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ABSTRACT

This is one of a series of reports that document the formative research that supported the development of the "First Steps" program designed to improve the literacy and numeracy of primary school students in Western Australia, particularly those considered at-risk. The four themes of First Steps (reading, writing, spelling, and oral language) are organized around a development continuum of milestones along the child's path to literacy. This report documents the impact of First Steps on teachers and schools by considering descriptions of its impact provided by principals and teachers in a sample of Western Australia schools. Responses were received from 30 Year-1 teachers, 34 Year-5 teachers, 12 focus teachers, and 15 principals. Questionnaire responses reveal that the general feeling in schools about First Steps is positive, and that its teaching strategies and materials have been well received. Principals felt that the First Steps focus teachers were very helpful in introducing First Steps into the schools, and that the professional development provided by the First Steps program was very helpful also. Principals and teachers thought that one of the major achievements in First Steps schools was the improved performance of students, and another was improved teaching skills. First Steps was particularly well-regarded in schools that had been involved with the program for more than a year. Two appendixes present response rates to the questionnaires and the texts of the questionnaires for principals, focus teachers, and teachers in First Steps and other schools. (Contains 14 exhibits and 7 references.) (SLD)

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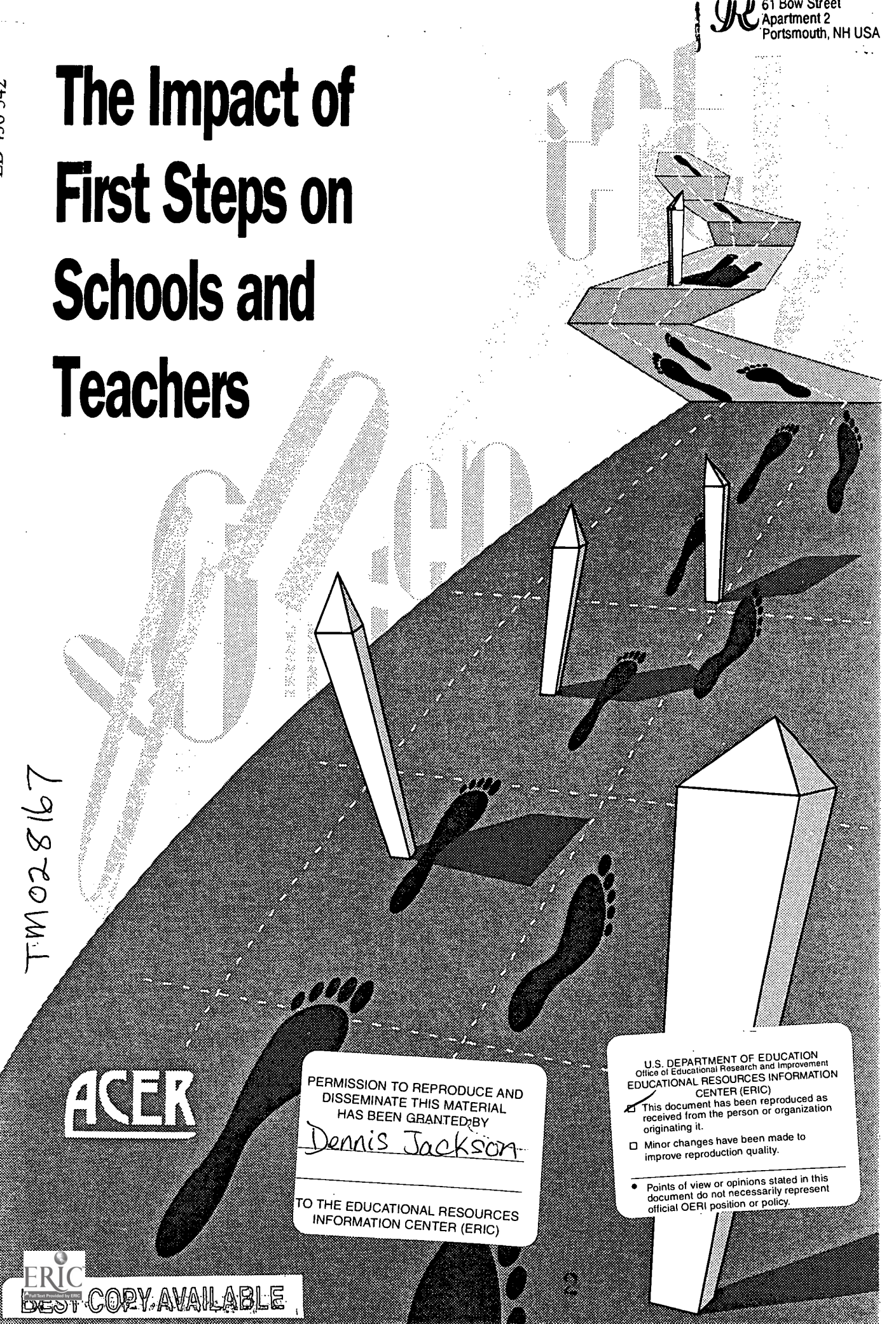
The Impact of First Steps on Schools and Teachers



THE IMPACT OF FIRST STEPS ON SCHOOLS AND TEACHERS

an interim report to the
Curriculum Development Branch
Western Australian Ministry of Education

Australian Council for Educational Research, June 1993.

This is the third of three reports on the ACER 1992 evaluation of the First Steps project in Western Australia. The first report describes the empirical validation of the First Steps Spelling and Writing continua. The second report examines the effects of the First Steps project on the reading comprehension and writing ability of Year 5 students. Each of these reports is available from the Curriculum Development Branch of the Ministry of Education.

Thanks to all the schools that agreed to participate in the evaluation of First Steps. Thanks also to the Principals and teachers who so generously contributed towards it by completing the questionnaires sent to them. The data from these questionnaires form the basis of this report.

Editor's Note

This document is one of a series of reports that document the formative research that supported the creation and development of *First Steps*™. As a result of this research, the Education Department of Western Australia (EDWA), in collaboration with the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) revised *First Steps* in response to each of the issues and questions raised by this research. *First Steps* training courses, Developmental Continua, and Resource Books are published with due amendments and alterations.

Other research documents that support the development of *First Steps* include:

Dr. Phil Deschamp:

- A Survey of the Implementation of the Literacy Component of the *First Steps* Project in WA
- The Implementation of The Literacy Component of The *First Steps* Project in ELAN Schools
- A Survey of the Effectiveness of the Focus Teacher 'B' Training for the *First Steps* Project
- Student Achievement: A Study of the Effects of *First Steps* Teaching on Student Achievement
- Case Studies of The Implementation of the *First Steps* Project in Twelve Schools
- The Development and Implementation of the *First Steps* Project in Western Australia

ACER:

- Empirical Validation of the *First Steps* Reading Continuum
- Empirical Validation of the *First Steps* Spelling and Writing Continua
- Empirical Re-Validation of the *First Steps* Spelling Continuum
- Assessment and Record of the Changes made to the Spelling Continuum
- The Impact of *First Steps* on Schools and Teachers
- The Impact of *First Steps* on the Reading and Writing Ability of Year 5 Students
- Background: *First Steps* and the ACER Evaluation & Report on the Validity of the *First Steps* Writing and Spelling Continua*

EDWA:

- Supporting Linguistic and Cultural Diversity Through *First Steps:* The Highgate Project

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SUMMARY OF THE MAIN FINDINGS

The following are the main findings which can be drawn from the data analysed in this report:

The general feeling towards First Steps:

i. The general feeling in schools towards First Steps is positive. In particular, the ideas, teaching strategies and materials that First Steps introduces to schools have been very well received. There was some evidence that the inservicing provided by First Steps and the use of the continua caused some muting of the enthusiasm of teachers for the project in some schools.

The main elements of the First Steps project:

ii. First Steps Focus Teachers are widely regarded by teachers and Principals as helpful in schools. They were seen as helpful for introducing classroom teachers to new strategies and materials, organising the acquisition of new materials and assisting in school wide planning.

iii. First Steps Collaborative teachers were reported by many teachers and Principals to be either 'very helpful' or 'helpful'. Modelling of classes, assistance in using the First Steps developmental continua and assistance in whole school organisation based on First Steps ideas were the most common reasons cited for this helpfulness.

iv. The Professional Development provided by First Steps was widely regarded by teachers and Principals as helpful in introducing new ideas, strategies and materials to teachers. There was, however, wide spread concern about the excessive amount of information provided in Professional Development sessions. This was seen as leading to 'information overload' by many teachers.

The overall success of First Steps:

v. One of the major achievements of First Steps in schools was seen by Principals and teachers to be the improved performance of students. Another major achievement of First Steps is the improved teaching skills of teachers.

vi. First Steps is widely perceived to be a success, particularly in schools which have been involved with the program for more than a year.

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Appendix A. Response rates to the questionnaires.

Appendix B. Principal's questionnaire, Focus Teacher's questionnaire, Year 1 teachers' questionnaires for non First Steps schools and Year 1 teachers' questionnaires for First Steps schools.

INTRODUCTION

Background to the First Steps Project

First Steps is a program instituted by the WA Ministry of Education to improve the literacy and numeracy of primary school students. It is intended, in particular, to assist in the development of the literacy and numeracy skills of 'at risk' students.[1] First Steps was introduced in 1988 and has been evolving since that time. So far, most of the work produced as part of the First Steps project has focussed upon literacy.

Background to the evaluation of First Steps

The WA Ministry of Education approached ACER in early 1992 to evaluate First Steps. Work for the evaluation began in April 1992. The evaluation was designed to measure the impact of First Steps at three levels. These levels were: (1) the school (2) the teachers and (3) the students. Questionnaires were used to gather data to measure the effects of First Steps at the school and teacher level. It is the data taken from these questionnaires that are reported here. Reading and writing tests were used to try and establish the effects of First Steps at the student level. The evaluation was also designed to validate the First Steps continua. (See *The Impact of First Steps on the reading and writing ability of Year 5 students* and *Empirical Validation of the First Steps Spelling and Writing Continua.*[2])

Aim of the report

This report aims to investigate the impact of First Steps, on teachers and schools. It does so by considering the descriptions of the impact as provided by the Principals and teachers, within a sample of Western Australian schools.

The sample of respondents

The sample was stratified into six groups based on the level of disadvantage of the schools (their 'PSP' status) and the period of involvement of the school in First Steps. Exhibit 1 shows how the six strata were derived.

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[1] 'At risk' students are those who are not making satisfactory progress. A student might not make satisfactory progress because he or she does not try or because of specific learning difficulties.

[2] These reports are part of the series of three reports produced as part of the ACER 1992 evaluation of First Steps.

Exhibit 1: Strata used in drawing the sample of teachers and Principals

Disadvantage status of school	First Steps status of school		
	Non First Steps	New First Steps	Old First Steps
Disadvantaged (PSP)	Non FS PSP	New FS PSP	Old FS PSP
Non Disadvantaged	Non FS non PSP	New FS non PSP	Old FS non PSP

A non First Steps school was defined as one that had had no formal involvement with First Steps. It should be noted, however, that within these non First Steps schools there were many teachers who used First Steps materials and ideas.[3] A new First Steps school was defined as one with less than 12 months formal involvement with First Steps. The level of disadvantage of a school was defined using the Ministry of Education's formal definition of disadvantage - its 'PSP' status.

The schools in each stratum were selected with a probability proportional to size. In other words, the more students there were in a school, the more likely the school was to be chosen. If school size is not taken into account, when sampling, small schools tend to be over represented in the sample. Four schools were selected from each stratum, so a total of 24 schools was chosen.

A questionnaire was sent to two Year 1 and two Year 5 teachers in each selected school. Where there were more than two Year 1 or more than two Year 5 teachers in a school, two from each Year level were randomly selected. If a school had one Year 1 and/or one Year 5 teacher then only one questionnaire for that Year level was sent to the school. Where a school had, say, no Year 1 teachers but some Year 5 teachers, this school was still included in the sample. A Year 1 class was defined as any class in which there was at least one Year 1 student. Thus, Year 1 teachers sometimes taught composite classes. Similarly, Year 5 teachers sometimes taught composite classes.

The First Steps schools were also sent questionnaires to be completed by the First Steps Focus Teacher and by the Principal.

Generally, there was a very good response rate to the questionnaire. All Focus Teachers responded, 15 of the 16 Principals responded, 30 of 38 Year 1 teachers (about 80%) responded and 34 of 46 Year 5 teachers (about 75%) responded to the questionnaire. More details of response rates are provided in Appendix A.

[3]Responses to questionnaires sent to teachers within these 'non First Steps' schools showed that nearly three quarters of Year 1 and Year 5 teachers who responded used some First Steps ideas or materials. Some had recently come from schools that had implemented First Steps and others had obtained First Steps materials from colleagues and used these without having had any formal involvement with First Steps.

The research design

The research was designed to examine the effect of First Steps by contrasting non First Steps schools, new First Steps and old First Steps schools while taking into account the effect of socio-economic disadvantage.

Socio-economic disadvantage is an important variable because of the known relationship between it and educational achievement.

In planning the evaluation it was expected that, typically, there would be differences between non First Steps schools and First Steps schools and that these differences would be more apparent in old First Steps schools than they would be in new First Steps schools. This was expected because the project will have had longer to make a stronger impact in the old First Steps schools.

Research questions

The following specific questions are addressed in this report:

- What is the impact of First Steps on teaching methods?
- What is the general feeling of teaching staff towards First Steps ?
- How helpful have Focus Teachers been to teachers and Principals?
- How helpful have Collaborative teachers been to teachers and to schools?
- How helpful is the professional development provided by First Steps?
- What do teachers and Principals think are the achievements of First Steps in their schools?
- Is First Steps perceived by teachers and Principals to be a success in their schools?

The data collection instruments

The data used in this report are taken from questionnaires posted to the participating schools. Year 1 and Year 5 teachers in non First Steps schools received a shortened questionnaire asking about their class characteristics (its size, whether it was a composite class and the number of 'at risk' children in it). They were also asked if they had heard of First Steps and if so, whether they had used any First Steps materials. Year 1 and Year 5 teachers in First Steps schools were asked additional questions about their experience with First Steps. These questionnaires were designed to provide information about the impact of First Steps in the classroom. The questionnaires sent to Principals and Focus Teachers were designed to collect data about the impact of First Steps on the whole school. The questionnaires to Principals and Focus Teachers, therefore, did not ask for details about the impact of First Steps on teaching methods, but concentrated on more general school-wide effects. The different questionnaires used in the evaluation are reproduced in Appendix B.

Background variables

If comparisons between different types of schools are to be made then the effect of important intervening variables needs to be established. Two important intervening variables are the teaching experience of teachers and class size. They are important because of the impact both can have on teaching methods.

Two aspects of teaching experience were collected. These were the number of years in the current school and the number of years teaching. Two aspects of class size were also collected. These were, the number of students in the class and the number of 'at risk' students in the class.

The length of time teachers had been at their current schools was measured so that recent arrivals at old First Steps schools could be identified. It was felt that these teachers would have a different set of experiences with First Steps from those who had been at the school since the inception of the program.

Since First Steps was designed to assist with 'at risk' students, it was considered fundamental to obtain data on how many of these students were in each class.

It was hoped that the sampled schools would have teachers who had similar levels of experience both at their current school and in their teaching, and that class sizes would also be similar. If these were observed, then the effect of these variables would be about the same and so would not confound the effects of First Steps.

Characteristics of the teachers

Years teaching at current school

Typically, teachers from the sample have been in their current school for about 4 years. No statistically significant difference was found between the mean number of years of teachers at the schools in each of the strata of the sample. (See Exhibit 2.)

Exhibit 2: Time (in years) at current school of Year 1 and Year 5 teachers by period of involvement with First Steps and PSP status.

School Type	Mean	Standard Deviation	Number of Respondents
Non First Steps non PSP	6.8	1.5	8
Non First Steps PSP	4.1	1.2	12
New First Steps non PSP	4.6	1.3	10
New First Steps PSP	2.4	1.5	8
Old First Steps non PSP	2.9	1.1	14
Old First Steps PSP	3.4	1.2	13

(Using ANOVA, $F(5,59) = 1.18$ which is not significant.)

Teaching Experience

While there are some differences in the average amount of teaching experience (especially for teachers in non First Steps non PSP and new First Steps non PSP compared with old First Steps non PSP) these differences are not statistically significant. (See Exhibit 3.)

Exhibit 3: Time (in years) teaching of Year 1 and Year 5 teachers by period of involvement with First Steps and PSP status.

School Type	Mean	Standard Deviation	Number of Respondents
Non First Steps non PSP	13.0	2.8	8
Non First Steps PSP	12.0	2.3	12
New First Steps non PSP	13.1	9.0	10
New First Steps PSP	9.6	5.3	8
Old First Steps non PSP	7.0	3.5	14
Old First Steps PSP	9.8	9.5	13

(Using ANOVA $F(5,59) = 1.03$ which is not significant.)

The data displayed in Exhibits 2 and 3 show that teachers probably had, on average, similar levels of teaching experience and similar periods of time within their current school. This finding means that generalisations about differences between schools in each of the six strata of the sample probably do not need to take account of differences in the teaching experience of staff or of differences in the period of time they have taught in their current school.

Class Size

There is a statistically significant difference in the mean number of students in each class from the different schools. Exhibit 4 shows these differences.

Exhibit 4: Class sizes of Year 1 and Year 5 teachers by period of involvement with First Steps and PSP status.

School Type	Mean	Standard Deviation	Number of Respondents
Non First Steps non PSP	25.0	5.3	9
Non First Steps PSP	26.8	3.1	11
New First Steps non PSP	22.6	7.2	10
New First Steps PSP	27.3	2.1	7
Old First Steps non PSP	24.0	3.9	14
Old First Steps PSP	28.3	2.7	13

[Using ANOVA $F(5,58) = 4.10$, which is significant ($p < 0.05$)]

Further analysis of these data showed that a significant difference lay between the means of the new First Steps non PSP schools and old First Steps PSP schools. [Tukey-Kramer all pairs comparison ($P < 0.05$).] One way of interpreting these results is to argue that this difference in class size will confound the effect of First Steps, particularly because class size is probably important in determining how teachers deal with literacy problems in their class. However, it is important also to examine the magnitude of the differences between the two groups. This shows that there are, on average, 5 or 6 more students in an old First Steps PSP classroom than in a new First Steps non PSP classroom. One needs to judge whether this difference is, in practical terms, an important one or not.

The number of 'at risk' students in the class

The number of 'at risk' students in a class is difficult to generalise about because some teachers are teaching small sized classes and others are teaching composite classes (that is classes made up of more than one Year level, for example, a 4/5 grade) and so have fewer Year 1 or Year 5 students. Seven teachers reported having more than 10 'at risk' students in their class. (Two of these were from the same school and both these teachers reported their whole class as 'at risk'.) The average number of 'at risk' students was 6 per class. An analysis of the difference between

the means for each of the factors - period of involvement with First Steps and PSP status - for non composite classes showed that there was no statistically significant difference between them.

Generally, it can be concluded that the schools in the sample are similar with regard to the teaching experience of classroom teachers, class size and, probably, the number of 'at risk 'students.

The extent to which First Steps materials and ideas are used in non First Steps schools

Part of the examination of the impact of First Steps involves contrasting non First Steps with First Steps schools. This is done on the assumption that differences between them may be attributable to the impact of First Steps. It is important, therefore, to know the extent to which First Steps ideas and materials have been used in non First Steps schools.

Teachers in non First Steps schools were asked if they had heard of First Steps before they were asked to complete the questionnaire. Of the 20 teachers who responded to this question, 18 had heard of First Steps and only 2 had not. Of these 18 teachers, 15 had been or were using First Steps materials.

Those teachers using First Steps materials were asked to describe what materials they had used from First Steps and how useful these materials had been in their teaching. Exhibit 5 shows the frequency of use of various types of First Steps materials. (Note that no distinction is drawn between PSP and non PSP schools in Exhibit 5 because there was little difference between the two types of schools. Similarly, there was little difference between Year levels and so these are also not described.)

Exhibit 5: Number of teachers in the sample of non First Steps schools using different types of First Steps materials. (Note double counting occurs in this Exhibit.)

Type of First Steps materials	n. of teachers using materials
Using at least one continuum	10
Concept keyboard	2
Other materials	7

The 'Other materials' used by teachers included 'some games', 'booklets', 'modules' and other non specified materials.

All teachers from non First Steps schools who were using First Steps materials reported a very positive response to them. The full set of their responses is given below because this is a useful way of communicating how widely and, sometimes enthusiastically, some teachers in non First Steps schools have adopted First Steps ideas.

When asked how useful First Steps materials is to their teaching, the teachers replied as follows:

- "Extremely useful - essential to my teaching!" *(Year 1, PSP school teacher)*
- "First Steps spelling and writing form the basis of the language program in my class" *(Year 1 PSP school teacher)*
- "The children enjoy the games ..."*(Year 1, PSP school teacher)*
- "Provides an interesting variety of strategies ..." *(Year 1, PSP school teacher)*
- "Very helpful and instructional." *(Year 5, PSP school teacher)*
- " ... I have only just returned to teaching after many years at home ... First Steps was a tremendous help." *(Year 5, PSP school teacher)*
- "(I am) much happier with spelling programs as it seems to have more meanings and direction." *(Year 5, PSP school teacher)*
- "Great!" *(Year 1 non PSP, school teacher)*
- "Phonics games lead to high success rate" *(Year 1 non PSP, school teacher)*
- "It has made me more aware of the fact that children cannot progress from stage to stage until they have satisfied the various criteria, and as a classroom teacher it is my duty to make sure that the work appropriate to my Year level has been adequately taught." *(Year 1, non PSP school teacher)*

The criticisms that were made were not of the program but of its availability. These comments included the following:

- "(I) need more in-servicing ..." *(Year 1, PSP school teacher)*
- "Could be better utilised if 'free' in-servicing was available rather than having to fumble blindly through." *(Year 1, non PSP school teacher)*

And less specifically,

- "(I) believe there is more yet to fathom."*(Year 5, non PSP school teacher)*

In the sample of non First Steps schools participating in the evaluation, First Steps materials and ideas are widely used and are seen very positively by those teachers who have gained access to them. These findings suggest that it is difficult to use a contrast between non First Steps and First Steps schools. Contrasts are nevertheless made because the First Steps schools have had extensive in-service assistance from First Steps staff and assistance from 'Collaborative teachers' - teachers who model First Steps strategies in classrooms. First Steps schools may also have a First Steps 'Focus Teacher' in the school whose role it is to co-ordinate and facilitate the program in the school.

What is the impact of First Steps on teaching methods?

A number of different approaches were used to investigate how First Steps may or may not be changing teaching methods. First, how teachers think about the problems that 'at risk' children face is examined. This was done because it is likely that the way these problems are conceived will shape the methods that teachers will use in attempting to help 'at risk' children. Secondly, the methods that teachers report that they use in their class rooms are examined. This examination includes both what teachers report that they do and what they would like to see happen so that they could better help 'at risk' children'. Finally, the impact of First Steps on teaching methods is examined by considering the extent to which teachers prefer teaching language compared with other parts of the curriculum in non First Steps school, new First Steps and old First Steps schools.

How teachers define the notion of an 'at risk' student

This part of the report considers whether there is a relationship between how teachers define 'at risk' students and the period of involvement of their school with First Steps.

In the questionnaire, teachers were asked: "In terms of either their spelling or reading or writing or oral language skills, in what way are these students at risk?" ("These students" were those whom the respondent had previously identified as 'at risk'). This question was asked to find out if First Steps has had any impact on how teachers view or think about 'at risk' children, especially in relation to literacy. Teachers' responses to this question are now examined.

The wording of the question prompted teachers to answer in two different ways. Some teachers nominated the 'background' and other characteristics of students which predisposed the children towards being 'at risk'. Others described those behaviours which the students exhibited (or failed to exhibit) that led the students to be defined as 'at risk'. The responses

nominating background factors were, in effect, explanations for children being 'at risk' and the responses listing 'at risk' behaviours were descriptions of the attributes of 'at risk' children.

There were of three types of explanations offered by teachers for why children were 'at risk'. The first referred to the social or family background of the child. 'Poor' language environments in the home, illiterate parents and English not being the first language at home were mentioned by many teachers. One teacher had children who had literacy problems because they were hungry and sleepy when they arrived at school each day. The second type of explanation referred to educational factors. Year 1 teachers commonly reported that failure to attend preprimary schooling predisposed children towards being 'at risk'. Poor attendance at school was cited by both Year 1 and Year 5 teachers. The third type of explanation referred to the personal characteristics of the children. These characteristics included physical disability, poor memory, poor fine motor control and, for some Year 1 teachers, the young age of the students. Many teachers also referred to children who lacked concentration, self discipline, had low self esteem or lacked confidence. (It was not always clear from some of these responses whether a lack of self confidence was seen as causing a child to be 'at risk' or whether the lack of self confidence arose from the child being 'at risk'.)

Most teachers from old First Steps, new First Steps, and non First Steps schools referred to one or other of these three categories of explanation in answering the question about how the children in their class were 'at risk'. There was no pattern in the responses which suggested that the period of involvement with First Steps affected how teachers identified background factors predisposing a child to being 'at risk'.

The second type of response to the question about 'at risk' students produced lists of behaviours or attributes which teachers used to identify 'at risk' students. For this type of response there were some differences between teachers although typically these were more strongly related to the Year level that they taught than to their involvement with First Steps. For example, Year 1 teachers more frequently than Year 5 teachers referred to a child being 'at risk' because they could not recognise sounds or because they could not speak clearly. Year 5 teachers were more likely to see students as being 'at risk' because they did not understand how to use successful strategies when spelling, reading or writing. Year 5 teachers were also more likely to describe 'at risk' students as those whole failed to concentrate on extracting meaning while reading.

First Steps stresses that literacy is about being able to communicate, translate, relay, interpret and internalise meaning. There was no evidence that teachers at First Steps schools were any more likely than other teachers to refer to 'at risk' students in terms of their difficulty in extracting or communicating meaning.

Most teachers referred to one or more of the following problems when describing an 'at risk' child:

- Poor grammar including poor punctuation and incomplete sentences,
- Poor or limited vocabulary,
- Little or no comprehension when reading,
- Inability to communicate ideas clearly when writing or speaking,
- Poor word attack skills,
- Failure to focus on meaning when reading,
- Inability to recognise sounds and to blend sounds when spelling
- Poor listening skills
- Failure to realise that words carry meaning

One teacher felt that a child who did not enjoy reading was 'at risk'. The same teacher also felt that a child who did not see him or herself as a writer was also 'at risk'.

The problems that these 'at risk' children have were often identified by comparing the child's ability to the ability of a normally developing child. Some teachers explicitly referred to the achievements of the class and defined an 'at risk' child by reference to them. For example, one teacher wrote that an 'at risk' child was "Much slower in progress than the rest of the class." Another wrote that; "These children are not 'learning' as the majority of the class are." In some schools, teachers defined an 'at risk' child by reference to their location on a First Steps developmental continuum and compared the 'at risk' child's location with the location of other children in the class. Interestingly, the use of First Steps continua to do this, was nearly as commonly reported by teachers in non First Steps schools as by teachers in First Steps schools.

Generally then, most teachers, irrespective of the level of involvement of their school with First Steps, tend to view the factors predisposing children toward being 'at risk', the characteristics of 'at risk' students and the standards against which 'at risk' can be gauged in much the same ways.

Methods used by teachers

This part of the report considers whether there is a relationship between the methods that teachers use to help 'at risk' students and the period of involvement of their school with First Steps.

In the questionnaire, teachers were asked how they keep track of the development of their 'at risk' students. This question was asked primarily to establish the extent to which the First

Steps developmental continua were being used to record students' progress. Analysis of the responses by teachers showed that First Steps continua were used by many teachers. Not surprisingly, they were used very frequently by teachers in old First Steps schools. They were used most frequently in old non PSP First Steps schools. It is interesting that there were also some teachers in non First Steps schools who reported using First Steps continua to keep track of the development of 'at risk' students. These teachers tended to be in the disadvantaged schools. Exhibit 6 shows the frequency with which teachers reported using at least one First Steps continuum to record the development of 'at risk' students'

Exhibit 6: Number and percentage of teachers using at least one First Steps continuum to record the progress of 'at risk' students by period of involvement with First Steps and PSP status.

		n Responding	n using a Continuum	% using a Continuum
Not First Steps	PSP	11	4	*35*
	Not PSP	9	1	*10*
New First Steps	PSP	8	6	*75*
	Not PSP	10	4	*40*
Old First Steps	PSP	13	6	*45*
	Not PSP	13	13	*100*

On average, about 20% of teachers in non First Steps schools use at least one continuum to record the progress of 'at risk' students. The proportion increases to about 55% of teachers in new First Steps schools. It increases further to about 75% of teachers in old First Steps schools.

It is clear from these data that the First Steps continua are more frequently used to record the development of 'at risk' students in old First Steps schools than in other schools. However, teachers, even in old First Steps schools, continue to use a wide variety of methods for recording development.

Other frequently reported methods of recording students' development included testing, keeping anecdotal records, using checklists, using observation and collecting work samples.

Teachers were also asked what had been the most useful methods that they had employed during 1992 to develop the literacy skills of their 'at risk' students. In response to this question, some teachers described the specific methods that they used and other teachers described the general orientation that they adopted. There were many different methods used, making it hard to generalise about differences between the teaching methods in non First Steps, new First

Steps and old First Steps schools using data from this question. It is probably the case that there is more variation within schools than there is between them.

All groups of teachers reported that involving parents and others, such as support teachers and aboriginal co-workers, were very useful methods. Many teachers stressed how useful 'games' such as 'Word Sleuth', 'Tic Tac Toe' and 'Hangman' are as ways of encouraging the children's interest. Many teachers also referred to the usefulness of modelling either in their teaching practice or by organising peer support for the children. A number of teachers referred to the use of 'Have-a-go' pads, concept key boards and the use of Big Books in the classroom.
There are some innovative ideas being practiced. One teacher (from a non First Steps school) referred to a 'Parliament session' in which students take over running the class to discuss problems. The teacher reported that; "The result of these sessions is invaluable inside information for me - I look at things through their eyes." This notion of trying to understand the child's perspective and the child's experience is a theme which runs through many of the responses that teachers made to this question about useful teaching methods. This is not to say that there are not some difficulties. One teacher (from an old First Steps school) wrote that; "There are one or two children who are 'at risk' through poor ability who seem to have severe problems no matter what I do."

Teachers were also asked what would help them to better meet the needs of 'at risk' students. There was a near unanimous chorus in response - more time with the students, more assistance from teachers' aides, more teaching materials. There was little difference between teachers from non, new and old First Steps schools in response to this question. Teachers argued that this extra support was needed so that the teachers could spend more time with small groups or individual students. It was felt by many teachers that such methods were the only way to deal with the literacy problems confronting their 'at risk' children.

There was a tendency for teachers to more frequently refer to the need for materials if they were in a non First Steps school. There were ten references made by teachers to the need for more and better materials and activities from teachers in the non First Steps schools compared with six made by teachers in First Steps schools

Other factors which teachers felt would help them to better meet the needs of their students included, (1) better timetabling so that literacy programs were not interrupted by other school activities such as sport, (2) better attendance at school by the children, (3) more in-servicing of teachers to assist 'at risk' children and (4) more parental support. Interestingly, the call for more parental support came most often from teachers in old First Steps schools. One teacher (from an old First Steps non PSP school) wrote, "I am fortunate to have a small class, and a

teacher's aide who is very capable, and is used for as much small group work as possible. (despite this) More parent help ... would be useful"

It is not clear from the data taken from the surveys to what extent and in what ways the developmental continua are replacing some of the methods used by teachers for identifying 'at risk' children, recording their progress and reporting on this progress. The questions asked of the teachers were not sensitive enough to do this. This means that with these data the relative importance of differing methods could not be established for teachers in non First Steps, new First Steps and old First Steps schools. Consequently, only the following can be claimed.

Teachers probably understand the problems of 'at risk' children or identify 'at risk' children in much the same ways, irrespective of their period of involvement with First Steps. In response to the problems faced by these 'at risk' students, teachers use a wide variety of methods. There are probably no major differences between the methods used by teachers in non First Steps, new First Steps and old First Steps schools. It is unclear if these methods are given the same weight by the teachers. Nor is it clear how teachers relate these methods to the First Steps developmental continua. There was a clear difference between non First Steps schools, new First Steps schools and old First Steps schools in the use of the developmental continua. About 75% of teachers in old First Steps schools reported using the continua to record the progress of their 'at risk' children. Fewer teachers (about 55%) used the continua in new First Schools and fewer still (about 20%) used them in non First Steps schools.

Data from elsewhere in the questionnaire suggests that Principals, Focus Teachers and the Year 1 and Year 5 classroom teachers see First Steps as having had an important impact on the methods and strategies that are used in classrooms. These views can be reconciled with the findings in this part of the report by noting the following:

- The wide variety of methods and strategies used by the sum of all teachers responding to the survey does not mean that individual teachers use all of these methods and strategies.

- The developmental continua may be important in providing a framework for a new understanding of already widely used methods.

Preferred Subject Area

Another way of gauging the impact of First Steps is to examine how comfortable teachers are in teaching language. One way of estimating this is to count the teachers who nominate language or a language related part of the curriculum as the area which they feel that they teach best.

This was done. Teachers were asked to nominate the area(s) of the curriculum that they teach the best. It was hypothesised that if First Steps was making a positive impact on teachers then a larger proportion of teachers from old First Steps schools would be more likely to regard themselves as best at teaching language than from either new of non First Steps schools.

Where a teacher's answer included reference to language or an aspect of language (eg spelling) the teacher was categorised as 'best at teaching language'. (Those teachers who nominated language plus other areas of the curriculum were thus defined as 'best at teaching language'.) Teachers who did not nominate language or parts of the language curriculum were defined as 'best at other subjects'. Exhibit 7 shows the number of teachers in each category by period of involvement of their school with First Steps.

Exhibit 7: Numbers of teachers who regard themselves as best at teaching language versus others by period of involvement of the school with First Steps.

School Type	Best at Language	Best at Other Subjects	Total
Non First Steps	12 (60%)	8 (40%)	20 (100%)
New First Steps	7 (47%)	9 (53%)	16 (100%)
Old First Steps	20 (79%)	5 (21%)	25 (100%)
Total	39(64%)	22(36%)	61(100%)

[$\chi^2 = 5.892$ with 2 df, (P =0.0561)][4]

If it is assumed that those teachers who feel that they teach language best are randomly distributed then it would be expected that the proportions of these teachers would be about the same in schools irrespective of the period of involvement of the school with First Steps. With this in mind, the pattern in the data as revealed by Exhibit 7 is quite complex. It shows that teachers are probably most likely to regard themselves as best in language at old First Steps schools. This is evidence that First Steps is improving teaching of language. Somewhat paradoxically, however, teachers are least likely to regard themselves as best at teaching language in new First Steps schools.[5] As will be seen later in the report, teachers in new First

[4] It will be observed that the differences between the levels of involvement with First Steps are, following convention, not significant at the .05 level. That is, there is a less than 1 in 20 chance of there being a real difference between the proportion of teachers in old, new and non First Steps schools who feel that they teach language best. In fact there is, with the data used here, a 1 in 18 chance of these differences being real. Given that 1 in 20 has no logical justification, it is up to the judgement of the reader as to whether or not the difference between the levels is likely to be real or not when the odds are 1 in 18.

[5] Further analysis of Exhibit 7 showed that the two cells which contributed most to the total χ^2 value were the 5 old First Steps teachers and the 9 new First Steps teachers who reported feeling better able to

Steps schools report that the introduction of First Steps is very demanding and, for some, stressful. It may be that during the implementation of First Steps in schools, teachers feel uncomfortable with their language teaching.

This finding that old First Steps schools probably have proportionally more teachers reporting that they teach language best is particularly interesting considering the known high turn over of staff from these schools. It can be expected that some teachers in old First Steps schools have moved to them after the inservicing which went with the introduction of the program into these schools.[6] That these teachers still report language as their best area of the curriculum suggests that the effects of First Steps extend beyond the experience of individual teachers and extend into the schools' educational culture.

What is the general feeling of teaching staff towards First Steps?

Before examining the response of teachers and Principals to various parts of First Steps, an overview is given. This overview provides the context for the more detailed examination which follows.

To get a picture of this general context, teachers were asked about the 'general feeling' (at the time of the survey) of the teaching staff towards First Steps in their school. Their responses were coded into one of three broad categories - 'The general feeling is positive', 'The general feeling is mixed' and 'The general feeling is negative'.

As Exhibit 8 shows, nearly half (48%) of Year 1 and Year 5 teachers report that the general feeling in their school is positive, 41% report a mixed feeling and 11% report a negative feeling.

An analysis of the data, shown in Exhibit 8, revealed that there was no significant difference between the observed and expected values for cells in the table which suggests that the general feeling of teaching staff towards First Steps is independent of the period of involvement with First Steps or the PSP status of the schools.

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teach other areas of the curriculum. In other words, there were probably less than expected numbers of teachers in old First Steps schools and more than the expected umber of teachers in new First Steps schools who feel they teach areas other than language.

[6]This cannot be established with the available data.

Exhibit 8: General feeling in schools towards First Steps by period of involvement with First Steps and PSP status as reported by Year 1 and Year 5 classroom teachers.

School Type	Positive	Mixed	Negative	Total
New First Steps non PSP	6	3	0	9
New First Steps PSP	3	4	1	8
Old First Steps non PSP	3	8	3	14
Old First Steps PSP	9	3	1	13
Total	21(48%)	18(41%)	5(11%)	44(100%)

[$\chi^2 = 4.774$ with 6 df, is not significant.]

Principals and Focus Teachers were also asked about the general feeling of classroom teachers towards First Steps. Of the Principals, 6 reported that First Steps was generally regarded positively, 8 reported a mixed response and 1 reported that it was generally regarded negatively. Three Focus Teachers reported a positive response, 6 reported a mixed response and 1 reported a negative response.

While it is important to know how First Steps is generally regarded by classroom teachers, it is also important to know the reasons for these responses. To identify these reasons the responses of classroom teachers, Principals and Focus Teachers are now examined more closely.

The responses are grouped into the same three categories used for Exhibit 8 - positive, mixed and negative responses. Within the group of mixed responses there were three types of negative responses. These are grouped as follows: (1) the overload associated with in-servicing, (2) overload associated with use of the continua and (3) a more general concern with other aspects of First Steps.

The general feeling of classroom teachers towards First Steps is positive.

Not all responses reporting a positive feeling are described. Those chosen show the typical reasons given for a positive feeling in schools about First Steps.

- "I enjoy using the strategies and have implemented First Steps ideas across the curriculum. The general feeling therefore is good - worthwhile program."
  (Year 1, new First Steps, non PSP school teacher)
- "Positive in junior blocks. Activities are practical, easy to make and good fun."
  (Year 1, old First Steps, PSP school teacher)

- "The majority of teachers know, in more detail, how to determine the children 'at risk' using the writing and developmental continua. The strategies provided enable the staff to modify or supplement their programs to cater for their children. On the whole, I would say that the staff are in favour of the First Steps program.
(Year 1, old First Steps, PSP school teacher)

- "In writing ... teachers feel more confident .. In the past it was very 'wishy washy'."
(Year 5, old First Steps, PSP school teacher)

- "Many children are achieving success where they have previously failed. This improves classroom tone and success rates." *(Focus Teacher, old First Steps, PSP school)*

- "Very positive - with both the First Steps Focus Teacher and Key teacher being very highly regarded and welcomed into classes to model and assist in planning and evaluation and recording." *(Principal old First Steps, PSP school)*

- "I believe that there is still a very positive feeling to First Steps by the teaching staff. If we can continue to provide time for teachers to complete the lengthy assessment tasks then I believe this good feeling will continue." *Principal old First Steps, PSP school*

- "Excited and involved." *(Principal old First Steps, non PSP school)*

A number of teachers reported that First Steps was better received in the lower grades than in the higher grades of the school. It is worth noting that two Principals see the continued positive feeling towards First Steps being maintained in their schools only for as long as provision is made for assistance (either through the Focus and 'Key' teachers or through the provision of extra time). As will be seen, one of the most frequent criticisms made by respondents was the additional work load that First Steps is perceived as imposing on classroom teachers.

<u>The general feeling of classroom teachers towards First Steps is mixed.</u>

The ideas, materials and strategies that First Steps provides are all generally well received by classroom teachers. The problems that lead to a negative response to the program are more varied. The most commonly reported problem that caused reactions to be mixed was the heavy work load that First Steps was perceived as imposing. This work load is often associated with the use of the continua and with the inservicing provided by First Steps. Again, typical responses are reported.

Problems with the continua:

- "Very positive (towards First Steps), but the time taken to place children on the continua is a concern." *(Principal new First Steps, non PSP school)*

- "The staff recognise the value of the program ...(but) at the moment the work load is too much and staff get a negative attitude towards the continua as they are time consuming and have limited use while we are still using other reporting systems."
(Year 5, old First Steps, PSP school teacher)

- "...continua placement requires an excessive amount of time ... (but) there are some very effective and worthwhile strategies." *(Focus Teacher, old First Steps, PSP school)*

- "Generally we find all the strategies very good - as for the continua, many of our staff dislike them as we feel we have taken too much on too soon." *(Year 1, old First Steps, non PSP school teacher)*

- "All the staff love the materials, modules etc but about half the staff resent keeping continua records. They ... claim it is too time consuming." *(Focus Teacher, old First Steps, non PSP school)*

Problems with inservicing:

- "People feel quite positive about the ideas and philosophies ... but also feel a bit bogged down after all the inservicing." *(Year 5, new First Steps, PSP school teacher)*

- "The staff feels that it is a good system but that the knowledge has been passed on to us much too quickly." *(Year 5, new First Steps, PSP school teacher)*

- "Teachers are overwhelmed over the amount of material presented to them. ... We have been shown some wonderful assessment techniques and new teaching strategies ..." *(Focus Teacher, new First Steps, PSP school)*

Problems with teacher overload in general:

- "Very positive. Some concern has been expressed about teacher overload." *(Principal new First Steps, non PSP school)*

- "Staff are very enthusiastic but pressured at times." *(Principal new First Steps, non PSP school)*

- There is a lot of concern about TIME especially in the middle and upper grades. However, the general feeling is positive." *(Year 1, old First Steps, PSP school teacher)*

- "In general the staff sees First Steps as very time consuming. It has great ideas but the main problem is having the time to implement (them) ..." *(Year 5, old First Steps, PSP school teacher)*

- "Some are very happy with the approach. Others feel we have tried to do too much too soon." *(Year 1, old First Steps, non PSP school teacher)*

So, the ideas and strategies are well received by teachers but the time taken to obtain these ideas, implement them and then record the results is seen by many teachers to be excessive.

<u>The general feeling of classroom teachers towards First Steps is negative.</u>

There were a number of responses which did not mention any positive feelings by classroom teachers towards First Steps. These show, again, that the work load that First Steps brings in its wake is of major concern to some teachers in schools.

- "Hard to tell, we have just begun but staff can see that they have committed themselves to a fairly onerous time-consuming course of action - a few may be regretting their commitment." *(Focus Teacher, new First Steps, PSP school)*

- "A program much less flamboyant and direct (far less documentation) could have been initiated .." *(Year 5, old First Steps, PSP school teacher)*

- "The plotting of students is demanding at this stage." *(Principal old First Steps, PSP school)*

- "Not sure of the validity of (the) continua as a recording procedure. Overloaded with having to take on all the continua." *(Year 5, old First Steps, non PSP school teacher)*

- "There is quite a strong negative feeling towards First Steps because, mainly, of the stress placed on teachers using the recording continuum. It is also felt that the decision to implement should come after inservicing, not as a prerequisite." *(Year 5, old First Steps, non PSP school teacher)*

- "First Steps needs to have a more efficient recording system. At the moment the continua file is cumbersome. It needs to be reduced in size so that information is more accessible." *(Year 5, old First Steps, non PSP school teacher)*

- "Teachers are unwilling to put any time into using continua as the English outcome statements seem to be superseding the continua. The outcome statements ... seem more logically organised." *(Focus Teacher, old First Steps, non PSP school)*

In summary, these data suggest that the contents of First Steps - the ideas, strategies and materials - have been very well received by classroom teachers. In contrast, the additional work load that is associated with, firstly the inservicing and then in the use of the continua causes teachers to feel less positive about First Steps. There were no significant differences in the feelings of teachers about First Steps in either new and old First Steps schools or PSP and non PSP schools.

While the concern with the amount of information that goes with the Professional development provided by First Steps is understandable, it is less clear why the use of continua should be seen to be so time consuming if schools are implementing First Steps in the recommended ways. First Steps recommends that the use of a continuum should only be gradually undertaken. The Introductory Module, for example, suggests the following approach be used:

> "...try and place your children at risk on a Continuum by first looking only at the key indicators. When you are comfortable with that, then extend your observations to include the other indicators. Don't attempt to observe all your children at once, rather, focus on three or four a week. You may only need to use all the indicators with the children about whom you have concern. The key indicators may tell you all you need about the others. Don't try to do too much at once."

If teachers are following this approach, it is difficult to see how the use of the developmental continua can be as onerous as is sometimes reported. It is possibly the case that teachers feel pressured to place all children on a continuum or continua using more than the key indicators as a result of other pressures in or upon schools. As the data collected for the evaluation do not assist in understanding these processes in schools this possibility cannot be explored here.

How helpful has the school Focus Teacher been to teachers and Principals?

One of the features of the First Steps program is the attempt that it makes to ensure that support for teachers is on-going. One way of doing this was through the creation of the role of 'Focus Teacher' in each school. The role of a school Focus Teacher is seen as:

- supporting teachers and schools with the implementation of First Steps
- enhancing teachers' knowledge of children's literacy development
- assisting to incorporate First Steps materials and strategies into whole school plans
- supporting schools to work with parents and the community

To achieve these objectives the Focus Teacher in the school is allowed time to undertake the additional duties that go with the role. The Focus Teacher also receives additional professional development and support from the District Office.

Focus Teachers have an important role in the implementation and the maintenance of First Steps in schools. For this reason they are examined here.

Two new First Steps non PSP schools, reported having no First Steps Focus Teacher. One old First Steps non PSP school had no Focus Teacher. All other First Steps schools in the sample had a Focus Teacher.

Teachers were asked whether the Focus Teacher in their school was important in helping them to introduce new strategies into their teaching practice. Of those teachers reporting having a Focus Teacher in the school, about 54% find the Focus Teacher helpful in introducing them to new strategies in their teaching practice. Exhibit 9 shows these data.

An analysis of the data in Exhibit 9 showed that there is no significant difference between the observed frequencies in each cell of the table and the expected frequencies (based on proportions defined by the marginal totals). Thus the probability that a Focus Teacher was seen to be helpful or not helpful in introducing new teaching practices is probably not effected by the period of involvement with First Steps or the PSP status of the school.

The data were explored further to investigate the relationship between the experience of the teachers and how helpful they find the Focus Teacher. Although these findings cannot be generalised , it is indicative that of the 8 teachers who had been teaching five or fewer years, 6 (or 75%) found the Focus Teacher helpful in introducing new strategies, while of those 18 teachers who had been teaching for more than 5 years, only 8 (or 44%) found the school Focus

Teacher helpful. This suggests that where a teacher is already well experienced a Focus Teacher may be seen as having less to offer than when a teacher is new. It may also be that new teachers are more receptive to the program.

Exhibit 8: Number and percentage of Year 1 and Year 5 teachers reporting whether they found the Focus Teacher helpful in introducing them to new teaching practices by period of involvement with First Steps and PSP status.

School Type	Yes	No	Total
New First Steps non PSP	1	3	4
New First Steps PSP	3	3	6
Old First Steps non PSP	4	4	8
Old First Steps PSP	6	2	8
Total	14 (54%)	12(46%)	26(100%)

($\chi^2 = 2.863$ with 3 df is not significant.)
(Teachers who are the school Focus Teacher or who come from a school with no Focus Teacher are excluded from this table and related analyses.)

Principals were also asked how helpful the Focus Teacher had been to the school. Of the 12 Principals who responded to this question, 8 reported that the Focus Teacher was very helpful and 4 reported that the Focus Teacher was helpful.

Teachers were asked to explain how they had been helped by the Focus Teacher or, if they had not found the Focus Teacher helpful, what ought to be done so that the Focus Teacher was more helpful. Principals were also asked to identify the reasons for the success or failure of the Focus Teacher in their school. Their answers are now examined more closely.

Generally, Focus Teachers were seen by the Year 1 and Year 5 classroom teachers who responded to this question as helpful because of the materials, ideas and new strategies which they introduced or because of the assistance that they provided in using the continua. Where Focus Teachers were reported as not helpful it was usually because they were seen to be inexperienced teachers compared with the respondent. There was also some evidence of personality conflicts affecting perceptions of how helpful a Focus Teacher was. In some new First Steps schools teachers reported that the Focus Teacher was not helpful because this role had only just been established. Teachers were, instead, working with Collaborative teachers. A small sample of responses is quoted to provide a sense of how teachers see Focus Teachers as helpful and what they see as some of the problems.

Some of the activities which teachers saw as helpful were described as follows:

- "She provides time to assist us in any way necessary to deal with anything we may need in relation to First Steps. (eg suggesting strategies for children in 'at risk' stage.)" *(Year 1, old First Steps, PSP school teacher)*

- "Alerting me to new ideas, demonstrating strategies and assisting with the development of resources." *(Year 5, old First Steps, PSP school teacher)*

- "The Focus Teacher is a good intermediary between teachers and the regional office. She also has had the time to better come to terms with the content of the course." *(Year 5, new First Steps, PSP school teacher)*

It was the Principals who gave a clearer sense of the scope of the activities undertaken by the Focus Teachers in schools. One Principal provided an internal school report on the activities of the Focus Teacher for the first two terms of 1992. A portion of this report is quoted:

- "(The Focus Teacher ...)
  1. Organised and modelled particular strategies.
  2. Formatted individual recording sheets and class recording sheets for spelling, writing, reading and oral language continu(a).
  3. Provided review sessions for the staff at staff meetings and to individuals during personal interview sessions.
  4. Helped with the diagnosis of students' skills and understandings.
  5. Assisted teachers to place children on the continua.
  6. Helped with the induction of new teachers.
  7. Assisted in presenting workshops with DO staff.
  8. Organised teacher meetings blocks to share ideas, talk through problems etc.
  9. Helped set up and implement programs ie writing centres, ideas for charts, suitable resources etc.
  10. Provided resource materials to teachers throughout the year.
  11. Networked informally with N*** and J*** Focus Teachers
  12. Purchased school resources to support First Steps strategies.
  13. Liaised with Administration on a number of matters."
  (Principal old First Steps, non PSP school)

Clearly the Focus Teacher in this school has an important role, not just in the classroom but within the school as a whole and between the school and the District Office and between other schools in the area. Responses by other Principals confirm the wide scope of activities and responsibilities undertaken by the school Focus Teachers.

- "The Focus Teacher ensures the First Steps strategies are to the forefront in the classroom. The role ensures inservicing and follow up can occur." *(Principal old First Steps, PSP school)*

- "The Focus Teacher maintains good practice and in part can induct new staff along the lines of First Steps." *(Principal old First Steps, PSP school)*

- "The Focus Teacher keeps the teachers focussed on new strategies, provides/purchases the new resources required, researches new recording sheets and reports to staff, liases with the District First Steps Development officer, assists new teachers clarify the School Development Plan, is able to moderate placement on agenda." *(Principal old First Steps, PSP school)*

- "(The Focus Teacher) provides a clearer direction and support." *(Principal new First Steps, non PSP school)*

- "If the Focus Teacher didn't do most of it, I would. Therefore, assists in management of school and staff see it as more of an ownership." *(Principal, new First Steps, PSP school)*
- "(The) Focus Teacher in our school has a very comprehensive grasp of First Steps material. She is a great fund of information and is able to clarify problems." *(Principal old First Steps, non PSP school)*

There were some teachers who reported that they were not helped by the Focus Teacher. Most teachers who did not find the Focus Teacher helpful came from new First Steps schools where the role had not yet been fully established. Commonly these teachers, instead, were working with Collaborative teachers. A small selection of negative comments is provided.

- "Our Focus Teacher tends to take any disagreeance or dissatisfaction with any First Steps materials as a personal insult. I tend to find her more threatening than helpful." *(Year 5 old First Steps, non PSP, school teacher)*
- "..most of us have more experience than our Focus Teacher." *(Year 5, new First Steps, non PSP school teacher)*

In summary, the data collected from Year 1 and Year 5 classroom teachers and from school Principals suggest that Focus Teachers are helpful in schools in the classroom, with other activities in the school and in liaising between the school and outside groups.

How helpful have Collaborative teachers been to teachers and schools?

Collaborative teachers are another innovation by the First Steps project to facilitate the adoption and understanding of First Steps ideas, strategies and materials. Collaborative teachers work, as their title suggests, collaboratively with teachers in their classroom modelling First Steps methods. Collaborative teachers also replace classroom teachers when they participate in professional development. They may also conduct action research and provide support to First Steps within schools. An important part of the Collaborative teachers' role is to assist teachers in using the developmental continua.

Typically, they are associated with a school for one term and then rotate to another school for the next term returning to the school for one more term to further assist teachers. They enter schools as part of the process of introducing First Steps into the school.

Frequency and type of association with Collaborative teachers

Teachers were asked whether they had worked with a Collaborative teacher in a classroom, whether a Collaborative teacher had worked in their classroom while they were away at an in-

service or whether they had had no contact with a Collaborative teacher. Exhibit 9 shows the how teachers responded to this question.

Exhibit 9: Number and percentage of Year 1 and Year 5 teachers with different types of exposure to Collaborative teachers by school type

School Type	In Class	While at Inservice	Both	No Collab.	Total
New FS non PSP	3	4	1	2	10
New FS PSP	7	0	1	0	8
Old FS non PSP	3	6	0	5	14
Old FS PSP	2	3	1	7	13
Total	15(33%)	13(29%)	3(7%)	14(31%)	45(100%)

[Likelihood ratio, $\chi^2 = 23.95$ with 9 df, is significant ($P < 0.01$)]

Exhibit 9 shows that 69% of teachers have had some kind of formal contact with a Collaborative teacher. The interesting feature of Exhibit 9 is the relatively high proportion of teachers from old First Steps schools who have not worked with a Collaborative teacher at any time, and the correspondingly low proportion who have worked with a Collaborative teacher in a classroom. Only 22% of teachers in old First Steps schools reported having worked with a Collaborative teacher in a classroom. (This 22% is made up of the 3 teachers from non PSP schools, 2 teachers from PSP schools and the 1 teacher from a PSP school reporting having both worked with a Collaborative teacher in class and having a Collaborative teacher while away at inservice.)

An analysis of the contents of Exhibit 9 showed that there is a statistically significant difference between the observed and expected counts in the cells. Further analysis showed that these differences can largely be accounted for by the period of involvement with First Steps. This difference possibly reflects the longer time available, since the introduction of First Steps in old First Steps schools, for staff to leave and to be replaced by new staff without exposure to Collaborative teachers. (Note that the small numbers in the cells in Exhibit 9 suggest that this finding should be treated cautiously.)

Collaborative teachers usually work with teachers in the classroom. This means that the work of a Collaborative teacher can be fraught with difficulty as different approaches, attitudes and personalties come together in the highly complex social setting of a classroom. As well, it is a commonly held view by many senior First Steps personnel that one of the keys to the success of First Steps lays with Collaborative teachers. Collaborative teachers must be able to communicate the ideas and strategies of First Steps. They must also be able to then translate these ideas and strategies into practices so that classroom teachers will understand and accept them. And this must be done without jeopardising the education of the children in these classes. For these reasons, an understanding of the impact of Collaborative teachers is crucial for an understanding of the impact of First Steps.

Teachers were asked to comment on how helpful the last Collaborative teacher with whom they had worked had been. A little over 80% (24 of 29 teachers) reported that they found their last Collaborative teacher to be either 'very helpful' or 'helpful'.

Exhibit 10: Number and percentage of Year 1 and Year 5 teachers who had worked with a Collaborative teacher reporting whether they found the last Collaborative teacher generally helpful by level of involvement with First Steps and PSP status.

School Type	Very Helpful	Helpful	Neither	Unhelpful	Very Unhelpful	Total
New First Steps non PSP	4	1	1	0	1	7
New First Steps PSP	5	2	1	0	0	8
Old First Steps non PSP	3	4	1	0	0	8
Old First Steps PSP	2	3	1	0	0	6
Total	14 (48%)	10 (34%)	4 (14%)	0	1 (3%)	29 (100%)

($\chi^2 = 6.133$ with 9 df, is not significant)

An analysis of the data displayed in Exhibit 10 showed that there was no significant difference between the expected and observed frequencies in the cells. In other words, how teachers, respond to Collaborative teachers is not affected by the PSP status or the period of involvement with First Steps of the school in which they teach.

Of the 15 Principals who responded, 13 reported that the Collaborative teachers had been either 'very helpful' or 'helpful'. Two Principals reported that the Collaborative teachers had been 'neither helpful nor unhelpful'. The 10 Focus Teachers who responded to this question reported that the Collaborative teachers had been either 'very helpful' or 'helpful'.

As has already been seen (Exhibit 10), Collaborative teachers are regarded very favourably in schools. So what is it that these Collaborative teachers are doing which has led to this positive response? Typically, the modelling of lessons, instruction and interpretation of the developmental continua and the role that they play at a whole school level seem to be the main activities which attract comment. A sample of responses by classroom teachers, Focus Teachers and Principals shows this.

On modelling or demonstration classes, some of the following comments were made:

- "Extremely helpful, they can provide demo(nstration) lessons, offer suggestions and advise. If you are unsure about something you can ask them to help you. It encourages you to try out the First Steps ideas rather than forget about them until the next inservice course." *(Year 1, new First Steps, PSP school teacher)*
- "Provided demonstration lessons at the teachers' request. This helped change the theory into practice." *(Principal old First Steps, non PSP school)*
- "I was able to see the strategies being used and how they were supposed to turn out. I was also able to confirm that my teaching methods were on the right track." *(Year 5, old First Steps, PSP school teacher)*
- "Demonstration lessons are the best as you can see exactly how things will work." *(Year 5, old First Steps, PSP school teacher)*
- "Good to see theories/ideas put into use." *(Year 5, new First Steps, non PSP school teacher)*
- "Collaborative teachers provided excellent models for classroom practice." *(Principal old First Steps, PSP school)*
- The children were primed with some of the strategies so when I came back from the sessions the children were familiar with the new way I was working. I began the strategies immediately on my return from the inservices so as to capitalise on what the CT (Collaborative Teacher) had been doing. She also left worksheets, ideas, lesson notes etc. that were very valuable." *(Year 1, new First Steps, non PSP school teacher)*

On the developmental continua some comments were:

- "Its been great. He has demonstrated new strategies, helped me plot children on the continua and helped me implement new strategies." *(Year 5, new First Steps, PSP school teacher)*
- "Clarified terms on continua that seemed vague or I did not understand." *(Year 5, new First Steps, PSP school teacher)*
- " - available to help put children on continua then and there.
  -available to give practical advice." *(Focus Teacher, old First Steps, non PSP school)*

Some whole school effects that respondents described were as follows:

- "When Collaborative teachers are in our school we try to take advantage of their expertise eg teachers request dem(onstration) lessons or other support and we invite others to share." *(Principal old First Steps, non PSP school)*

- "1. Enabled whole school participation in the First Steps inservice. With relief teachers in K-7 were able to participate, hence it became a whole school Focus.
- 2. Provided support for class teachers when they returned from inservicing to experiment and implement strategies and ideas. This was immediate - while it was fresh in the teachers mind." *(Principal, old First Steps, non PSP school)*

- "The Collaborative teachers have been an excellent resource for advising teachers and the Principal on how to implement First Steps in the class and school." *(Principal, new First Steps, PSP school)*

There were some less enthusiastic responses.

- "My Collaborative was disappointing and very little help. I felt I was more in touch and informed about the material. How these people get employed needs to be assessed. A Collaborative should be a good classroom teacher first - mine was appalling." *(Year 1, new First Steps, non PSP school teacher)*

In summary, Collaborative teachers are seen by most classroom teachers and Principals to be either 'very helpful' or 'helpful'. In particular modelling of classes, explaining the continua and providing other practical advice and materials within the classroom as well as assisting with the school wide adoption of First Steps were seen as important contributions to the introduction of First Steps into a school.

First Steps personnel stressed the importance of the Collaborative teachers during the planning phase of the evaluation. Because of this importance, it was decided to explore their impact in greater depth. This was done by asking respondents to describe any problems associated with Collaborative teachers going into classrooms and schools. (It was also thought that this information could be of value to Collaborative teachers.) Teachers, Focus Teachers and Principals were asked to describe the main problems in having a First Step Collaborative teacher in the classroom. Before examining the responses made to this question, it is important to stress that these problems need to be seen in the light of the previous data which showed that most teachers and Principals regarded Collaborative teachers very positively. In fact, many teachers made comments like "No major problems ..." and "No main problems come to mind." Indeed some teachers and Principals complained that the main problem with the Collaborative teachers was that they were not in the school long enough or that there were too few of them. For example, one teacher wrote

- "I felt that I didn't receive my share of time with the Collaborative teacher, despite timetabling that was very fair. There was always some interruption - minor or major to the arranged timetabling." *(Year 1, old First Steps, PSP school teacher)*

The problems that were identified with having a Collaborative teacher in the classroom were of six types. These were; (1) not enough time spent in the classroom with the classroom teacher, (2) teacher stress, (3) student stress, (4) increased workload for the classroom teacher, (5) mistakes made in the classroom by a Collaborative teacher and (6) personality clashes. The most common complaint made was that classroom teachers did not get a chance to spend enough time with the Collaborative teachers in the classroom. Teachers of country schools seemed particularly disadvantaged in their access to Collaborative teachers. It should also be noted that of the 46 respondents to this question, 11 (just under 25%) reported that there were no problems with Collaborative teachers.

Classroom teachers, Focus Teachers and Principals all reported these types of problems. There was little difference between old and new First Steps schools although new First Steps schools were slightly more likely to report that teacher stress was a problem. There was little difference between PSP and non PSP schools. Each of the main types of problems is now described. A sample of responses from teachers, Focus Teachers and Principals provides some sense of how these problems are experienced in schools.

There were ten comments about the need for extra time for classroom teachers to work with Collaborative teachers. Some of these comments were as follows:

- "The amount of time in each class was not enough." *(Principal, new First Steps, PSP school)*
- "The Collaborative teachers were used last year but only while the teachers were away at an inservice. I feel it would have been more beneficial for teachers to have had an opportunity to work with Collaborative teachers ..." *(Focus Teacher, old First Steps, PSP school)*
- "No time to view her teaching. I would have liked to see her teaching my class using First Steps strategies." *(Year 1, old First Steps, non PSP school teacher)*
- "None, except I'd like to have had more time to discuss, observe lessons, have my teaching observed." *(Year 5, old First Steps, non PSP school teacher)*

Teacher stress was mentioned seven times. The following is a typical response.

- "initial pressure just from the mere fact that another teacher was watching you and you were under pressure to 'perform'." *(Year 5, new First Steps, PSP school teacher)*

The children being unsettled by the presence of the Collaborative teacher was mentioned seven times. In one case parents were also seen as being unsettled.

- "No major problems, sometimes the children become unsettled with the change and the teacher-teacher talk that goes on means that you are not always giving them your undivided attention and they can become disruptive." *(Year 1, new First Steps, PSP school teacher)*

- "The 'there one week', 'gone the next' is very unsettling for these children." *(Principal, new First Steps, PSP school)*

- "The children resented the new teacher and there were discipline problems. Also parents complained because we were out of the school so much." *(Year 1, old First Steps, PSP school teacher)*

The increased work load that fell upon classroom teachers was mentioned five times. The following quote typifies these responses.

- "In the country (Collaborative teachers are) no use really as we don't see them and we have to leave all the lessons - prepared one month ahead anyway." *(Year 1, new First Steps, non PSP school teacher)*

Some Collaborative teachers were seen as having inadequate teaching skills for the particular class they were in. This was reported four times. As the following quotes suggest, this usually had to do with the way in which a class was organised or with children with whom the teacher was unfamiliar.

- "(A problem was the Collaborative teacher's) inexperience with teaching a multigrade class .." *(Principal new First Steps, non PSP school)*

- "Some (Collaborative) teachers had difficulties in dealing (with) the emotionally disturbed children and Aboriginal children." *(Principal old First Steps, PSP school)*

A few personality clashes were reported.

- "Personality clashes were a problem - one of the Collaborative teachers was perceived as being 'bossy'." *(Focus Teacher, old First Steps, non PSP school)*

To keep these problems in perspective, two responses are quoted which show that the problems were not always caused by the Collaborative teachers and that sometimes, the problems were ones which Collaborative teachers might find flattering. First, that the problems were not always caused by the Collaborative teachers.

- "One staff member had not been receptive to First Steps and experiences problems with classroom management. This had created difficulties for the coll(aborative) teachers." *(Principal, new First Steps, PSP school)*

And finally, the somewhat flattering problem faced by one teacher who said that her problem with the Collaborative teacher was:

- "Knowing exactly how to use the Collaborative teacher to the best advantage." *(Year 1, new First Steps, PSP school teacher)*

Generally, the major problems associated with the Collaborative teachers had to do with gaining proper access to them. In particular, despite the claims made that teachers were

stressed by having a Collaborative work in their classroom, many teachers reported that they need more exposure to this. Student stress is also a problem which needs to be taken into account. This may need to be examined more closely because it seems, from these data, that the children most upset are those very 'at risk' students that First Steps is aiming to assist.

How helpful is the professional development provided by First Steps?

Another important feature of the First Steps project is the extensive Professional Development offered by the program. This aspect of First Steps is now examined.

All teachers from all First Steps schools in the sample reported having attended Professional Development provided by First Steps. Of these, 84% reported that they found this to be either 'very helpful' or 'helpful'. No teachers found it 'unhelpful'. (See Exhibit 11.) There is no significant difference between the observed and expected values in the cells of Exhibit 11, which suggests that irrespective of the period of involvement with First Steps or the PSP status of school where they teach, most teachers will find the Professional Development offered by First Steps to be 'very helpful' or 'helpful'.

Exhibit 11: Number and percentage of Year 1 and Year 5 teachers reporting whether they found First Steps professional development generally helpful by period of involvement with First Steps and PSP status.

School Type	Very Helpful	Helpful	Neither	Unhelpful	Very Unhelpful	Total
New First Steps non PSP	4	5	1	0	0	10
New First Steps PSP	5	2	1	0	0	8
Old First Steps non PSP	6	6	1	0	0	13
Old First Steps PSP	6	3	4	0	0	13
Total	21 (48%)	16 (36%)	7 (16%)	0	0	44 (100%)

($\chi^2 = 4.908$ with 6 df, is not significant)

Principals responded very positively to the Professional Development provided by First Steps. Of the 15 Principals who answered the question about how helpful they had found First Steps Professional Development, 10 said it was 'very helpful' and 5 that it was 'helpful'. The Focus

Teachers responding to this question were also very positive about the Professional Development provided by First Steps. Five found it 'very helpful' and 5 found it 'helpful'.

A closer examination of the reasons for these responses - by teachers, Focus Teachers and Principals - showed that the ideas, materials and strategies that First Steps brought together were the most frequently commented upon. About 35% of all comments made were about how useful and practical the materials and strategies that First Steps proposed were. A further 30% of comments were about how useful, practical or generally worthwhile were the ideas that First Steps was advancing. Other frequently made comments included the positive effect on teachers (about 15% of comments) and the value of the continua (about 10% of comments).

There were only a few differences between schools based on either their period of involvement with First Steps or their PSP status. Of the 9 comments made about how the Professional Development had improved teachers' understandings of child development, 8 came from old First Steps schools. There were also 9 comments made about how the Professional Development had improved the morale, confidence or enthusiasm of teachers. Eight of these comments came PSP schools.

A sample of the many positive comments made about the materials and strategies that came with First Steps Professional Development follows. One of the recurring themes to emerge from these comments is the importance that teachers attached to the ease with which these materials could be used in a classroom.

- "It has given us an abundance of teaching materials and strategies with methods of effective implementation."*(Principal, new First Steps, PSP school)*
- "It (the Professional Development) was excellently presented, in a clear way that was easily understood. It provided excellent strategies to be used in the classroom." *(Year 5, new First Steps, PSP school teacher)*
- "Provided a means by which children could be assessed while providing the next step to take." *(Year 5, new First Steps, PSP school teacher)*
- "Reminded me of strategies that had been successful in the past." *(Year 5, new First Steps, non PSP school teacher)*
- "Clarified activities/strategies for myself by actually participating in the activities/strategies in a practical way. *(Year 5, old First Steps, PSP school teacher)*

While the distinction drawn here between 'materials' and 'strategies and ideas' is somewhat arbitrary, it is helpful because it emphasises that an important part of the Professional Development involves communicating an understanding of the developmental processes that children go through as they acquire literacy skills. The following comments from teachers and

principles show how important this is. It is interesting, also, to observe that teachers see these ideas as having been communicated in a straightforward way.

- "Gave a good understanding of how children develop."
  (Year 5, new First Steps, PSP school teacher)
- "It brought all the language pieces together." *(Principal, new First Steps, PSP school)*
- "I found the Professional Development opened a whole new approach to how I learn language. It was practical and gave me a better understanding."
  (Year 1, old First Steps, PSP school teacher)
- "Helped to shape my overall attitude and perceptions of the best way for students to learn.
  (Year 5, old First Steps, PSP school teacher)
- "General philosophical understandings followed by practical help was easily transferred into the classroom." *(Principal old First Steps, non PSP school)*
- "Very good - straight forward, commonsense ideas presented."
  (Year 1, old First Steps, non PSP school teacher)
- "It helped me understand that children are all going through a process of developmental stages - all of which are sequential." *(Year 5, old First Steps, non PSP school teacher)*

One of the positive effects of the Professional Development was that it allowed teachers to share ideas and to meet other teachers facing problems which they confronted in the classroom. This seemed to be particularly important for teachers from country areas. A couple of comments give the flavour here.

- "Sharing ideas with peers was great." *(Year 1, new First Steps, PSP school teacher)*
- "... provided professional fellowship for staff."
  (Focus Teacher, new First Steps, PSP school)
- "Content and presentation of Professional Development and interaction with colleagues has revitalised most staff."*(Principal, new First Steps, PSP school)*

As well, the Professional Development helped to confirm for teachers that much of what they were already doing was consistent with good teaching practice. As one Principal wrote:

- "It reinforces to teachers that the things they were doing were OK"
  (Principal, new First Steps, PSP school)

and two teachers wrote:

- "Positive reinforcement about what I was already doing." *(Year 1, new First Steps, PSP school teacher)*
- "It gave me reassurance about my beliefs of teaching - MODEL - PRACTICE - REMODEL - PRACTICE - EVALUATE." *(Year 5, old First Steps, non PSP school teacher)*

Skills were also improved by First Steps Professional Development. Teachers felt this and Focus Teachers and Principals reported it. Two comments suffice to show this.

- "Staff knowledge and skills have been dramatically and demonstrably improved." *(Principal, new First Steps, PSP school)*

- "... gave me insight into how the students feel when confronted by problems, situations, made me more sensitive/aware." *(Year 5, old First Steps, PSP school teacher)*

The Professional Development from First Steps was also seen as leading to an improvement in the morale and confidence of teachers. Two teachers wrote, as follows:

- "It made me feel very confident about going back into my classroom and trialing different strategies." *(Year 1, old First Steps, PSP school teacher)*

- "It highlighted many useful and successful teaching strategies. For myself, it was a rekindling of enthusiasm and ideas." *(Year 5, old First Steps, PSP school teacher)*

The Professional Development was also seen as leading to important outcomes for the whole school. Some comments show how.

- "It gave our school a Focus for our accountability." *(Principal, new First Steps, PSP school)*

- "On a school level it has been helpful to have teachers using the same continua, indicators and 'lingo' to be able to describe where each child is at and thus to obtain an accurate whole school profile/ (First Steps) has been beneficial in helping to determine priority areas for the future school development plan." *(Focus Teacher, old First Steps, PSP school)*

- "It provided a very broad highly professional framework for teacher development which had a dramatic impact upon school policy and practice. The big plus has been (the) emphasis upon good practice whether it be old or new. This emphasis has helped counter balance the fad and fashion problem of many new graduates." *(Principal, old First Steps PSP)*

Finally, teachers and Principals referred to the important role that the Professional Development played in introducing them to the developmental continua, leading to an understanding of the ideas imbedded in them and the best ways of using them. One Principal sums up most of the responses made about the continua with the following succinct response:

- "Provided great insight into continuum use." *(Principal, new First Steps non PSP)*

Generally, the Professional Development provided by First Steps is seen by nearly all teachers, Focus Teachers and Principals to be helpful. The materials provided and the ideas that underpin these materials were seen as particularly important. Teacher morale and performance in classrooms was seen to improve after Professional Development. There was also seen to be an improvement in whole school planning as a result of the Professional Development.

Teachers and Principals were also asked to describe the main problems that were associated with the Professional Development given by First Steps. There was one very clear response to this question - the lack of time for staff to assimilate the materials and ideas. This was the

complaint from teachers, Focus Teachers and Principals irrespective of the PSP status of the school or the period of involvement of the school with First Steps. Of the 80 different comments made about the problems with Professional Development, 30% of them referred to this problem. Another 15% of comments focussed upon the intensity of the Professional Development. A number of these responses noted that it would be better if the Professional Development was spread over a longer time so that teachers could better assimilate the ideas. A further 15% of comments referred to problems caused in the schools while the teachers were at the Professional Development. Such things were mentioned as the children being disturbed by the absence of their usual teacher. About 5% of comments implied that the respondent was bored by the Professional Development. Only 5% of respondents asserted that there were no problems with the Professional Development.

The pressure upon the teachers during the Professional Development provided by First Steps was evident from both their responses and the responses of the Focus Teachers and the Principals. A large sample of responses is provided to show how acute this pressure was for many teachers.

- "I found the inservice overwhelming - it seemed that huge amounts of paper were being given to us to read and used in the classroom in a very short period of time.."
  (Year 1, old First Steps, non PSP school teacher)
- "It was 'too much too quick!' Not enough time to digest it all and I felt overloaded!! I didn't know where to begin and then people had interpreted things differently."
  (Year 1, old First Steps, non PSP school teacher)
- "Too much too soon. An overload of ideas."
  (Year 5, old First Steps, non PSP school teacher)
- ".. it was somewhat overwhelming since I hadn't done it before."
  (Year 5, old First Steps, non PSP school teacher)
- "We often felt 'overload' by the end of the day."
  (Year 5, new First Steps, non PSP school teacher)
- "Information overload." *(Principal, new First Steps, PSP school)*
- "We found the amount of material presented to us overwhelming."
  (Focus Teacher, new First Steps, PSP school)
- "I feel that there was too much information at once .."
  (Year 1, new First Steps, non PSP school teacher)
- "Too much - too fast." *(Year 1, new First Steps, PSP school teacher)*
- "Too much too quickly," *(Year 1, new First Steps, PSP school teacher)*
- "I would have liked more time for discussion and to absorb all they were saying, but no other problems from my point of view." *(Year 1, new First Steps, PSP school teacher)*
- "Too much too quickly." *(Year 5, new First Steps, PSP school teacher)*
- "Information overload - is there time to do all this?"
  (Year 5, new First Steps, PSP school teacher)

- "A lot of information was presented in a short amount of time without providing us with any extra time to read, digest and reflect." *(Focus Teacher, new First Steps, PSP school)*
- "Sometimes 3 days is just too much!" *(Principal, new First Steps, PSP school)*
- "... not enough time for mulling through ideas." *(Principal, new First Steps, PSP school)*
- "Information overload!" *(Principal, new First Steps, PSP school)*
- "Too much written information." *(Year 1, old First Steps, PSP school teacher)*
- "The whole day inservice was too long. I often found I really wasn't paying attention - overload of information." *(Year 1, old First Steps, PSP school teacher)*
- "I felt the course was rather intense and one was expected to absorb quite a lot of material in a short time." *(Year 1, old First Steps, PSP school teacher)*
- "So much material in a couple of days." *(Year 5, old First Steps, PSP school teacher)*
- "An overload of information - too much too quickly ..." *(Year 5, old First Steps, PSP school teacher)*
- "A lot of information squeezed into a short period of time .." *(Year 5, old First Steps, PSP school teacher)*
- "... too much information in too little time ..." *(Focus Teacher, old First Steps, PSP school)*
- "A huge amount of information was difficult to put into practice all at once .." *(Focus Teacher, old First Steps, PSP school)*
- " .. in some cases a lot of information to take in in a short period of time." *(Focus Teacher, old First Steps, PSP school)*
- "Too much too close together ..." *(Focus Teacher, old First Steps, PSP school)*
- "Too intensive - little time for refection/discussion." *(Year 5, old First Steps, non PSP school teacher)*
- "Time factor to implement First Steps is daunting ...All in all, it is a lot to take on board!" *(Year 5, new First Steps, non PSP school teacher)*
- "Ten days First Steps Professional Development in one year was "information overload". *(Focus Teacher, new First Steps, PSP school)*

Two teachers responded to these problems by suggesting that the Professional Development be spread over a longer period of time. Their responses show that they find the material valuable. but they need more time to assimilate it.

- "In order to take in the excellent material being presented to us we would like to suggest spreading the content over two years." *(Focus Teacher, new First Steps, PSP school)*
- "A better approach would be to introduce one continuum per term ..." *(Year 1, new First Steps, PSP school teacher)*

Another problem that concerned some respondents was the difficulties that their long absences from their class was causing.

- "Too much time taken out of classes." *(Principal, new First Steps, PSP school)*

- "Large amounts of time out of school." *(Principal, new First Steps, PSP school)*
- "Too many staff out of the school at the one time - relief staff had huge behaviour problems." *(Focus Teacher, new First Steps, PSP school)*

Again it is important to stress that these problems need to be seen in the context of the very positive comments teachers, Focus Teachers and Principals made about First Steps Professional Development. They value the material. Most feel that they need more time to assimilate, evaluate and, then, "mull over" it.

What do teachers and Principals think are the achievements of First Steps in schools?

Teachers, Focus Teachers and Principals were asked to describe what was achieved and what was not achieved by First Steps in their school. Based on the numbers of responses and the detail in these responses, more was achieved in schools than was not achieved. There were many reports of teachers having an improved understanding of how children develop and how they can best be taught (25% of comments). Respondents also reported the use of new and effective strategies and ideas (20% of comments), more enthusiasm by the staff (10% of comments), improved outcomes for children (10% of comments) and an improved whole school approach to literacy and/or assessment (15% of comments). There were only a small number of negative comments about the achievements of First Steps,

The achievements of First Steps were, generally, seen to be the same in old and new First Steps schools and in PSP and non PSP schools. There were, however, some small differences worth noting. Of the 11 comments made about improved morale and increased enthusiasm of the teachers, 7 came from non PSP schools. It is not clear why this should be so. Of the 17 comments about the achievements of First Steps at a school wide level, 11 came from old First Steps schools. All comments about how First Steps had achieved improvements in children's literacy or attitudes came from old First Steps schools. Nearly all negative comments about the achievements of First Steps also came from old First Steps schools. These last differences can probably be understood simply as a function of the amount of time that First Steps has had to achieve effects (both good and bad) in these old First Steps schools.

A selection of responses gives a feeling for the kinds of achievements that First Steps is reported as making in schools.

Perhaps one of the more impressive achievements is reflected in the number of comments about teachers gaining a deeper or better understanding of child development and of educational programs based on this understanding. Some responses illustrate this increased understanding and the associated benefits.

- "(I am) more aware of teaching the meaning of language." *(Year 1, new First Steps, non PSP school teacher)*
- "Teachers are more able to identify groups of children at the same stage of development and plan specific activities to help those children move along the continuum." *(Focus Teacher, old First Steps, PSP school)*
- "I have gained a better understanding of how to help children with their literacy development." *(Year 1, new First Steps, PSP school teacher)*
- "I know a lot more about the teaching of language than I did at the beginning of the year." *(Focus Teacher, new First Steps, PSP school)*
- "Very professional discussions about learning theory." *(Principal, new First Steps, PSP school)*
- "Staff are much more informed." *(Principal old First Steps, PSP school)*

The benefits of this improved understanding have lead to some very positive outcomes in the classroom. Some comments from teachers and Principals show how.

- "At this early stage I would say First Steps has provided a good diagnostic tool by which I can know exactly where each child is at, and starting points from which their further development could continue." *(Year 5, new First Steps, PSP school teacher)*
- "I have been able to identify areas of weakness in my class and therefore teach to them." *(Year 1, new First Steps, non PSP school teacher)*
- "The language area is now a much more exciting and practical subject to teach." *(Year 1, old First Steps, non PSP school teacher)*
- "A much higher standard of language taught at the school." *(Focus Teacher, old First Steps, PSP school)*
- "Greater Focus on teaching and less on 'filling in sheets' achieved." *(Principal old First Steps, PSP school)*
- "Greater Focus on teaching children to teach themselves (education rather than teaching) achieved." *(Principal old First Steps, PSP school)*
- "For some - probably most staff - a revitalisation of their teaching organisation and delivery." *(Year 1, new First Steps, PSP school teacher)*

With the improvement in strategies and ideas, so there seems to have been an improvement in morale and enthusiasm for teaching.

- "I have more faith in my own judgements and am less stressed about children who don't get everything right." *(Year 1, new First Steps, non PSP school teacher)*

- "I feel better about my teaching because the developmental stages have been pointed out to me. I worry, but I don't panic." *(Year 5, old First Steps, PSP school teacher)*
- "An injection of new ideas and enthusiasm into my classroom teaching." *(Year 1, new First Steps, PSP school teacher)*

This, in turn, seems to have produced some good outcomes for the students.

- "... children 'at risk' who normally never have a go at language written, oral etc. activities are willing to have a go and are completing work, developing confidence to participate." *(Year 5, old First Steps, PSP school teacher)*
- "Children's attitude has improved towards writing." *(Year 5, old First Steps, PSP school teacher)*
- "Fewer behaviour problems achieved." *(Principal new First Steps, non PSP school)*

A number of Principals and Focus Teachers referred to school wide achievements associated with First Steps. They usually referred to changes in school policy and reporting procedures that were based upon the developmental continua.

There were some negative assessments of the achievement of First Steps. These had to do mostly with increased workload and stress. One teacher described the achievements of First Steps in one word " STRESS!!!". Others were less vehement.

- "I had expected that once I began and got it going my work load might decease! Wrong. I feel better organised but my family are thinking of putting a name tag on me!" *(Year 1, new First Steps, non PSP school teacher)*

One Principal expressed concerns about the Focus of First Steps.

- "(There is a) concentration on writing forms to the detriment of creative writing." *(Principal old First Steps, PSP school)*

In summary, teachers, Focus Teachers and Principals see the achievements of First Steps in their school as improving the performance of students, and teachers and the organisation of key aspects of the whole school. These are noteworthy achievements.

Is First Steps perceived by teachers and Principals to be a success in their schools?

In this final section of the report, the judgements made by respondents about the success of First Steps are examined.

As Exhibits 12, 13 and 14 show, the majority of Year 1 and Year 5 classroom teachers, Focus Teachers and Principals regard First Steps as a success at their school. The proportion of Principals and Focus Teachers who view First Steps as a success is greater than the proportion of Year 1 and 5 classroom teachers who view First Steps as a success. (About 73% of Principals, 80% of Focus Teachers and 56% of teachers report First Steps a success in their school. If the 22% of teachers who reported that it is too soon to tell about the success of First Steps are distributed proportionally across the three remaining categories - 'successful', 'mixed', 'unsuccessful' - then the percentage of teachers regarding First Steps as successful is likely to be about 70%. This suggests that, if this redistribution is reasonable, most of these groups, in much the same proportion, regard First Steps as a success. This proportion is large and so important.)

Exhibit 12: Number and percentage of Year 1 and Year 5 teachers reporting how successful First Steps is in their school by period of involvement with First Steps and PSP status

School Type	Success -ful	Mixed	Unsuccess -ful	Too soon to tell	Total
New FS non PSP	6	0	0	1	7
New FS PSP	2	0	0	6	8
Old FS non PSP	3	6	1	1	11
Old FS PSP	9	0	1	0	10
Total	20(56%)	6(17%)	2(6%)	8(22%)	36(100%)

Of the 6 teachers reporting mixed success for First Steps in their schools, 3 described difficulty with 'traditionalist' teachers who were unwilling to change their ways. These traditionalist teachers were said to be particularly resistant to using the continua for reporting purposes. Apart from these difficulties, First Steps was otherwise regarded as a success in these schools. Another 2 teachers reporting mixed success in their school, regarded First Steps as a success but mentioned that there was a general resistance to using the continua. The sixth teacher who reported mixed success felt that while First Steps was initially a success in the school, its impact was now declining. The common thread in most of these responses is that where First Steps is seen to be a mixed success, the continua are likely to be implicated.

Most Principals who endorsed First Steps as successful in their school were enthusiastic about its success, commenting on its importance for consolidating a whole school approach to literacy.

Exhibit 13: Number and percentage of Principals reporting how successful First Steps is in their school by period of involvement with First Steps and PSP status.

School Type	Success -ful	Mixed	Unsuccess -ful	Too soon to tell	Total
New FS non PSP	3	0	0	1	4
New FS PSP	2	1	1	0	4
Old FS non PSP	3	1	0	0	4
Old FS PSP	3	0	0	0	3
Total	11	2	1	1	15

As Exhibit 14 shows, most Focus Teachers regard First Steps as successful. None regard it as unsuccessful.

Exhibit 14: Number and percentage of Focus Teachers reporting how successful First Steps is in their school by school type.

School Type	Success -ful	Mixed	Unsuccess -ful	Too soon to tell	Total
New FS non PSP	2	0	0	1	3
New FS PSP	1	0	0	0	1
Old FS non PSP	3	1	0	0	4
Old FS PSP	2	0	0	0	2
Total	8	1	0	1	10

A sample of responses provides an opportunity to see the various ways in which First Steps has been, or less frequently has not been, a success in schools. Some of the responses to the question of whether First Steps was a success in the school were as follows:

- "First Steps is good, particularly for young teachers ... and for schools with a high number of low achievers in each class - this school." *(Year 5, old First Steps, PSP school teacher)*

- "Yes it is because you can see its been used right through form Year 1 - 7 and children are very familiar with the strategies/activities and quite comfortable using them." *(Year 5, old First Steps, PSP school teacher)*

- "Yes to a high degree ..." *(Year 5, old First Steps, PSP school teacher)*

- "Very successful at this school due to general 'low ability' of children." *(Year 5, old First Steps, PSP school teacher)*

- "Definitely a success. It has refocussed teachers' attention on effective teaching by providing good teaching strategies ..." *(Principal old First Steps, PSP school)*

- "I have noticed a changed attitude to writing by teachers and students (ie for the better) *(Principal old First Steps, PSP school)*

- "the children are taking risks with their spelling ..." *(Year 1, new First Steps, non PSP school teacher)*

- "Yes
  - it has boosted morale by giving everyone a focal point to view teaching from
  - People are reassessing how and what they teach
  - People are taking risks and trying new approaches - the collab(orative teacher) program has made this possible.
  - People have a clearer idea of outcome statements and key indicators".
  (Year 1, new First Steps, non PSP school teacher)

- "First Steps is a success that will impact on all students at this school." *(Principal new First Steps, non PSP school)*

- "Yes ... we see a positive attitude change in the children." *(Principal new First Steps, non PSP school)*

- "I believe that so far it has been very successful." *(Year 1, new First Steps, PSP school teacher)*

- "Yes it is and will continue to be so as the staff and administration are right behind it." *(Focus Teacher, new First Steps, PSP school)*

- "Absolutely" *(Principal, new First Steps, PSP school)*

- "A definite success." *(Principal, new First Steps, PSP school)*

- "Yes because it has opened the eyes of all staff members, presenting them with new strategies and a common assessment framework." *(Focus Teacher, new First Steps, PSP school)*

- "We are all implementing the strategies and on the whole most people are very pleased with the success the children are having." *(Year 1, new First Steps, PSP school teacher)*

- "Some of the more mature teachers seem hesitant in changing their ways. I guess on the whole First Steps has been a success in our school." *(Year 1, new First Steps, PSP school teacher)*

- "I saw enormous flowering of the Year 1 children (I was not the Year 1 teacher at the time) as their teacher was freed from (a) strict phonics and basal system. She was delighted with their ability. It gave us all a common ground and time to talk to one another about teaching." *(Year 1, new First Steps, PSP school teacher)*

- "What has been implemented appears to be successful." *(Principal, new First Steps, PSP school)*

- "Within the constraints of time, yes First Steps is successful in this school. Although the ideas are open to individual interpretation, the general philosophy has been embraced enthusiastically and the children have benefited. Children write more, read more and have-a-go at spelling unknown and difficult words more now than in the years preceding First Steps. Most tasks are being made much more meaningful."
  (Principal, new First Steps, PSP school)

Other comments suggested that the success of First Steps was limited. Some general comments to begin with.

- 'Generally yes, although could be more successful." *(Principal old First Steps, PSP school)*
- "Yes while all staff are enthused and it is our Focus. However since all schools don't have access to First Steps (which is very unfair) our staff will become replaced with staff unfamiliar to First Steps. I'm sure it is going to be become harder to keep everyone on tasks and enthuse a whole school - rather than individuals. Who is going to inservice them? Where will their books come from?" *(Year 1, new First Steps, non PSP school teacher)*
- "Initially yes but the impact and success has diminished. People take from it what suits them." *(Year 1, new First Steps, PSP school teacher)*

There were a number of comments about the success of First Steps being hindered by some reluctant members of staff.

- "I consider First Steps is being given every chance to be a success. New in-coming staff have received some in-servicing, the Focus Teacher has done an excellent job in providing time/demonstration for all the staff. Of course, some people don't like change and they are slow to embrace First Steps".*(Year 1, old First Steps, PSP school teacher)*
- "I think it is a very big success although it is asking some teachers to change their very ingrained philosophies about teaching." *(Year 5, new First Steps, non PSP school teacher)*
- "For those who have taken on the First Steps strategies in a positive way, the success is evident in their children's work. However, there are some staff members who have been a little resistant to change and who find that First Steps has been introduced too quickly at this school, and who also find the continua too time consuming. Personally, I have found that First Steps has aided my teaching especially in the language area and the continua are an efficient and clear way of recording". *(Year 1, old First Steps, non PSP school teacher)*
- "My perception is that when used wholeheartedly it is very successful. There is a real problem in convincing some 'traditionalists' that it has merit."
(Year 5, new First Steps, PSP school teacher)

There were some who did not regard First Steps as particularly successful. (However, even with these respondents there seemed to be a somewhat grudging acknowledgment that First Steps is successful. Their complaints were that it ought to be a lot more successful.)

- "Perhaps for some teachers but a disappointment for myself.
  WHY do First Step speakers and everyone involved want every child on the continua when they are designed for students at risk? This change would make First Steps a success rather than a near useless task which takes loads of time."
  (Year 5, new First Steps, non PSP school teacher)[7]

[7]This comment is indicative of problems already alluded to earlier about whether First Steps is being properly implemented in some schools.

- "... I am not sure if First Steps is proving to be a success." *(Year 5, new First Steps, PSP school teacher)*

- "In general I think teachers would say First Steps success could be achieved in a much more cost effective basis." *(Year 5, old First Steps, PSP school teacher)*

Finally, some, while optimistic about the success of First Steps feel it is too early to comment.

- "I consider it too early to pass judgement. Early indicators are heartening ... Some staff still remain sceptical about the advantages and the workload." *(Principal, new First Steps, PSP school)*

- "At this stage it is too early to tell but I feel it will be due to the staff's enthusiasm." *(Year 1, new First Steps, PSP school teacher)*

- "Yes. Although with some reservations.
The uncertainty surrounding its effectiveness cannot be seen yet until children are tested for a second time on the continu(a)." *(Principal new First Steps, non PSP school)*

In summary, teachers, Focus Teachers and Principals generally see First Steps as a success in their schools. They comment upon the positive effect it is having on the willingness of the children to tackle reading and writing, their improved attitudes and increased ability. Teachers' morale and methods are seen to have improved. Improvements in whole school organisation, particularly in reporting and assessment, were also noted by respondents. The consensus among the teachers and Principals from the schools in the sample used for this report is that First Steps is a success in schools.

CONCLUSION

The following conclusions can be drawn from the data analysed here:

i. Teachers in old First Steps schools are probably more likely to report that they are best at teaching language than teachers in new First Steps schools. This may be the result of the impact of First Steps on improving teachers' confidence and skills in teaching language in old First Steps combined with short term difficulties which some teachers may experience with teaching language in new First Steps while it is being introduced into schools.

ii. The general feeling in schools towards First Steps is positive. In particular, the ideas, teaching strategies and materials that First Steps introduces to schools have been very well received. There was some evidence that the inservicing provided by First Steps and the use of the continua caused an unexpectedly increased workload which muted some of the enthusiasm towards the project in some schools. This feeling was more frequently reported in new First Steps schools than in old First Steps schools. There may have been more time to resolve these problems in the old First Steps schools.

iii. First Steps Focus Teachers are widely regarded by teachers and Principals as helpful in schools. They were seen as having an important role in classrooms, within the whole school and in establishing relationships between the school and the District Office, and, the school with other schools. Reference was often made to the valuable role that they play in introducing classroom teachers to new strategies and materials, organising the acquisition of new materials and assisting in school wide planning.

iv. First Steps Collaborative teachers were reported by many teachers and Principals to be either very helpful or helpful. Modelling of classes, assistance in using the First Steps developmental continua and assistance in whole school organisation based on First Steps ideas were the most common reasons cited for this helpfulness.

v. The Professional Development provided by First Steps was widely regarded by teachers and Principals as helpful in introducing new ideas, strategies and materials to teachers. There was wide spread concern, however, about the excessive amount of information provided in Professional Development sessions. This was seen as leading to 'information overload' by many teachers. There was also concern that too much

time was spent away from classes while the teachers participated in the Professional Development provided by First Steps.

vi. One of the major achievements of First Steps in schools was seen by Principals and teachers to be the improved performance of students. Another major achievement of First Steps is the improved teaching skills of teachers. New reporting and assessment methods based upon the developmental continua were also seen as important achievements of First Steps in schools.

vii. First Steps is widely perceived to be a success in old First Steps schools. This success is seen in the changed attitudes of students - they are now more willing 'to have a go' at writing, spelling and reading where previously they may not have been willing. Students are showing improved writing, spelling and reading ability. Teachers were also seen to have improved their teaching skills. They were also seen as having more confidence.

Overall the impact of First Steps has been positive for (1) students who are now reported to be achieving more, (2) for teachers who are now reported to be teaching better and with more confidence and (3) for schools which are reported as having improved reporting and organisational structures.

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Appendix A: response rates to the survey

First Steps type	PSP status		Yr 1 Tchrs	Yr 5 Tchrs	Focus Tchrs	Principal
Non First Steps	PSP	N sampled	7	6	0	0
		N responding	6	5	0	0
	Non PSP	N sampled	6	6	0	0
		N responding	5	4	0	0
New First Steps	PSP	N sampled	6	7	3	4
		N responding	2	6	3	4
	Non PSP	N sampled	5	5	2	4
		N responding	5	5	2	4
Old First Steps	PSP	N sampled	6	8	4	4
		N responding	5	8	4	4
	Non PSP	N sampled	8	7	3	4
		N responding	7	6	3	3
Total		N sampled	38	46	12	16
		N responding	30	34	12	15
		% Responding	*79*	*74*	*100*	*94*

Appendix B: Questionnaires sent to classroom teachers, focus teachers and principals.

This Appendix contains some of the questionnaires sent to schools to gather data for the evaluation of First Steps. The questionnaires included here are those sent to:

- Year 1 classroom teachers — non First Steps schools
- Year 1 classroom teachers — First Steps schools
- Focus Teachers — First Steps schools
- Principals — First Steps schools

Questionnaires were also sent to Year 5 classroom teachers in non First Steps and First Steps schools. The wording of these questionnaires was the same as for the Year 1 questionnaires except that where the words "Year 1" appear in the Year 1 questionnaire the words Year 5" appear in the Year 5 questionnaire. Given that the differences between the Year 1 and Year 5 questionnaires are so small, there seemed little point in duplicating them in this Appendix.

Questionnaire for Year 1 Classroom Teachers at non-First Steps schools

The WA Ministry of Education has commissioned the Australian Council for Educational Research to evaluate the First Steps project. First Steps is a WA Ministry of Education funded project which has been running since 1989. Its main aim has been to develop strategies for teachers to use in helping 'at risk' students, particularly in the area of literacy. This questionnaire forms one part of the evaluation. It is designed to provide information about how classroom teachers in non-First Step schools approach teaching literacy skills.

You are one of about sixty Year 1 teachers chosen at random from all WA government primary and district high schools. Because there are relatively few teachers being sampled, your response to this survey is especially important.

Your participation in this survey is voluntary. You may refuse to answer any or all of the questions contained in this questionnaire. If you choose not to participate could you please contact me at the address below so that I do not send out reminder notices to you.

Your responses to these questions will be treated confidentially and no schools or individual respondents will be identified in any reports produced as part of this evaluation unless permission is given. (Your principal has more details about this.)

If you have any questions about the survey or evaluation feel free to contact me by phone on (03) 819 1400 or by mail at the address below.

The questionnaire should take between 30 and 45 minutes to complete.

When you have completed this questionnaire, please post it using the attached Reply Paid envelope. If you have misplaced the envelope, **send the completed questionnaire to:**

Adrian Harvey-Beavis
First Steps Evaluation
Reply Post 2
Australian Council for Education Research
PO Box 210
Hawthorn
Victoria 3122
(If you use this address you will not need a postage stamp.)

Please post the completed questionnaire before September 4

Complete this survey form by ticking the appropriate box or by writing in the space provided. If more space is needed use the back page of this questionnaire or a blank sheet of paper. Staple any extra sheets to the questionnaire.

1. **What is the name of this school?** .....

(The name of your school is needed so that other information from other sources can be linked to it, for example, whether it is an urban or rural school or whether it is a PSP school. It is also needed to check off returns so that you are not sent a reminder notice.)

About you

2. *This question asks you about the numbers of years you have been teaching. To answer this question treat years teaching part time as equivalent to full time and only count the years when you were working as a teacher. Do not, for example, count* years *on maternity leave.*

a. Up until the end of 1992, how many years will you have been teaching at this school? ..... Year(s)

b. Up until the end of 1992, what will be the total number of years that you have been teaching? ..... Year(s)

3. **What subject area(s) do you teach best?** .....

About the class you teach

4. a. **How many students are in the class that you are currently teaching?**

.....

b. Is it a composite class? **Yes** ☐

No ☐

If yes, how many of these students are in Year 1? .....

5. The First Steps Project is particularly concerned to assist teachers working with 'at risk' students. 'At risk' students are those students who are not making satisfactory progress. A student might not make satisfactory progress because they do not try or because they have specific learning difficulties.

In terms of either their spelling or reading or writing or oral language skills, how many Year 1 students in your class in 1992 would you describe as 'at risk'

.....

6. **In terms of either their spelling or reading or writing or oral language skills, in what ways are these students 'at risk'?**

About your teaching methods

7. Think about the Year 1 students in this class who are 'at risk' in terms of their spelling or reading or writing or oral language skills.
How do you know that a student is 'at risk'?

8. **How do you keep track of the development of the spelling, reading, writing and oral language skills of 'at risk' Year 1 students in this class?**

9. Still thinking about Year 1 students in this class who are 'at risk' in terms of their spelling or reading or writing or oral language skills,

What have been the most useful methods that you have employed, during 1992 to develop their literacy skills?

In your answer you might want to mention the methods you used with individuals or the strategies you have used to help them at the class room level. List up to 3 of the most useful methods or strategies.

10. **What would help you to better meet the needs of these 'at risk' Year 1 students?**

About your contact with First Steps

11. **Had you heard of First Steps before reading this survey?**

Yes ☐

No ☐ ***If no, stop here.*** *Thank you for completing the survey.*

If yes, briefly describe the perceptions you have now of First Steps.

12. **Have you used any materials produced by the First Steps project?**

Yes ☐

No ☐ ***If no, stop here.*** *Thank you for completing the survey.*

If yes, what were these materials?

13. **Briefly describe how useful these have been in your teaching.**

Thank you for completing this survey.

Questionnaire for Year 1 Classroom Teachers using First Steps

The WA Ministry of Education has commissioned the Australian Council for Educational Research to evaluate the First Steps project. This questionnaire forms one part of the evaluation.

You are one of about sixty Year 1 teachers chosen at random from all WA government primary and district high schools. Because there are relatively few teachers being sampled, your response to this survey is especially important for understanding how teachers perceive the impact of First Steps, use its products and respond to its ideas.

Your participation in this survey is voluntary. You may refuse to answer any or all of the questions contained in this questionnaire. If you choose not to participate could you please contact me at the address below so that I do not send out reminder notices to you.

Your responses to these questions will be treated confidentially and no schools or individual respondents will be identified in any reports produced as part of this evaluation unless permission is given. (For more information see the access conditions to the data which are available from your school principal.)

If you have any questions about this survey or the evaluation feel free to contact me by phone on (03) 819 1400 or by mail at the address below.

The questionnaire will take between 60 and 90 minutes to complete. Just how long it takes will depend on your involvement with the First Steps Project. When you have completed this questionnaire, please post it using the attached Reply Paid envelope. If you have misplaced the envelope, **send the completed questionnaire to:**

Adrian Harvey-Beavis
First Steps Evaluation
Reply Post 2
Australian Council for Education Research
PO Box 210
Hawthorn
Victoria 3122

(If you use this address you will not need a postage stamp.)

Please post the completed questionnaire before September 4

Complete this survey form by ticking the appropriate box or by writing in the space provided. If more space is needed use the back page of this questionnaire or a blank sheet of paper. Staple any extra sheets to the questionnaire.

1. **What is the name of this school?** .....

(The name of your school is needed so that other information from other sources can be linked to it, for example, whether it is an urban or rural school or whether it is a PSP school. It is also needed to check off returns so that you are not sent a reminder notice.)

About you

2. *This question asks you about the numbers of years you have been teaching. To answer this question treat years teaching part time as equivalent to full time and only count the years when you were working as a teacher. Do not, for example, count years on maternity leave.*

a. Up until the end of 1992, how many years will you have been teaching at this school? ..... Year(s)

b. Up until the end of 1992, what will be the total number of years that you have been teaching? ..... Year(s)

3. **What subject area(s) do you teach best?** .....

About the class you teach

4. a. **How many students are in the class that you are currently teaching?** .....

b. Is it a composite class? **Yes** ☐
No ☐

If yes, how many of these students are in Year 1? .....

5. The First Steps Project is particularly concerned to assist teachers working with 'at risk' students. 'At risk' students are those students who are not making satisfactory progress. A student might not make satisfactory progress because they do not try or because they have specific learning difficulties.

In terms of either their spelling or reading or writing or oral language skills, how many Year 1 students in your class in 1992 would you describe as 'at risk' .....

6. **In terms of either their spelling or reading or writing or oral language skills, in what ways are these students 'at risk'?**

About your teaching methods

7. Think about the Year 1 students in this class who are 'at risk' in terms of their spelling or reading or writing or oral language skills.
How do you know that a student is 'at risk'?

8. **How do you keep track of the development of the spelling, reading, writing and oral language skills of 'at risk' Year 1 students in this class?**

9. Still thinking about Year 1 students in this class who are 'at risk' in terms of their spelling or reading or writing or oral language skills,

What have been the most useful methods that you have employed, during 1992 to develop their literacy skills?

In your answer you might want to mention the methods you used with individuals or the strategies you have used to help them at the class room level. List up to 3 of the most useful methods or strategies. (These methods or strategies may or may not have been taken from First Steps materials.)

10. **What would help you to better meet the needs of these 'at risk' Year 1 students?**

About First Steps in the school

11. **At the present time, what is the general feeling of the teaching staff towards First Steps in this school?**

About the First Steps continua

12. **During any time in 1992 have you used with the Year 1 students in this class, however briefly, any of the following First Steps Continua?**
(Tick as many boxes as apply)

	Yes
Writing Development Continuum	☐
Writing Learning Continuum	☐
Spelling Development Continuum	☐
Reading Development Continuum	☐
Oral Language Development Continuum	☐

If you have <u>not</u> used any First Steps Continua with the Year 1 students in this class at any time in 1992, <u>go to Question 18</u>

13. **Describe in as much detail as possible how you have used a First Steps Continuum with some or all of the Year 1 students in this class during 1992.**
You might want to mention the steps you used to put the students on a continuum, which students these were, why you chose these students, and why you decided to use the continuum.

14. How well do the continua which you have used with this Year 1 class in 1992 depict the development which you see in your students?

15. How might the First Steps continua which you have used with the Year 1 students in this class be further improved and developed?

16. Describe how the continua that you have used with the Year 1 students in this class in 1992 have, or have not, helped you in your teaching practice.

17. What have you learnt by using First Steps continua with the Year 1 students in this class in 1992?

About support from First Steps

18. Does this school have a First Steps Focus teacher?

Yes ☐

No ☐ ⇒ *Go to Question 20*

19. Is the Focus teacher in your school important in helping you to introduce new strategies into your teaching practice?

Yes ☐

No ☐

No comment, I am the focus teacher ☐ ⇒ *Go to Question 20*

If yes, explain how the focus teacher is important.

If no, what could the focus teacher do to become more important?

20. Has a First Steps collaborative teacher ever worked with you in any class you have taught?

Yes, with me in class ☐

Yes, but only while I was away at an in-service ☐

No ☐ ⇒ *Go to question 24*

21. Describe how having a First Steps collaborative teacher in your class room has helped you.

22. **Describe the main problems in having a First Steps collaborative teacher in your class room.**

23. Think of the last collaborative teacher to work in a class that you taught.
Generally, how helpful was this collaborative teacher to you?

- **Very helpful** ☐
- **Helpful** ☐
- **Neither helpful nor unhelpful** ☐
- **Unhelpful** ☐
- **Very unhelpful** ☐

24. **Have you ever attended Professional Development provided by First Steps?**

- **Yes** ☐
- **No** ☐ ⇒ *Go to Question 28*

25. **Briefly, describe how the Professional Development provided by First Steps was helpful to you.**

26. **Briefly, what were some of the problems with the Professional Development offered by First Steps?**

27. Generally, how helpful was First Steps Professional Development to you?

Very helpful ☐
Helpful ☐
Neither helpful nor unhelpful ☐
Unhelpful ☐
Very unhelpful ☐

Other aspects of your experience with First Steps

28. Are you familiar with the ELIC literacy program?

Yes ☐
No ☐ ⇒ *Go to Question 30*

29. What are the main differences between ELIC and First Steps?

30. From what you expected of your involvement with First Steps,

a. What has eventuated?

b. What has not eventuated?

31. **Comment on whether First Steps is a success at this school.**

Thank you for completing this survey.

Sometimes, the answers people provide in questionnaires provoke other questions. If this happens with some of your answers in this questionnaire, would you be prepared to discuss these additional questions with me? I could telephone you at the school during working hours or at a time and place convenient to you. **If you are prepared to be contacted could you add your name and other details requested below so that I can ring you.** Once the data have been taken from this questionnaire and any follow up questions completed, I will then remove your name and phone number from the questionnaire. The slip of paper with this information on it will then be destroyed. **Leave the following items blank if you do not wish to be questioned about your responses in this survey.**

Circle the best day for me to contact you at school

Mon Tues Wed Thurs Fri

The best time to phone at the school is ..... (W.A time)

OR

Do not contact the school but ring on: .....

Circle the best day for me to contact you on this number:

Mon Tues Wed Thurs Fri

The best time to phone on this number is ..... (W.A time)

Name: .....

ACER

Australian Council for Educational Research

First Steps Evaluation, 1992

First Steps Focus Teacher's Questionnaire

The WA Ministry of Education has commissioned the Australian Council for Educational Research to evaluate the First Steps project. This questionnaire forms one part of the evaluation.

You are one of about thirty focus teachers chosen at random from all WA government primary and district high schools. Because you are one of so few being sampled, your response to this survey is especially important for understanding how focus teachers perceive the impact of First Steps, use its products and respond to its ideas.

Your participation in this survey is voluntary. You may refuse to answer any or all of the questions contained in this questionnaire. If you choose not to participate could you please contact me at the address below so that I do not send out reminder notices to you.

Your responses to these questions will be treated confidentially and no schools or individual respondents will be identified in any reports produced as part of this evaluation unless permission is given. (For more information see the access conditions to the data which are available from your school principal.)

If you have any questions about this survey or the evaluation feel free to contact me by phone on (03) 819 1400 or by mail at the address below.

The questionnaire will take between 45 and 90 minutes to complete. Just how long it takes will depend on your involvement with the First Steps Project. When you have completed this questionnaire, please post it using the attached Reply Paid envelope. If you have misplaced the envelope, **send the completed questionnaire to:**

Adrian Harvey-Beavis
First Steps Evaluation
Reply Post 2
Australian Council for Education Research
PO Box 210
Hawthorn
Victoria 3122

(If you use this address you will not need a postage stamp.)

Please post the completed questionnaire before September 4

Complete this survey form by ticking the appropriate box or by writing in the space provided. If more space is needed use the back page of this questionnaire or a blank sheet of paper. Staple any extra sheets to the questionnaire.

1. **What is the name of this school?** .....

(The name of your school is needed so that other information from other sources can be linked to it, for example, whether it is an urban or rural school or whether it is a PSP school. It is also needed to check off returns so that you are not sent a reminder notice.)

About you

2. *This question asks you about the numbers of years you have been teaching. To answer this question treat years teaching part time as equivalent to full time and only count the years when you were working as a teacher. Do not, for example, count years on maternity leave.*

a. Up until the end of 1992, how many years will you have been teaching at this school? ..... Year(s)

b. Up until the end of 1992, what will be the total number of years that you have been teaching? ..... Year(s)

3. **During 1992, what is the year level of the class which you normally teach at this school ?** .....

About the First Steps continua

4. **During any time in 1992 has this school, however briefly, used any of the following First Steps Continua?**

(Tick as many boxes as apply)

	Yes
Writing Development Continuum	☐
Writing Learning Continuum	☐
Spelling Development Continuum	☐
Reading Development Continuum	☐
Oral Language Development Continuum	☐

If this school has <u>not</u> used any First Steps Continua at any time during 1992, <u>go to Question 8</u>

The remaining questions ask about your involvement with First Steps as this school's focus teacher. Please do not answer the following questions by just refering to your own individual classroom practice. Your answers should reflect a school wide perspective. This means that you will tend to make generalisations about behaviours and attitudes within the school. These generalisations should, however, be evidenced by refering to specific examples.

5. **In what ways have First Steps continua been used in this school?**
   For example, have the continua been used as part of assessment procedures, have they been incorporated into curriculum documents?

6. **Describe how the use of First Steps continua have or have not been helpful in this school.**

7. **What have you learnt as a focus teacher by using First Steps continua in this school?**

About support from First Steps

8. Has a First Steps collaborative teacher ever worked in any classrooms in this school?

Yes, with teachers in class ☐
Yes, but only while teachers were away at an in-service ☐
No ☐ ⇒*Go to question 12*

9. Describe the main advantages of having a First Steps collaborative teacher in classrooms in this school.

10. Describe the main problems in having a First Steps collaborative teacher in classrooms in this school

11. Generally, how helpful were the First Steps collaborative teachers to this school?

Very helpful ☐
Helpful ☐
Neither helpful nor unhelpful ☐
Unhelpful ☐
Very unhelpful ☐

12. Have you, or any teachers in this school ever attended Professional Development provided by First Steps?

Yes ☐
No ☐ ⇒ *Go to Question 16*

13. Briefly, describe how the Professional Development provided by First Steps was helpful to this school.

14. Briefly, what were some of the problems for this school with the Professional Development offered by First Steps?

15. Generally, how helpful was First Steps Professional Development to this school?

- Very helpful ☐
- Helpful ☐
- Neither helpful nor unhelpful ☐
- Unhelpful ☐
- Very unhelpful ☐

About First Steps in the school

16. At the present time, what is the general feeling of the teaching staff towards First Steps in this school?

17. From what you expected of your involvement with First Steps,

a. What has eventuated?

b. What has not eventuated?

18. Comment on whether First Steps is a success at this school.

Other aspects of your experience with First Steps

19. Are you familiar with the ELIC literacy program?

Yes ☐

No ☐ ⇒ *Stop here. Thank you for completing the questionnaire*

20. **What are the main differences between ELIC and First Steps?**

Thank you for completing this survey.

Sometimes, the answers people provide in questionnaires provoke other questions. If this happens with some of your answers in this questionnaire, would you be prepared to discuss these additional questions with me? I could telephone you at the school during working hours or at a time and place convenient to you. **If you are prepared to be contacted could you add your name and other details requested below so that I can ring you.** Once the data have been taken from this questionnaire and any follow up questions completed, I will then remove your name and phone number from the questionnaire. The slip of paper with this information on it will then be destroyed. **Leave the following items blank if you do not wish to be questioned about your responses in this survey.**

Circle the best day for me to contact you at school

Mon Tues Wed Thurs Fri

The best time to phone at the school is ..... (W.A time)

OR

Do not contact the school but ring on: .....

Circle the best day for me to contact you on this number:

Mon Tues Wed Thurs Fri

The best time to phone on this number is ..... (W.A time)

Name: .....

Australian Council for Educational Research

First Steps Evaluation, 1992

Principal's Questionnaire

The WA Ministry of Education has commissioned the Australian Council for Educational Research to evaluate the First Steps project. This questionnaire forms one part of the evaluation and is designed to provide information about how school principals perceive the operation and impact of First Steps in their schools.

Your participation in this survey is voluntary. You may refuse to answer any or all of the questions contained in this questionnaire. If you choose not to participate could you please contact me at the address below so that I do not send out reminder notices to you.

Your responses to these questions will be treated confidentially and no schools or individual respondents will be identified in any reports produced as part of this evaluation unless permission is given. (For more information see the access conditions to the data.)

If you have any questions about this survey or the evaluation feel free to contact me by phone on (03) 819 1400 or by mail at the address below.

The questionnaire will take between 30 and 60 minutes to complete. Just how long it takes will depend on your involvement with the First Steps Project.

When you have completed this questionnaire, please post it using the attached Reply Paid envelope. If you have misplaced the envelope, **send the completed questionnaire to:**

Adrian Harvey-Beavis
First Steps Evaluation
Reply Post 2
Australian Council for Education Research
PO Box 210
Hawthorn
Victoria 3122
(If you use this address you will not need a postage stamp.)

Please post the completed questionnaire before September 4

Complete this survey form by ticking the appropriate box or by writing in the space provided. If more space is needed use the back page of this questionnaire or a blank sheet of paper. Staple any extra sheets to the questionnaire.

1. **What is the name of this school?** .....

(The name of your school is needed so that other information from other sources can be linked to it, for example, whether it is an urban or rural school or whether it is a PSP school. It is also needed to check off returns so that you are not sent a reminder notice.)

About you

2 **a. Up until the end of 1992, how many years will you have been principal at this school?** ..... Year(s)

b. Including this school, at how many schools have you been the principal? .....

c. Up until the end of 1992, what will be the total number of years that you have been teaching? ..... Year(s)

To answer question number 2c treat years teaching part time as equivalent to full time and only count the years when you were working as a teacher. Do not, for example, count years on maternity leave. Count years as principal as years teaching.

About the First Steps continua

3. **During any time in 1992 has this school, however briefly, used any of the following First Steps Continua?**

(Tick as many boxes as apply)

	Yes
Writing Development Continuum	☐
Writing Learning Continuum	☐
Spelling Development Continuum	☐
Reading Development Continuum	☐
Oral Language Development Continuum	☐

If this school has not used any First Steps Continua at any time in 1992, go to Question 7

4. **In what ways have First Steps continua been used in this school?**

For example, have the continua been used as part of assessment procedures, have they been incorporated into curriculum documents?

5. **Describe how the use of First Steps continua have or have not been helpful in this school.**

6. **What have you learnt by using First Steps continua in this school?**

About support from First Steps

7. **Does this school have a First Steps Focus teacher?**

Yes ☐

No ☐ ⇒ ***Go to Question 10***

8. Do you find having a focus teacher in this school helpful?

Yes ☐
No ☐
No comment, I am the focus teacher ☐ ⇒ *Go to Question 9*

If yes, explain how the focus teacher is helpful.
If no, what could the focus teacher do to become more helpful?

9. Generally, how helpful has this focus teacher been to this school?

Very helpful ☐
Helpful ☐
Neither helpful nor unhelpful ☐
Unhelpful ☐
Very unhelpful ☐

10. Has a First Steps collaborative teacher ever worked in any classrooms in this school?

Yes, with teachers in class ☐
Yes, but only while teachers were away at an in-service ☐
No ☐ ⇒*Go to question 14*

11. Describe the main advantages of having a First Steps collaborative teacher in class rooms in this school.

12. Describe the main problems in having a First Steps collaborative teacher in classrooms in this school.

13. Generally, how helpful have collaborative teachers been in this school?

- Very helpful ☐
- Helpful ☐
- Neither helpful nor unhelpful ☐
- Unhelpful ☐
- Very unhelpful ☐

14. Have you or any teachers at this school ever attended Professional Development provided by First Steps?

- Yes ☐
- No ☐ ⇒ *Go to Question 18*

15. Briefly, describe how the Professional Development provided by First Steps was helpful to this school.

16. Briefly, what were some of the problems for this school with the Professional Development offered by First Steps?

17. Generally, how helpful was First Steps Professional Development to this school?

Very helpful	☐
Helpful	☐
Neither helpful nor unhelpful	☐
Unhelpful	☐
Very unhelpful	☐

About First Steps in the school

18. At the present time, what is the general feeling of the teaching staff towards First Steps in this school?

19. From what you expected of this school's involvement in First Steps,

a. What has eventuated?

b. What has not eventuated?

20. What reaction have parents had to the school's involvement with First Steps?

21. Comment on whether First Steps is a success at this school.

Other aspects of your experience with First Steps

22. Are you familiar with the ELIC literacy program?

Yes ☐

No ☐ ⇒ *Stop here. Thank you for completing the survey*

23. What are the main differences between ELIC and First Steps?

Thank you for completing this survey.

TM028167

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