

# Evaluation of Teacher Professional Leave: Final Report (2004 - 2008)

Final Report  
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**Success Works**

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# Executive Summary

## Introduction

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) commissioned Success Works Pty Ltd to evaluate the Blueprint for Government Schools' Initiative: Teacher Professional Leave (TPL). The evaluation has now taken place over four years, and the following report constitutes the final evaluation report to be undertaken by Success Works.

The emphasis in the current report is on the outcomes achieved as a consequence of undertaking TPL and factors that appear to lead to differential outcomes across schools and teachers. The primary sources of data that will be drawn upon when discussing these factors are pre-program and post-program teacher surveys and post-program principal surveys, as well as qualitative interviews with a range of stakeholders.

## TPL Outcomes

The survey data and interviews provide clear evidence that TPL is an invaluable investment in the capacity and skills of teachers. TPL teachers and principals report improvements in outcomes for the teachers themselves, for students and for the school overall. In general, principals appear to be more positive about the impact of TPL on the capacity and skills of teachers and on the school overall, compared with teachers themselves.

With regards to the specific outcomes occurring as a result of TPL, TPL projects have been consistently associated with a very high level of achievement in teachers' knowledge and skills. In addition, TPL projects have been associated with substantial improvements in a number of other outcome areas including:

- The level of interconnectedness with other teachers at the school
- Curriculum for delivery at the school
- Student engagement and motivation in the classroom
- Student learning outcomes
- Classroom and teaching performance
- Sharing of knowledge between teachers at the school
- Enthusiasm for teaching
- Innovative approaches to school issues
- Leadership skills and capacity
- Identification of student learning needs

TPL has also resulted in moderate improvements in other outcome areas, including:

- The level of collaboration with other schools

- The level of collaboration with people outside of the school system

## Explaining individual differences in reported TPL outcomes: A 'meta-analysis'

This report offers a 'meta-analysis' of the quantitative survey data collected over the past four years, by pooling together all post-program responses by teachers across the four cohorts in order to investigate what factors appear to be associated with better outcomes in relation to TPL. Before proceeding with the analysis, for the sake of parsimony, the thirteen outcomes for which survey data is available are first aggregated into three overarching outcomes depending on the 'level' at which they are operating: micro (at the classroom level), meso (at the school level) and macro (beyond the school level).

The factors which most strongly predict achieving a high score on **micro** level outcomes are (in order):

- teaching at a primary school (as opposed to a secondary school)
- being at a smaller school (500 students or less)
- being part of the 2005/06 cohort of participants.

Conversely, the factors which most strongly predict a relatively low score on micro level outcomes are (in order):

- teaching year 11 or 12
- being employed part-time as a teacher.

The factors which most strongly predict achieving a high score on **meso** level outcomes are (in order):

- being part of the 2005/06 cohort of participants
- teaching at a primary school (as opposed to a secondary school)
- being at a smaller school (500 students or less)

Conversely, the factors which most strongly predict a relatively low score on meso level outcomes are (in order):

- teaching year 11 or 12
- undertaking TPL as an individual (compared with being part of an intra or inter school team).

The factors which most strongly predict achieving a high score on **macro** level outcomes are (in order):

- being from a school in the Northern Metropolitan Region
- teaching at a primary school (as opposed to a secondary school)
- being at a smaller school (500 students or less).

Conversely, the factors which most strongly predict a relatively low score on macro level outcomes are (in order):

- undertaking TPL within an intra-school team (compared with as part of an inter school team or as an individual)
- teaching year 7 or 8

This would suggest that teachers from smaller primary schools tend to achieve (according to self-report data) higher levels of outcomes as a consequence of TPL than teachers from larger secondary schools, particularly VCE teachers. However, it is important to note that further analysis reveals that all statistically significant factors account for less than 10% of the variance in micro, meso and macro level outcomes. Put another way, more than 90% of the variation in TPL outcomes (as described by TPL participants) cannot be explained by quantifiable factors captured in the survey data.

It is clear that there appear to be few easily quantifiable factors which are associated with large differences in TPL outcomes. Consequently, rather than rely on quantitative data alone, the report analyses and distils the qualitative responses of teachers and principals compiled over the life of the evaluation in order to explicitly address two questions: What is it about the TPL experience that participants and schools find so positive? and What is it about some particular TPL projects that results in them achieving very positive outcomes, while other projects are less successful?

## **What is it about the TPL experience that participants and schools find so positive?**

There appears to be a number of elements of TPL that participants find very positive. These elements have been 'aggregated up' into a series of overarching themes:

- Flexibility and professional interest: It was clear that participants appreciated the level of flexibility they had within TPL to pursue a project that was of professional interest to them.
- Believing in the project: Having professional interest in the project also meant that teachers believed in what they were trying to achieve through their project.
- Classroom observation and school visits: Although classroom observation may be seen as primarily a process for facilitating professional learning, which in turn leads to the implementation of new classroom/school practices, it is certainly the case that simply observing other teachers in operation (particularly in other school environments) is a very rewarding experience in itself.
- Experiential learning: For many of the projects reviewed, participants emphasise that what was really valuable about the TPL professional learning opportunity (as opposed to some other professional learning opportunities) is the emphasis placed on experiential learning.

## What is it about some particular TPL projects that results in them achieving very positive outcomes, while other projects are less successful?

While the TPL experience has generally been described as very positive from the perspective of participating schools and principals, this is not universally the case. Analysis of site visit and interview data reveals a number of factors that appear to be associated with a TPL project being successful:

- Clearly defined objectives and purpose: Having clearly defined objectives appears to be a factor associated with most successful projects, and the lack of a clear purpose behind the project was an oft-cited reason when participants felt that their project had not fulfilled its potential.

Interestingly, the PLATO program was introduced in order to address this very issue, that is, to assist participants with clarifying their research question and developing their research process. Indeed, many participants made the point that the PLATO sessions were very valuable and strongly endorsed the initiative. However, not all TPL participants attended PLATO workshops.

**Recommendation:** DEECD to strongly encourage all TPL teams (including participants undertaking individual TPL projects) to attend PLATO; and to strongly encourage schools to allow all members of a TPL team to be given the opportunity to attend PLATO.

- Reasonable and realistic project scope: The individual/team should ensure that the scope of their TPL endeavour is both reasonable and realistic in the given time-frame.
- Project 'owned' by participating teachers and highly relevant to the school: The point was made by a number of participating teachers that, in order for a particular TPL project to be successful, it needs to be 'owned' by the participating teachers. Consequently, TPL projects which had an agenda largely driven by the school, rather than the participating teachers, tended to be less successful. In such instances, it was apparent that the school viewed TPL as a resource that it could 'tap into', rather than a professional learning opportunity for teachers. It was suggested by a number of teachers (and principals) that the purpose of TPL should be made very clear to both teachers and the school leadership group before teachers apply.

**Recommendation:** DEECD clarify the purpose of the TPL initiative, perhaps through the departmental newsletter, to reflect the fact that it is primarily a professional learning opportunity for teachers.

- Schools flexible in their approach: A characteristic of many of the TPL projects was that it requires a change to the way in which schools normally operate. From the participants' point of view, it is important that schools be flexible enough to accommodate this change to the status quo.

- Priority given to disseminating learnings: In order to ensure that TPL projects lead to long-term change within schools, it is critical that sufficient emphasis be placed on the process of the sharing of project learnings.

With regards to how learnings from TPL projects are disseminated more broadly, a number of participants challenged the value of simply 'writing up' their findings on Knowledge Bank. Some participants commented that they found Knowledge Bank difficult to navigate, were unsure whether they could adequately capture project learnings in the Knowledge Bank format and found the task of writing up project learnings particularly laborious given it coincides with end of year assessment and reporting obligations. It was put forward that, for some projects, it would be more appropriate to present findings in the form of an 'online conference', or presentation. Such an option has the advantage of project knowledge being retained in digital format, whilst allowing participants to present project learnings in a structure more suitable to the nature of the project.

**Recommendation:** DEECD to allow more flexibility around the 'writing up' of project findings. Specifically, participants should be given the option of presenting findings in the form of an 'online conference', rather than having to produce a written report.

- Support of TPL project by school leadership group: The school leadership group needs to be supportive of the TPL project in terms of providing teachers with the time out of class in order to undertake this project. Not being able to take sufficient time off from other school commitments (in particular, teaching commitments) was the principal reason why many TPL projects did not achieve the outcomes that had been set for it.

In summary, across the four years of the evaluation of TPL, it is very apparent that the program is a highly valuable professional learning opportunity for teachers and schools alike. Survey, interview and site visit data, whether analysed qualitatively or quantitatively, has consistently painted TPL as an extremely rewarding and exciting initiative. It provides teachers with a genuine opportunity to undertake an innovative and/or improvement project which is of professional interest to them and valuable to the school.

Throughout this evaluation, an understanding of how TPL projects have a positive impact on a number of school, teacher and student outcomes has been developed. However, the opportunity still remains to more thoroughly investigate the exact causal mechanisms which lead to the realisation of these outcomes; in particular, the link between TPL projects and student outcomes. It is anticipated that the 'follow-up' case study evaluation will be able to shed some light on this issue.

# 1. Introduction

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) commissioned Success Works Pty Ltd to evaluate the Blueprint for Government Schools' Initiative: Teacher Professional Leave (TPL) in 2004. The evaluation has now taken place over four years, and the following report constitutes the final evaluation report to be undertaken by Success Works.

It needs to be noted at the outset there is a twin emphasis in the current report on the outcomes achieved as a consequence of undertaking TPL and the factors that appear to lead to differential outcomes across schools and teachers. The primary sources of data that will be drawn upon when discussing these factors are pre-program and post-program teacher surveys and post-program principal surveys, as well as qualitative interviews with a range of stakeholders. This focus on outcomes achieved through TPL over the four years reflects the fact that this is the final iteration of this evaluation report and the first three reports sufficiently explored and discussed issues of 'process' in relation to TPL. For completeness sake, however, many of the 'process' issues explored in previous reports are included in Appendix A of the current report. The report will also separately consider the impact of TPL in 2008 in Chapter 3.<sup>1</sup>

TPL is available to all teachers in all government schools. Teachers are able to access leave from the classroom for periods ranging from four to ten weeks. TPL can be taken as a continuous block or spread over time or as a combination of the two.

TPL aims to build teacher capacity by providing teachers with flexible opportunities to enhance their classroom practice and contribute to school and system improvement. Teachers may choose from a range of options for their TPL including participation in a professional learning team; leading a school based or network project; action research; research; mentoring and/or shadowing; short term placement in other schools; project work and study. TPL is design primarily for teachers to:

- Identify a problem, question or area of interest
- Investigate ways of addressing that issue
- Evaluate what has been learned
- Act upon the implications of that learning

Evaluation tasks undertaken for this evaluation by Success Works include:

- A detailed literature review
- Development of the project evaluation framework, project logic and data collection tools
- Surveys of all teachers in 2004/05

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that the TPL initiative was structured around financial years in 2004/05, 2005/06 and 2006/07; however this was changed to calendar years in 2008 to be more in line with time-frames which are meaningful within a school environment. To facilitate this change, the 2006/07 program was extended until the end of the 2007 calendar year.

- Surveys of all principals of teachers granted TPL in 2004/05
- Site visits to 18 schools whose teachers undertook TPL in 2004/05
- Interviews with non-participating schools in 2004/05
- Interviews with non-participating schools in 2005/06
- Interviews with Regional Administrators in 2005/06
- Pre-commencement surveys of all TPL teachers in 2005/06
- Surveys of all teachers in 2005/06
- Surveys of all principals of teachers granted TPL in 2005/06
- Site visits to 18 schools whose teachers undertook TPL in 2005/06.
- Pre-commencement surveys of all TPL teachers in 2006/07
- Surveys of all teachers in 2006/07
- Surveys of all principals of teachers granted TPL in 2006/07
- Site visits to 20 schools whose teachers undertook TPL in 2006/07
- Pre-commencement surveys of all TPL teachers in 2008
- Surveys of all teachers in 2008
- Surveys of all principals of teachers granted TPL in 2008
- Interviews with 14 teachers who undertook TPL in 2008

In summary, data collected to date is as follows:

	2004/05 Cohort	2005/06 Cohort	2006/07 Cohort	2008 Cohort
Pre-Commencement Survey- Teachers		✓	✓	✓
Post-Program Survey – Teachers	✓	✓	✓	✓
Post-Program Survey – Principals	✓	✓	✓	✓
Site Visits/Interviews	✓	✓	✓	✓
Non-Participating School Interviews	✓	✓		
Regional Administrators			✓	

Chapter 3 of the current report presents data for the 2008 cohort of TPL teachers and their principals. Where relevant, it compares results from the pre-commencement survey and the post-program survey to reveal whether teachers TPL experience was

consistent with their expectations. Furthermore, it contrasts outcome data from the post-program survey of teachers with outcome data from the post-program survey of principals. Drawing on multiple self-report surveys from different perspectives is a means of validating findings through triangulation. It allows us to state with more confidence that the self-reported outcomes noted by teachers are an accurate reflection of the actual impact of the program. This chapter also compares outcomes across all four cohorts for both teacher and principal surveys.

Chapter 4 builds on the time-series analysis presented in Chapter 3 by pooling together all post-program responses by teachers across the four cohorts in order to investigate which factors appear to be associated with better outcomes in relation to TPL. Chapter 4 is supplemented by Appendix B, which provides detailed tables of the results of the analysis, as well as an overview of the inferential statistical techniques used.

Chapter 5 provides an overall discussion in relation to the outcomes of TPL across the four years. Particular attention is given to how providing teachers with professional leave can increase the capacity and performance of the educational system, helping to generate better outcomes in the classroom.

## 2. Methodology

This evaluation has engaged multiple methodologies to inform the analysis of and draw conclusions about the initiative. The methods have included the dispatch of structured surveys to teachers and principals, face-to-face interviewing of teachers, principals, and regional administrators, and an examination of other data sources made available by the Department.

### 2.1 Survey tools

The pre-commencement survey for the 2008 cohort of TPL teachers was emailed to participants in December 2007. The post-program survey was emailed to all teachers from the 2008 cohort in late 2008 (November-December), whilst the Principals Survey was emailed in early 2009 (February). Reminders were sent to both teachers and principals who had not completed the post-program survey. All surveys were administered using the electronic survey program "Survey Monkey".

Response rates for the various surveys in 2008 were as follows:

	Number of Teachers in 2008 <sup>2</sup>	Response Rate in 2008	Response rate in 2006/07	Response rate in 2005/06	Response rate in 2004/05
Pre-Commencement Survey- Teachers	677	36% (N=245)	36% (N=242)	22% (N=149)	NA
Post-Program Survey-Teachers	731	21% (N=157)	59% (N=431)	58% (N=421)	35% (N=255)
Post-Program Survey – Principals	107	65% (N=70) <sup>3</sup>	59% (N=184)	65% (N=203)	34% (N=106)

Note that the low response rate achieved for the post-program survey in 2008 was likely due to the timing of the survey. Although the survey was in the field for approximately six weeks, and follow-up was conducted with participants to remind them to complete the survey, the response period for the survey was November-December 2008. As reported by teachers interviewed as part of this evaluation, the end of the school year is a very busy period for teachers, and this may have had a direct impact on the response rate.

Success Works was concerned that the low response rate may have introduced a higher level of non-response bias (compared with previous years), undermining the

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<sup>2</sup> Note that respondents who were included on the initial mailing list provided by the Department but who subsequently notified Success Works that either they were not part of the program or that their application for TPL had actually been unsuccessful are not included in the 'number of teachers'.

<sup>3</sup> Note that the survey of principals for 2008 was restricted to those principles that had been in their role throughout the TPL process.

integrity of the 2008 data and hindering comparisons with previous years. In response to this, a comprehensive investigation of potential non-response bias in the 2008 follow-up survey was undertaken. This analysis is outlined in Appendix C.

In summary, multiple comparisons were undertaken which established that the TPL experiences of individuals who completed the follow-up survey were not significantly different from the TPL experiences of those individuals who completed the pre-commencement survey. From this it was gleaned that there is no reason to suspect that non-response bias, in any form, is a greater issue for 2008 follow-up survey data than it has been in previous years.

## **2.2 Qualitative interviewing**

Interviews were undertaken with teachers from a sample of schools who had participated in TPL during 2008. The interviews were conducted in December 2008. The schools were randomly selected to represent a cross section of regions, types of school (primary, secondary, specialist, P-12) and types of TPL (group, individual, block and non-continuous). A list of the schools selected is included in Appendix E.

In addition, all school site visit data from the previous three cohorts is also in scope for the current report insofar as this data can shed light on some of the outcomes achieved across the life of the TPL initiative.

## **3. Overview of TPL outcomes: 2008 data and comparisons across the four years**

### **3.1 A note about principal and teacher perceptions of outcomes achieved by teachers**

Before proceeding with a discussion of TPL outcomes in 2008, it should be noted that throughout this chapter, there appears to be a trend that principals responding to the survey reported greater improvements in teacher outcomes than teachers themselves. Specifically, mean responses from principals were higher than mean responses from teachers for eleven of the thirteen outcomes, and, on average, mean scores for principals were 0.20 higher than mean scores for teachers. Data from 2006/07 respondents has been re-analysed, and a similar, albeit slightly smaller, differential between teachers and principals revealed (on average, for 2006/07 respondents, principal scores were 0.15 higher).

There are a number of possible reasons for this tendency. As noted in previous years' reports, some general reasons as to why principals may give higher scores in relation to teacher's outcomes than teachers themselves include:

- Teachers are overly 'self-critical' when appraising improvements in their knowledge, abilities and skills
- Principals may have multiple teachers participating in TPL, and, when asked about to what extent a particular outcome area had improved as a consequence of TPL, 'aggregated' these improvements across participating teachers from their school, rather than 'averaged' improvements (which would lead to principals reporting greater improvements than teachers)
- Principals, on average, may be inherently more 'optimistic' and positive than teachers on average
- Principals have the benefit of a wider view and can observe changes in teachers' behaviour and attitudes from afar
- There may be differential non-response biases in terms of principals and teachers responding to post-program surveys (although there is little evidence across the four years of data to support this assertion)

In addition, there are idiosyncratic factors associated with 2008 which may imply that the tendency for principals to give more positive responses to 'outcome' questions than teachers will be higher compared with previous years. These include:

- That, following consultation with DEECD, the scope of the post-program survey of principals was restricted to those principals who were in the role through the 2008 TPL period, and who remained in the role at the beginning of 2009. Principals who have experienced such 'continuity' across the period in which TPL has been accessed may notice more dramatic improvements for

participating teachers (and for their school as a whole). This may explain the greater discrepancy between teachers and principals for the 2008 TPL cohort compared with other years (when all current principals of schools in which TPL had been accessed were surveyed)

- Principals were surveyed later in the process than teachers, particularly in 2008, which may mean that by the time principals were surveyed, there had been more opportunity for the benefits associated with TPL to be realised

It is difficult to speculate with any confidence the relative contribution of each of the aforementioned factors to the tendency for principals to report greater improvements in outcomes associated with TPL than teachers. However, the potential impact of these factors is important to bear in mind when considering results presented in this chapter.

## 3.2 Teacher Morale

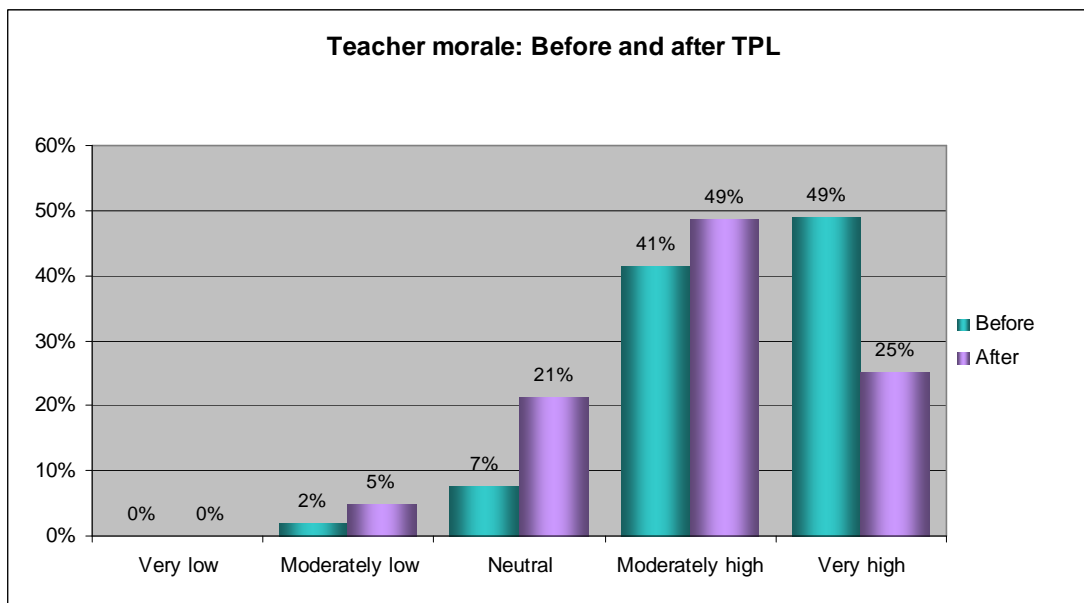
### 3.2.1 TPL Teachers – Post-program Survey

According to survey results from 2008, the number of teachers with a 'very high' morale increased from 25% before TPL to 49% after TPL. Furthermore, the number of teachers with a 'moderately low' morale fell from 5% to 2%. The chart also indicates that once teachers have undertaken TPL they are less 'neutral' (and more positive) when assessing their morale.

Teacher interview responses reiterated that the TPL experience increased their morale. Interestingly, teacher interview responses also raised the issue that perhaps teachers who apply for TPL are more likely to fall into the category of those who already have a relatively high morale and a real interest and enthusiasm for teaching. From the survey results, this can be implied from the fact that only one in twenty teachers who undertook TPL inferred their morale retrospectively as being low or very low before they undertook TPL. This is unlikely to be reflective of the broader population of teachers. Indeed, as one participant commented:

*“Sometimes those who would benefit most from TPL or other professional development opportunities don't put their hands up, so it seems like its the same group of people doing this stuff all the time (those that have the energy for it). How do we draw in the teams that really need it?”*

The question of “how to draw in the teams who really need it” might be worth pursuing in the future 'case study' evaluation of TPL, particularly given the emphasis in the recent Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development on recognising 'the needs of those who are at risk of being left behind' (p. 12). This recognises the fact that some schools, classes within schools and students within classrooms may be benefiting less from programs such as TPL (perhaps because they are not applying for such programs), despite appearing to have a high need for additional support and development.



\*11 individuals did not indicate their level of morale before undertaking TPL and 10 individuals did not indicate their level of morale after completing TPL. These individuals were excluded from the denominator when calculating proportions.

The chart below reconfigures morale data in order to explore the level of change in morale as perceived by teachers before and after the TPL program. The morale for more than half (57%) of all teachers was not reported to have changed, the morale for less than one third (29%) of teachers increased slightly (i.e. increased one 'full point') and the morale of 8% of teachers increased moderately (i.e. increased two 'full points'). It is worth noting that only 5 percent of teachers reported a decrease in morale (of any level).

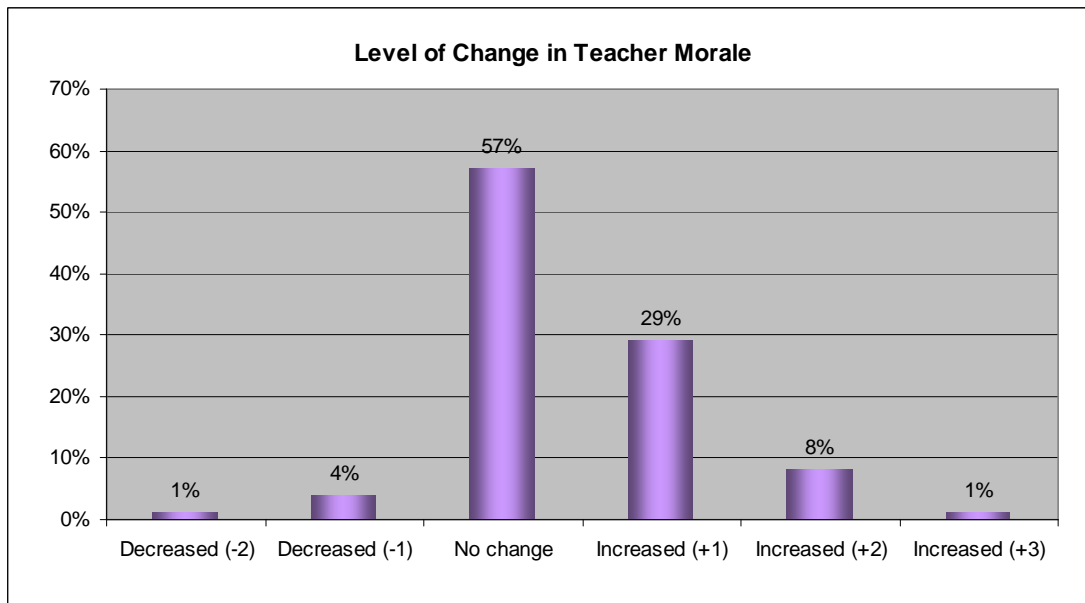
The high incidence of "no change" may perhaps again be attributed to the fact that many teachers participating in TPL already have relatively high levels of morale (self-reported), as indicated by the following comment:

*"Would like to say "yes", but have always loved teaching .... Not sure if the TPL has added anything to this already positive feeling."*

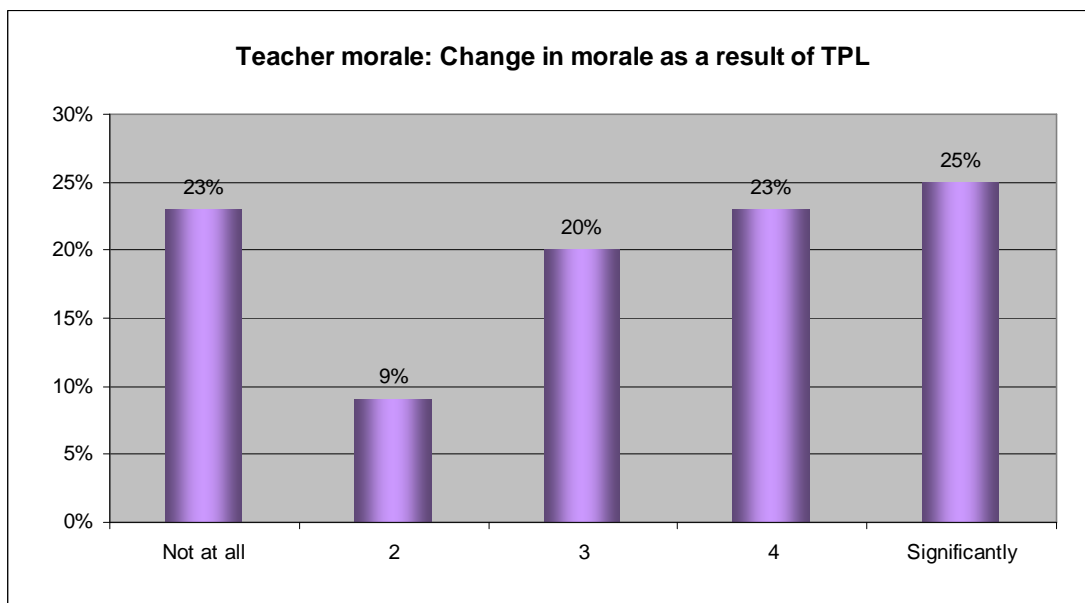
One reason for a decrease in morale after completing TPL may be due to disappointment where a decision has been made at school level not to continue the TPL learning. For instance:

*"Not being utilised properly next year is a downer."*

Even in instances where teachers expressed disappointment in how the TPL learnings were or were not being implemented within the school, the teacher responses indicated that they believed the TPL initiative itself was worthwhile. A change in morale may therefore not be due to the TPL per se; more the political decisions around its implementation (or lack of implementation).



Teachers were asked to indicate, on a scale of 1 to 5, whether this change in morale was attributable to their TPL experience. Approximately three-quarters (77%) of teachers responding to the survey attributed their change in morale to their TPL experience, to varying degrees. Almost half of respondents (47%) indicated that TPL was substantially or significantly<sup>4</sup> responsible for their change in morale.



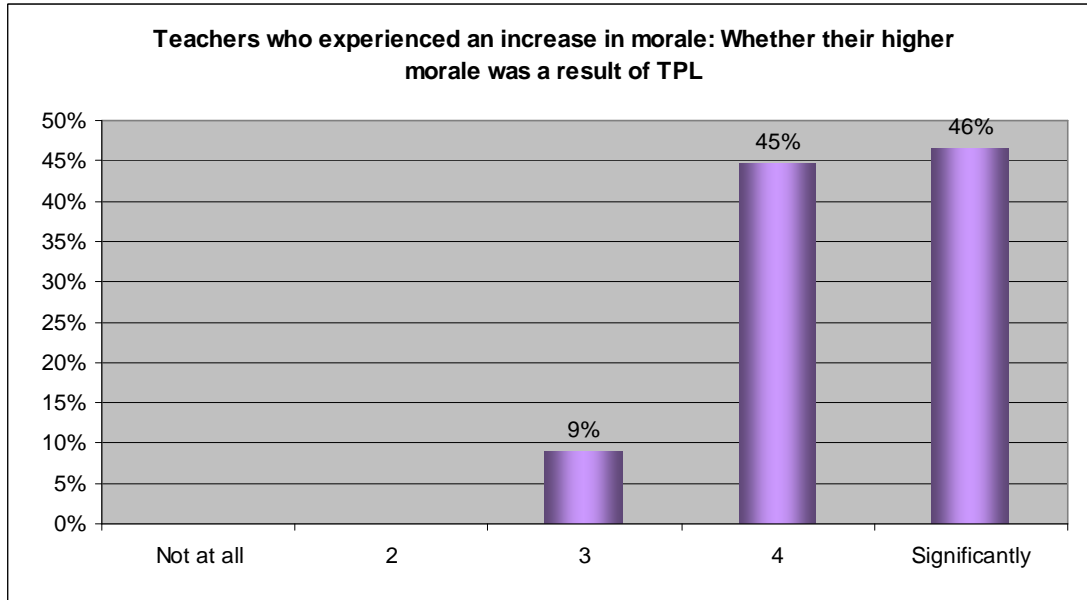
\*15 individuals did not provide a response to this question and were thus excluded from the denominator when calculating the above proportions.

The above chart regarding 'change in morale as a result of TPL' was reproduced below, however only individuals who indicated a positive change in morale of at

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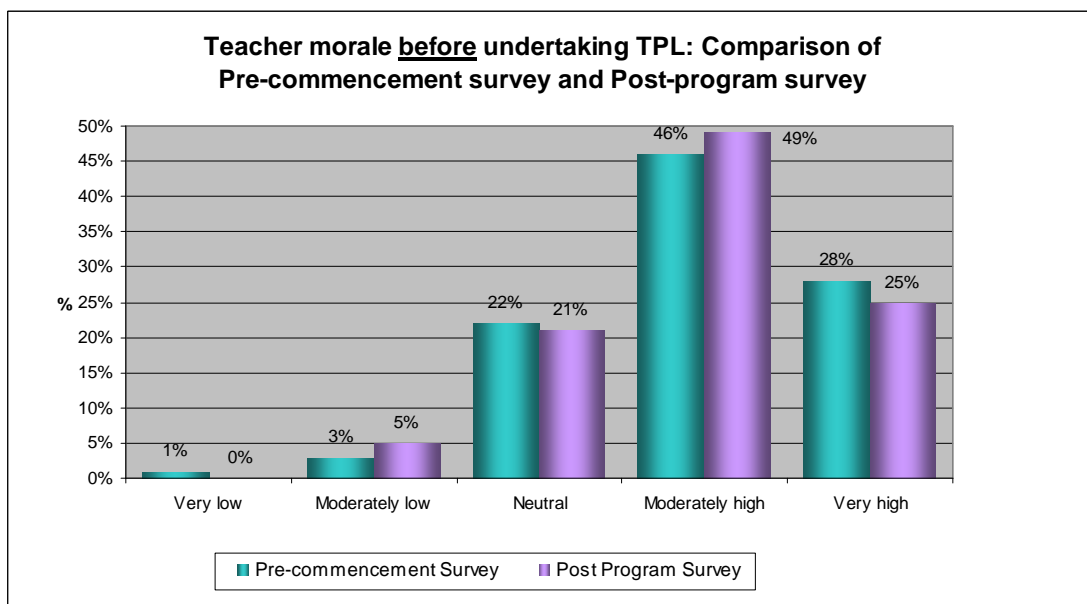
<sup>4</sup> In this chapter, in relation to 'improvement questions' (e.g. To what extent has TPL improved your knowledge and skills), the term 'significant improvement' refers to a likert scale response of 5, 'substantial improvement' refers to a likert scale response of 4, 'moderate improvement' a score of three and 'some improvement' a score of two.

least one point (subtracting their response from the pre-TPL morale question from their response to the post-TPL morale question) were included in the analysis. Following this refinement in scope, it is apparent from the chart below that 91% of teachers who reported an increase in morale attributed this increase 'substantially' or 'significantly' to the TPL program.



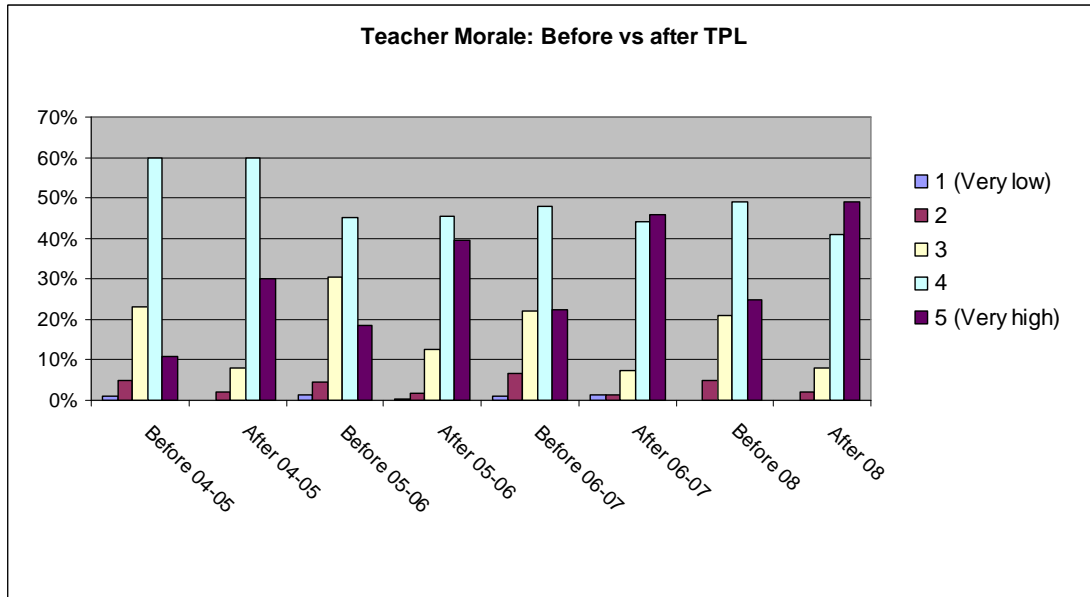
### 3.2.2 Comparison with Pre-Commencement Survey (2008)

Teacher morale 'pre-TPL' as reported in the pre-commencement survey was highly consistent with the teacher morale 'pre-TPL' as reported in the post-program survey. In both surveys, the reported average morale was 4.0 (on a 1-5 likert scale). Indeed, not only is the 'mean' morale the same - when we consider the 'spread' of morale responses in the chart below the response pattern across the two surveys is remarkably similar. This suggests that teachers can accurately answer 'retrospective' questions regarding their levels of morale.

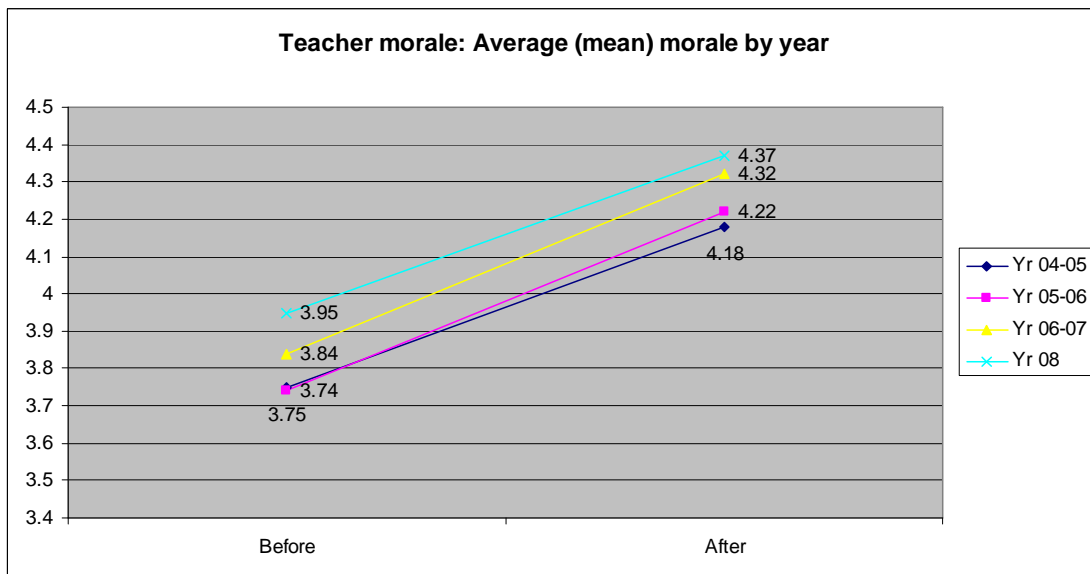


### 3.2.3 Comparison with 2004/05, 2005/06, and 2006/07 Cohorts

All four cohorts showed similar patterns of improvement in morale after the TPL program. Specifically, after completing the TPL program, there are a higher proportion of teachers who report having 'very high' morale, and a lower proportion of teachers who report having (very) low or neutral morale.



The above morale data by cohort has been presented in an alternative format in the chart below. Consistent with the pattern presented above, average morale has increased by a very similar amount (between 0.42 and 0.48 points) following the introduction of the TPL program for each of the four years in which the TPL program has been in operation. It is also interesting to note that average morale (as reported pre and post-program) has been increasing marginally each year.

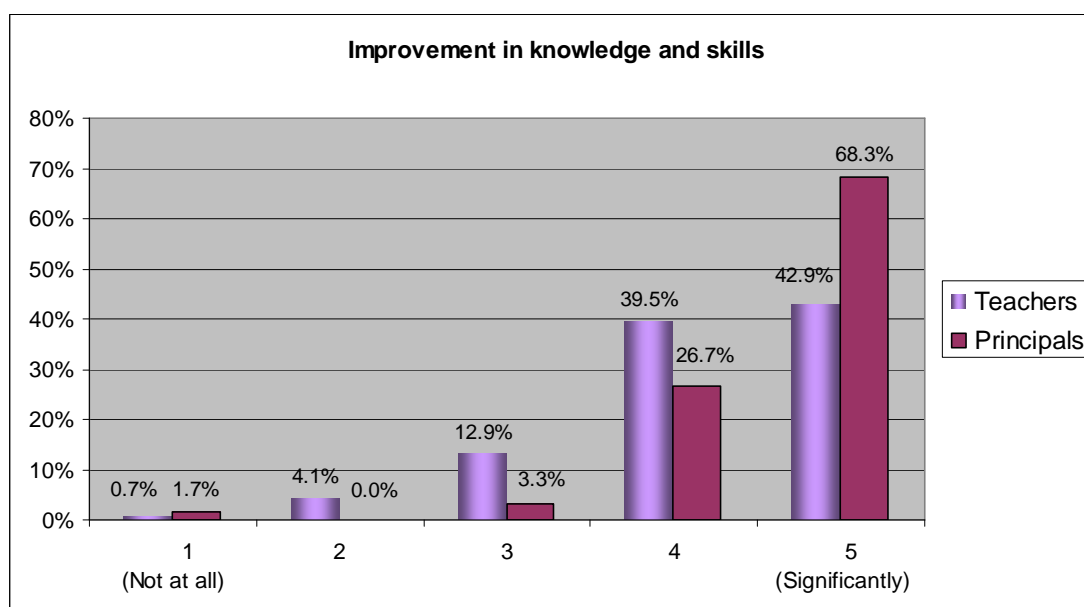


## 3.3 Outcomes for teachers

### 3.3.1 Post-program Survey 2008

#### 3.3.1.1 Knowledge and Skills

Ninety nine percent of TPL teachers and 98% of principals identified at least some improvement in teachers' knowledge and skills as a consequence of the teacher(s) undertaking the TPL program. Furthermore, more than four in five teachers (82%) and nineteen in twenty principals (95%) identified at least 'substantial' improvements in knowledge and skills, with more than two-thirds of principals (68%) and two-fifths of teachers (43%) responding that knowledge and skills of teachers had increased significantly. Across the survey results, it is very apparent that, as noted earlier, although both teachers and principals noted large gains in teachers' knowledge and skills which they attributed to TPL, principals tended to observe greater improvements in teacher knowledge and skills.



\*10 teachers did not provide a response to this question; however no teachers indicated that this outcome was not applicable to their project. These teachers were excluded from the denominator when calculating proportions.

\*\*10 principals did not provide a response to this question; however no principals indicated that this outcome was not applicable to TPL projects undertaken in their schools. These principals were excluded from the denominator when calculating the above proportions.

Although, as demonstrated above, the vast majority of teachers and principals noted very large improvements in teachers knowledge and skills as a consequence of engaging in TPL, the actual specific knowledge and skills developed by teachers varied depending on the nature of the project. Some projects which were more focussed on particular components of the curriculum resulted in substantial content knowledge. For example, one teacher engaged in a reading comprehension project stated that:

*"In terms of what I learnt through my project... I gained a lot of knowledge about reading and comprehension strategies in order to*

*develop student skills in this area. I now have a greater body of resources and activities to use with my class."*

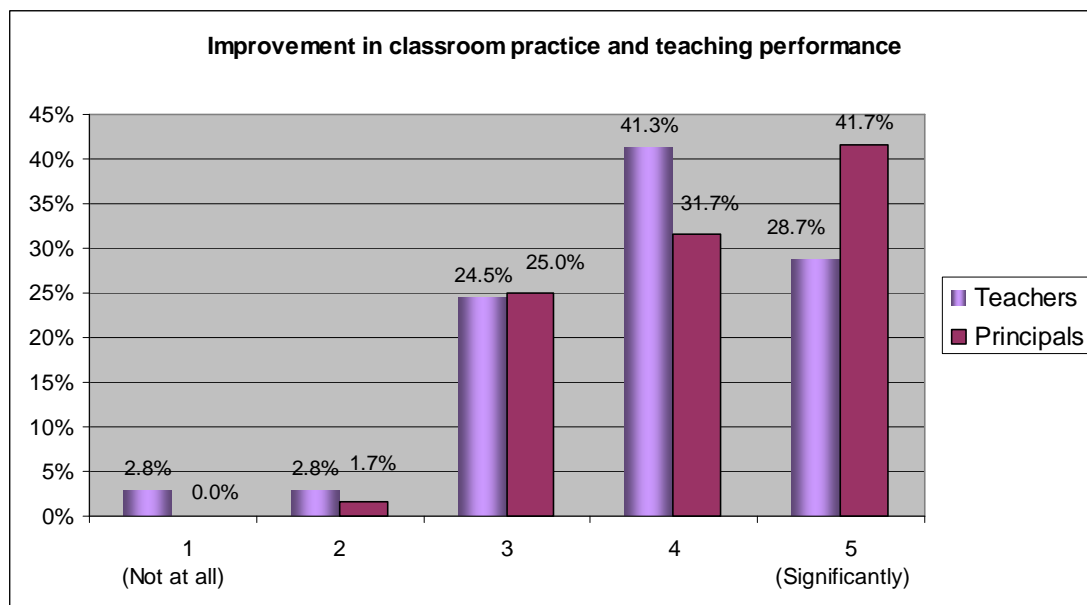
Other teachers noted that observing other classes in other schools and other teachers' approach to teaching helped to directly expand their own knowledge base and skill set. Moreover, it also served to validate a number of their existing practices and approaches, helping to reinforce their pre-existing capabilities.

This multitude of different ways in which TPL can improve teacher knowledge and skills was summed up by one interviewee, when commenting on the outcomes of having several teachers from her school undertake TPL in the past few years.

*"TPL engages teachers in life long learning. It builds the individual teacher, the teaching profession and the education system as a whole."*

### 3.3.1.2 Classroom practice and teaching performance

Both teachers and principals noted similar levels of improvement in classroom practice and teaching performance as a consequence of undertaking the TPL program. Specifically, more than nine in ten teachers (94%) and almost all principals (98%) noted at least a moderate improvement in classroom practice as a consequence of TPL, with almost seven in ten teachers (70%) and almost three in four principals (73%) noting at least substantial improvements. The major difference between teachers and principals with regard to perceptions of changes in classroom practice and teaching performance as a consequence of TPL is that principals were more likely to indicate that teachers had achieved the maximum level of change allowed (i.e. 'significantly') than teachers (42% vs 29%).



\*10 teachers did not provide a response to this question and a further 4 teachers indicated that this outcome was not applicable to their project. Both these groups were excluded from the denominator when calculating proportions.

\*\*Nine principals did not provide a response to this question and one principal indicated that this outcome was not applicable to TPL projects at their school. Both these groups were excluded from the denominator when calculating proportions.

Although some teachers felt that it was too soon to comment on how the TPL initiative had impacted on their classroom practice and teaching performance, other teachers noted immediate improvement in this domain which they connected to TPL, as evidenced by the following comments:

*“My classroom practice has altered as a consequence of TPL. I am now adopting a more explicit approach to teaching reading. I feel that my teaching is more focussed.”*

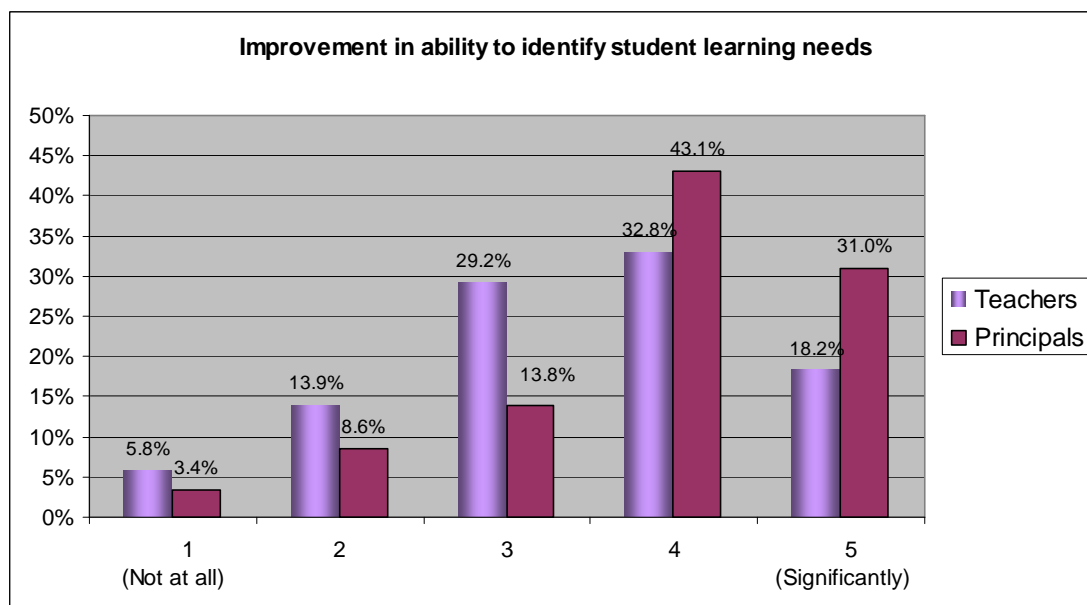
*“This opportunity has reconnected me to some things that I used to do, such as actually spending time conversing with the children and watching their interactions with each other. The project has improved the atmosphere in the classroom.”*

*“The learning spills over into other subjects. I feel that I will be a more effective teacher in my other methods having spent some time engaging in a literacy TPL project.”*

This final quote highlights the difficulties in attempting to isolate the benefits associated with a program such as TPL. Both teachers and students will likely develop generic capabilities which they can utilise in other contexts, even though the nature of their TPL project may have been highly content and/or curriculum specific.

### 3.3.1.3 Ability to identify student learning needs

Around half of the teachers (51%) who responded to the survey and three in four principals (74%) noted that participation in TPL had at least substantially improved teachers' ability to identify student learning needs (i.e. responded with a 4 or 5). Across survey results, there is a clear trend suggesting that principals are notably more positive about the level of improvement in identifying student needs than teachers.



\*10 teachers did not provide a response to this question and 10 teachers indicated that this outcome was not applicable to their project. These groups were excluded from the denominator when calculating proportions.

\*\*10 principals did not provide a response to this question and a further two principals indicated that this outcome was not applicable to TPL projects at their school. Both these groups were excluded from the denominator when calculating proportions.

There is some evidence from the interviews undertaken with teachers that one of the mechanisms responsible for improved capacity to identify student learning needs was observing classes run by teachers in other schools. As one teacher put it:

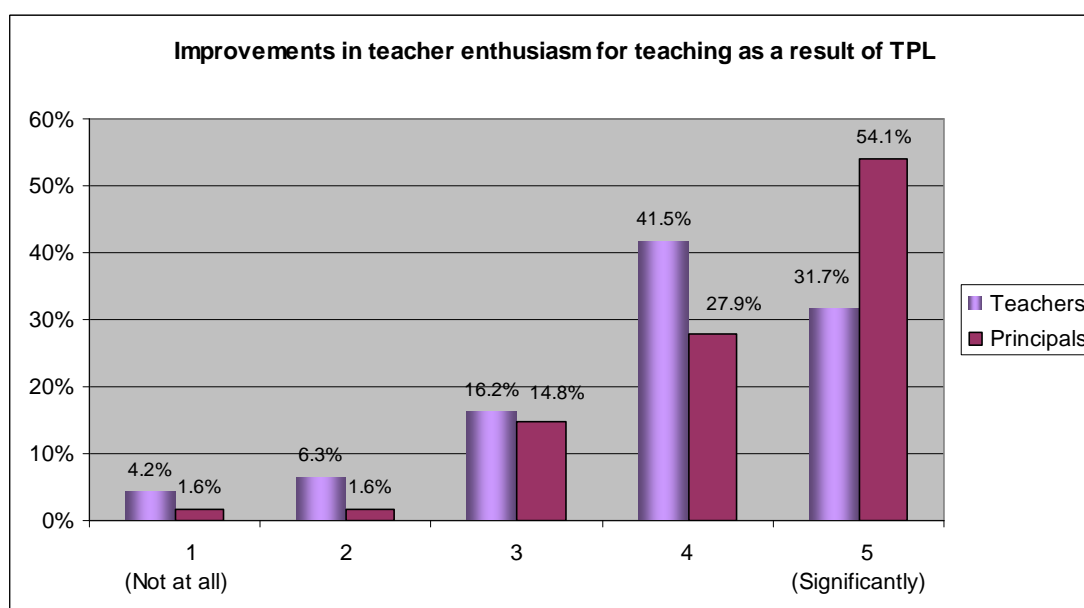
*“As a consequence of our TPL project (a large component of which involved classroom observation) I am now far more flexible in teaching and more prepared to be flexible. I am able to be more positive about how students are, even when the students themselves are negative. I am less likely to take their attitude personally, and can adopt a more relaxed approach.”*

For this particular teacher, being able to ‘relax’ in the classroom meant that he was able to spend more of his energy connecting with students and reflecting on their learning needs, because he was expending less of his energy on ‘managing the mood of the classroom’ and on managing his own reactions to student negativity.

Interestingly, some projects actually appeared to be at least partially directed towards assisting students to better identify their own learning needs (as opposed to improving teachers’ capacity to identify student learning needs). One such project involved the sharing of student data with students, so that students could become more aware of their own performance in particular areas.

### 3.3.1.4 Enthusiasm for teaching

Almost three-quarters of teachers (73%) and more than four-fifths of principals (82%) noted that teachers’ enthusiasm for teaching increased substantially or significantly as a consequence of TPL (i.e. they responded with a 4 or 5). However, principals were 71% more likely than teachers to respond that teacher morale had improved significantly, with more than half of principals (54%) noting significant improvements in the enthusiasm for teaching on the part of teachers who participated in TPL.



\*11 teachers did not provide a response to this question and four teachers indicated that this outcome was not applicable to their project. Both these groups were excluded from the denominator when calculating proportions.

\*\*Nine principals did not provide a response to this question and thus have been excluded from the denominator when calculating proportions.

It is evident that participating in TPL projects impacted positively on teacher enthusiasm for teaching in a number of different ways. For example, some teachers were reinvigorated by the opportunity to learn something new and by the learning process itself:

*“Learning is a lifelong process. Being given the time for your own learning in order to improve your own teaching is fantastic.”*

For other teachers, their TPL project led to them feeling more flexible and confident in the classroom, in turn resulting in them developing a more positive attitude towards teaching. Still other teachers professed that the opportunity to spend some time at another school observing how this other school operated was in itself reinvigorating.

However, there were some examples of TPL impacting negatively on teacher enthusiasm. This was not because of the experience of the TPL project per se, but rather the way the school implemented (or failed to implement) some of the positive learnings resulting from TPL. In particular, teachers were frustrated at not being able to put into use some of the skills they had developed whilst undertaking TPL:

*“The school has made the decision, stupidly in my opinion, not to continue to use me as a resource to teach kids in the area of literacy. The question for me is why did the school get me involved in the program in the first place if I am not going to be able to continue with it?”*

This example would appear to demonstrate the importance of schools ensuring that professional learning activities are linked in with opportunities to utilise newly developed skills. Not only is this an imperative from the point of view of maximising resource utilisation, but, as the above example demonstrates, for the maintenance of teacher morale as well.

### **3.3.2 Comparison with 2004/05, 2005/06, and 2006/07 Cohorts**

The charts below compare teacher outcomes as reported by teachers across the four years of the TPL program.

#### **3.3.2.1 Knowledge and Skills**

Reported improvements in knowledge and skills by participants were, for the most part, consistent across the four years of data. Specifically, around five in six teachers who responded to the post-program survey indicated at least substantial improvements in their level of knowledge and skills as a consequence of TPL, and more than two in five teachers reported significant improvements. The exception was the 2005/06 financial year, in which teachers noted greater improvements in knowledge and skills.

On the whole, principals tended to be slightly more positive about improvements in participants knowledge and skills than the participating teachers themselves. Moreover, for the principal data, rather than the 2005/06 cohort being an ‘outlier’, the extremely positive results from this year were almost replicated in the 2008 calendar year.

This pattern is demonstrated in the line chart below, which presents the mean response to this question for each of the four years of TPL. It is apparent that teacher and principal mean responses fluctuated in a similar manner between 2004/05 and 2006/07, before diverging in 2008.

