from scratch

So many leaders assume if something doesn't work instantly, or they see another school doing something getting results or they just see something perceived as 'better' then they should ignore what they've already started and give their focus to something else. They think they just need to find the 'right' product or initiative and everything will be fixed. What happens by starting again though, is they ask their staff (and students) to learn a new language whilst continually rehashing and often contradicting ideas rather than allowing for consolidation and growth.

It is vitally important whenever you are building (or revising) a Whole School Literacy Plan that the first thing you do is look at what IS working in the school. Not only does starting from scratch mean you are working from a blank page - but it sends a clear message to staff that you don't respect the hard work they have done up until this point. Unnecessarily changing the language they currently use for example, only leads to confusion and inconsistency throughout the school.

Remember, giving the time to consolidate a process and support it properly allows time for staff and students to see the benefit of investing their energy and for you to assess the data properly to know how it is working.

Initial Whole School Literacy Audit



1. What current major literacy programs do you have running and at what year level?

2. What current literacy practices do you run within the school? (within English, subjects other than English, reading foci, writing foci, speaking and listening foci, extra curricula programs/classes etc)

3. What current metalanguage do you use across the school to talk about literacy with the students? (Comprehension strategies, the writing process etc. Are these across all subjects or just within English?)

4. What benefits and positive elements have you seen from these current programs and practices? (What is working?)

5. What concerns and negative elements have you seen from these current programs and practices? (inconsistency with staff, student disengagement, lack of improvement in results. What is not working?)

6. What are your Strategic Plan and/or AIP Goals specific to Literacy? (include your current literacy data and the goals for this specifically in your planning documents)

A SAMPLE OF MY LITERACY AUDIT

So what do I do?

Even if something is not working consistently, but it has shown potential in a few classes, consider re-emphasising it in the Literacy Plan. Supporting an existing model by attempting to consolidate it into the school can be powerful in many ways and is ultimately 'easier' than introducing ANOTHER new idea (whereby staff assume it will be dropped as soon as it doesn't work anyway - so why bother investing their time and energies?)

If you do need to bring a new idea or program into play, then consider maintaining some of the current language around literacy that can make it feel like it is a development rather than something completely new.

Mistake #2 - Leaders don't build authentic consultation with staff



As a literacy leader, you need to understand the only way your Literacy Plan will be realised and reach its potential, is if staff support it by playing their part in its implementation and ultimate success. As such, the way you consult with staff regarding its development and implementation is critical. So often staff consultation can be perceived as tokenistic - the decisions have already been made, nothing will change...'but we gave staff an opportunity to be involved,' they say!!

Alternatively, but just as damaging, is when staff are consulted, but the session hasn't been planned properly and the discussion becomes stalls around blockers and problems that can't be solved in that moment. It is vital as a leader that any consultation meetings are thoroughly planned in advance so you know what you want to get out of the meeting.(Planned in the sense of having a specific focus and knowing the right questions to ask rather than knowing what the answers are going to be!)

So what do I do?

When planning your consultation, ensure to set up different situations where staff can provide you with language and strategies that you can use within the Literacy Plan. They need to see their voice was heard, understood and applied directly to the document they will ultimately be implementing in the classroom.

Once written, you also need to work with staff in supporting its implementation. During and after the session it is important to ask what support they would like and need - and follow through to provide this support! The idea is you want to emphasise their role in the Plan's success and the expectations around how they will be using the document moving forward.

Remember, your staff are human and they are working with humans - that's what makes this so complicated! This is why we need to be flexible and accept not everyone is going to think the same way you do...and that's ok!

Steps for planning collaborative staff input

BE PREPARED TO:

- Know exactly what you want to say and do
- Consider your school priorities
- Know what you do NOT need to include
- Know where you want the most involvement
- Know what staff need to know (*and what do they not need to know*)

CONFIRM IN YOUR PLAN:

- What data you are going to present
- What areas you want staff to actively contribute to in building solutions (*Think short term rather than long term*)
- What potential actions are most significant (*Potentially most controversial so staff can have ownership over it*)

Mistake #3 - Leaders write a document no one will ever read

So often a Literacy Plan is developed and stored on a staff drive never to be seen or read again. But just like pregnancy, the writing of the document is only the first step...the most difficult part is raising the child! It is so important to consider *where* you are going to publish the document, and how you are going to refer back to the document throughout the year to sustain a connection.

Too often leaders write a jargonistic and overly verbose document that makes the purpose of the document difficult to decipher for their audience. Or the document is theoretical, rather than **purposeful** and **actionable**. The whole point of a Literacy Plan is to document the specific steps required to achieve literacy improvement across the school - so a really important question to ask should be: *Is my Literacy Plan accessible, actionable and operational?*

Remember, you want whatever is included in your document to actually happen, so you need to ensure you set up a system and process whereby it is front and centre of everyone's thoughts!

So what do I do?

When publishing your document, you need to consider your audience.



How do they need to use it? (School leaders are going to use it differently to teaching staff for example)



Where can they access it easily? (Does there need to be a printed version alongside a digital copy?)



How can you help keep your audience connected to the document? (You need to connect what they are doing and learning back to where it sits within the document.)

You also need to acknowledge **how the document will be read**. For most schools you are likely to need a 'formal' document which details the why and how and who as well as a more 'condensed' document that simply highlights the key actions for everyday use.

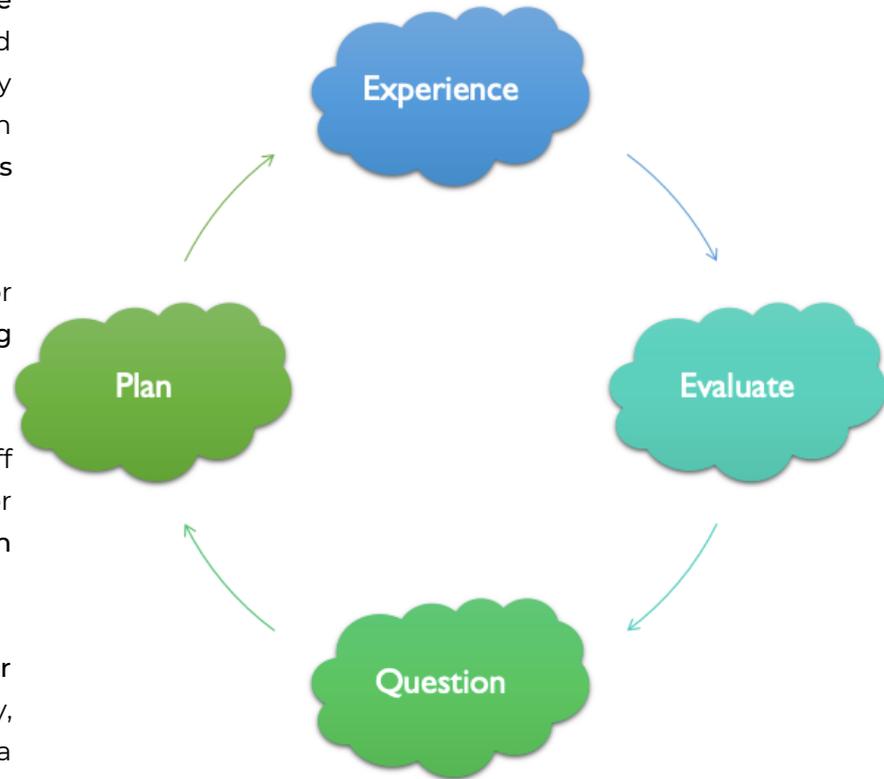
What do you do if you are one of these leaders?

Once you have recognised a less-than-desirable approach to your literacy leadership, you need to **own it and move forward**. You can't change the past, and you don't want to chop and change any more than you absolutely have to...so from here, you need to **consider the choices you need to make**.

Do you need another new program, or do you need to invest in consolidating the initiatives already in place?

Do you need to consult with staff about what they see are working (or not) and gather their perspectives on an approach moving forward?

Do you need to reinvigorate your Literacy Plan, publish it properly, reconnect the staff with it or write a summarised version to be used more regularly by all?



Finding the Positives

One of the best parts about the institution of education is it is constantly changing. This means you are supposed to grow and shift and develop alongside your programs and processes - so if you don't have it exactly perfect just yet...you just need to continue working towards finding the answer that works for your school, your staff and ultimately your students - because that is what is all about after all!

You just have to keep your lens wide, so you can see the whole picture and how everything is impacting literacy across the school.

Remember, just because it works in another school, doesn't mean it is the answer for your school.

The Literacy Plan Assessment

WHICH
STEP ARE
YOU UP TO?

Do you have a Whole School Literacy Plan?

Without a plan you are flying blind. There is no vision or actionable steps to work through and towards. There can be no longevity and sustainability in the work you are doing.

STEP
01



Has the plan been collaboratively designed by the current staff using it?

If staff haven't been actively and authentically involved in the process, it is difficult for them to understand their role within the plan. It also becomes another mandate for them to implement, rather than an opportunity for them to directly benefit their student outcomes.

STEP
02

Is the plan supported by leadership?

This involves their literal AND symbolic approval that emphasises the value of the plan. The literacy plan goals should be included in the school's improvement plan and leaders understand their role within the plan.

STEP
03



Is the plan easily accessible, actionable and operational?

Too often Literacy Plans are either printed off and ignored or saved into the vortex of a staff file. Your plan needs to be used consistently, so it should be stored somewhere logical and purposeful. It also needs to be written in a way that staff understand how it applies to them directly.

STEP
04



Are staff using the plan?

The only way your Literacy Plan will work is if staff understand their role within it, and are consistently actioning it everyday. Consistency is everything, but can often be the most difficult thing to maintain. Much of its success is due to good leadership, a strong induction process and a consistent message across the school.

STEP
05

CONGRATULATIONS

Your school Literacy Plan is supported, accessible, actively used and easily accessible to all staff!
This is such an amazing place for you to be as a Literacy Leader! The next step is to then consider what is **IN** the plan and see if it includes all the key elements to make real literacy development in your school.

Auditing your Whole School Literacy

Hayley Harrison

GET THE

The Literacy Audit Course

If you found this short guide useful, you may benefit from completing my Literacy Audit course.

It involves 3 short videos that step you through the key questions and processes to be considered when completing your literacy audit. It includes a comprehensive Literacy Audit downloadable which you can use to guide you through the auditing process and the final lesson considers the critical next steps once the audit has been completed.

If you would like to find out more, either send me an email or message on any of the platforms below or search for *The Literacy Audit Course* on the Connect Literacy website.

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