Literacy Teaching in Tasmania: Teaching Practice and Teacher Learning

Final Report for the Review of Literacy Teaching, Training, and Practice in Government Schools

Prepared for the Department of Education, Tasmania
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Abbreviations

AC	Australian Curriculum
AC: E	Australian Curriculum: English
ACARA	Australian Curriculum Assessment & Reporting Authority
ACER	Australian Council for Educational Research
ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
AITSL	Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership
ALEA	Australian Literacy Educators' Association
ATAR	Australian Tertiary Admission Ranking
BEd	Bachelor of Education
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
CPLD	Continuing Learning and Professional Development
DoE	Department of Education (also referred to as the Department)
EEF	Education Endowment Foundation
ELF	Early Literacy Foundations

GTPA	Graduate Teacher Performance Assessment
HASS	Humanities and Social Sciences
HITS	High Impact Teaching Strategies
HPE	Health and Physical Education
HREC	Human Research Ethics Committee
ICSEA	Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage
IEP	Individual Education Plan
ITE	Initial Teacher Education
KDC	Kindergarten Development Check
LANTITE	Literacy and Numeracy Test for Initial Teacher Education
LiFT	Learning in Families Together
LiL	Launching into Learning
MTeach	Master of Teaching
NACAT	Non-Academic Capabilities Assessment Tool
NAPLAN	National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OWL	Oxford Word List
PALL	Principals as Literacy Leaders
PALS	Partners as Literacy Support
PAT	Progressive Achievement Test
PE	Professional Experience
PEIRS	Professional Experience in Rural and Isolated Schools
PL	Professional Learning
PLC	Professional Learning Community
PLI	Professional Learning Institute
PLT	Professional Learning Team
PST	Preservice Teacher
RCT	Randomised Controlled Trial
SAST	South Australian Spelling Test
SPAT	Sutherland Phonological Awareness Test
SWI	Structured Word Inquiry
SWST	Single Word Spelling Test
TEMAG	Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Committee
TEQSA	Teacher Education Quality and Standards Agency
TIPP	Teacher Intern Placement Program
TFA	Teach for Australia
TORCH	Tests of Reading Comprehension
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UTAS	University of Tasmania
VET	Vocational Education and Training
WTL	Writing-To-Learn

Codes used to indicate data sources

Schools

CS	Combined School
HS	High School
PS	Primary School

Participants

AP	Assistant Principal
AST	Advanced Skills Teacher
CT	Classroom Teacher
TiC	Teacher in Charge
LS	Literacy-specific practitioner (literacy coaches and specialists)1
LT	Literacy (support) Teacher
P	Principal
PSY	Psychologist
PV	Parent / Volunteer
SP	Speech Pathologist
TA	Teacher Assistant
A	Academic
BT_BE_EC	Beginning teacher, Bachelor of Education (Early childhood)
BT_BE_P	Beginning teacher, Bachelor of Education (Primary)
BT_BE_S	Beginning teacher, Bachelor of Education (Secondary)
BT_MT_P	Beginning teacher, Master of Teaching (Primary)
BT_MT_S	Beginning teacher, Master of Teaching (Secondary)
PST	Pre-service teacher

Documentation

AR16	Annual Report 2016
OP17	Operational Plan 2017
OP-Lit17	Operational Plan for English / Literacy 2017
UO	Unit Outline

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1   At the time the Phase 2 research was conducted, the role of 'Literacy Coach' was being introduced into Tasmanian government schools, and the role of 'Literacy Specialist' teacher was being phased out. Therefore, the sample of participants included both categories of 'literacy-specific' [LS] practitioners.

Executive Summary

This report represents the culmination of the Review of Literacy Teaching, Training, and Practice in Government Schools project and presents a synthesis of the findings from all phases of the research. It is the fifth and final report for this project, prepared by the Peter Underwood Centre for Educational Attainment for the Department of Education in Tasmania. The report is organised in two major sections related to: (1) literacy teaching practice in schools, and (2) pre- and in-service teacher learning for literacy teaching.

Literacy teaching practice in schools

The beliefs and understandings that educators hold contribute to shaping schooling environments and the contexts in which children learn to become literate.

Key findings:

- There was unanimous agreement among all participants about the importance of literacy as a foundational capability for learning, in school and beyond formal education.
- Consistent with contemporary conceptualisations of literacy, most participants expressed understandings of literacy as broad, complex and dynamic.

To maximise every child's chances of reaching their full potential, educators need to consider both proximal (school-based) and distal (out-of-school) factors that affect literacy development.

Key findings:

- Overall, participants referred to a range of both proximal and distal factors that influence children's literacy development.
- Importantly, educators noted that good teaching practice nested within supportive literacy-rich school environments can do much to mitigate the negative effects of distal factors such as socioeconomic and educational disadvantage.

Enacting literacy teaching practice in the classroom

Good literacy instruction is situated in the broader context of classroom pedagogy and in what research suggests 'works' generally—for all students and for those who need extra support.

Key findings:

- Classroom practitioners and school leaders emphasised the importance of embedding literacy teaching practice within a sound pedagogical framework informed by knowledge about students as well as pedagogical knowledge and skills. Common approaches included:
  - high expectations of students in 'free-to-fail' environments in which learners felt confident enough to take risks in their learning;
  - differentiated instruction within a gradual release of responsibility model;
  - early identification of students struggling with literacy; and

- high-quality targeted interventions in collaboration with allied professionals where appropriate.

- Such good practice was not yet universal across schools in Tasmania (and nor is it across Australia). In particular participants:

  - reported challenges in meeting the needs of students with literacy learning difficulties, with this important work often being undertaken by para-professional staff; and

  - noted the need for additional support for increasing numbers of students with backgrounds of trauma and neglect, often manifesting in mental health and/or behavioural issues and learning difficulties at school.

Based on extensive reviews of the available evidence, the *Improving Literacy Guidance Reports* produced by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) in the United Kingdom provide evidence-informed practical recommendations for educators across all stages of schooling. Findings about literacy teaching practices in K–2, 3–6, and 7–10 in section 2 of this report are discussed in relation to those recommendations.

Enacting practice in the early years (K–2)

A key message across a wide body of research is that effective teachers of literacy in the early years of school integrate and balance learning the codes of written language with purposes of literacy in ways that are meaningful to the learner.

Key findings:

- All K–2 teachers were well aware of the crucial importance of the early years in laying solid foundations for children's literacy development; and described their practices in ways consistent with research-informed recommendations for good practice at this stage of learning.

- Early years teachers usually prioritised the development of oral literacy: listening and speaking skills.

- Most commonly, the elements of literacy were taught in ways that integrated both decoding and comprehension skills, with teachers often referring to:

  - the 'Big Six' components of learning to read;

  - phonics and phonemic awareness; and

  - guided reading activities to monitor young learners' reading comprehension.

- Time was provided for explicit teaching of writing strategies and structured writing activities, as well as for free writing in most classrooms.

- In relation to spelling, some teachers focused on learning spelling strategies, some on testing students on list of words, and some used both those approaches.

- Children needing extra literacy support were generally identified using early diagnostic assessments, and a variety of interventions and allied professional staff were then used to provide support.

Enacting practice in the primary years (3–6)

In the upper primary years, literature suggests that teaching practice needs to focus on consolidating literacy skills as well as moving students towards independence, as the depth and breadth of their knowledge and skills increase and as they learn to use increasingly complex literacy strategies.

Key findings:

- Compared to the early years, there appeared to be greater diversity in literacy teaching practice in Years 3–6 classrooms, and somewhat less focus on oral literacy.
- There was a strong emphasis on reading to learn. The teaching of reading fluency and comprehension were entwined. Common approaches were:
  - the CAFE approach, focusing on comprehension, accuracy, fluency, and expanding vocabulary; and
  - the 'Readers' Workshop' model.
- The teaching of writing involved extensive modelling and scaffolding of different genres. Using an inquiry-based approach to writing, the 'Writers' Workshop' model was popular.
- Many primary teachers favoured a word study/structured word inquiry approach to spelling and vocabulary development, although many also reported using memorisation as a spelling approach.
- There was considerable diversity in relation to teaching grammar and punctuation and no consensus about whether a 'traditional' or a 'functional' approach to grammar was more appropriate.
- Approaches similar to those in in K–2 were used to identify and support students who struggled with literacy. Opinion was divided as to whether withdrawing students with additional literacy needs was more effective than an inclusive approach.

Enacting practice in the secondary years (7–10)

Research highlights the importance of preventing students falling into a 'literacy gap' in the 'middle years' as they transition from primary to secondary school. Emerging evidence strongly suggests that the key to improving literacy in high school is to prioritise 'disciplinary literacy' over generic approaches to literacy. Relatively few secondary school staff participated in the research and teachers were all from English and Humanities and Social Sciences learning areas; this limits the generalisability of findings for Years 7–10.

Key findings:

- There was a strong focus on reading to learn. Teachers were more likely to promote the use of generic reading strategies than discipline-specific strategies adapted for deep reading of more complex and challenging academic texts.
- It was common for teachers to provide targeted vocabulary instruction, linking word knowledge to the content of lessons across the curriculum.
- Most teachers used a process approach to teaching writing, with the Writers' Workshop model being used extensively in some secondary schools to build students' confidence in breaking down complex writing tasks.
- There was no discernibly consistent approach to the teaching of spelling, grammar, and punctuation.

- There was limited evidence of structured opportunities for talk.
- As in the upper primary years, there were varied opinions about the benefits and best balance of withdrawal and inclusion for providing struggling students with additional support.

Enacting literacy teaching practice at the whole school level

Research supports a whole school approach to literacy as a promising way to improve literacy outcomes. Although definitions, interpretations, and implementations of this approach vary, there is a common emphasis on consistency, cohesiveness, collective action, and collaboration. Importantly, a whole school approach encompasses the notion that all teachers are teachers of literacy.

Key findings:

- Staff in many schools embraced and acted on the notion of a whole school approach to literacy. However, understandings and implementation varied, including in relation to:
  - having a sustained focus across the whole school on one aspect of literacy (for example, reading, spelling or writing);
  - consistently displaying explicit learning intentions and success criteria in all classrooms; and
  - using a common language about literacy teaching as a 'non-negotiable' aspect of whole school practice.
- Most schools had initiatives in place to include families and community in a whole school approach to literacy.
- Schools that had an established whole school approach were characterised by a collaborative and collegial culture and strong leadership.

Evaluating impacts of literacy teaching practice

Evaluating the impacts of teaching practice through ongoing monitoring and regular assessment of student progress is integral to good literacy teaching practice.

Key findings:

- Schools were engaged in an intensive schedule of ongoing literacy assessment activities, collecting large amounts of data:
  - both quantitative and qualitative; and
  - generated from a range of diagnostic, formative, and summative assessment processes.
- Most school leaders encouraged the collection of multiple types and levels of data to gauge student growth and achievement.
- Most participants considered formative assessment central to good practice, including feedback from students, parents, and colleagues.
- In most schools there was strong reliance on formal testing. In some schools, quantitative data and summative assessment processes were privileged but some participants expressed concerns about the usefulness and burden of summative tests.

Teacher learning for teaching literacy

Implementing good literacy practice in schools relies to a large extent on teachers' learning—both in their initial teacher education and through continuing, in-service, professional learning. The report discusses teacher learning for teaching literacy in relation to 'conceived', 'perceived', and 'lived' spaces. Although discussed separately, these spaces overlap and are interconnected.

'Conceived' space: the policy context

International research suggests that countries with outstanding educational outcomes have teacher education systems characterised by rigorous quality assurance arrangements and strong policy in three key areas: recruitment of preservice teachers; accreditation of initial teacher education programs; and transition and full entry to the profession.

Recruitment

In Australia, there is much debate about the use and appropriate level of the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) score for entry to teaching degrees. In addition, to ensure that new teachers have the requisite skills, knowledge, and aptitudes other measures have been introduced on recruitment and later.

Key findings:

- At the time of the research, the minimum ATAR score for entry into initial teacher education at the University of Tasmania was 65.

- Consistent with national trends, enrolment data indicate that around half of students enrol into initial teacher education at the University of Tasmania by meeting requirements other than the ATAR, including mature age special entry, a VET award, or prior enrolment in a different university course.

- The Non-Academic Capability Assessment Tool (NACAT), which focuses on assessing personal traits and understandings about what it means to be a teacher, has been compulsory for all prospective teachers applying to the University of Tasmania since 2017.

Initial teacher education program accreditation

The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership is responsible for checking that all 37 Standards in the Accreditation of initial teacher education programs in Australia – Standards and Procedures (AITSL 2018) are taught, practised, and assessed before accrediting an initial teacher education program. Stage 2 accreditation must be achieved within five years of having achieved Stage 1 accreditation. The focus of Stage 2 is on the provider's interpretation of the evidence they have collected about program impact.

Key findings:

- The University of Tasmania is an accredited initial teacher education program provider and is fully compliant with the AITSL requirements.

- Three programs have achieved Stage 2 accreditation (Bed HPE; MTeach Primary; MTeach Secondary). The remaining programs (BEd EC; BEd Primary) will go through the process for Stage 2 accreditation in 2020.

Transition and entry to the profession

At the University of Tasmania, during their university studies and prior to graduation preservice teachers are assessed in various ways to ensure they are as 'classroom-ready' as possible. There is widespread research in support of the value of mentoring and induction for beginning teachers.

Key findings:

- There are two checks in relation to personal literacy at the University of Tasmania:
  - an internal faculty-based test which must be passed before the first professional experience (PE) placement; and
  - the Literacy and Numeracy Test for Initial Teacher Education (LANTITE), which must be passed prior to the final PE placement.
- The LANTITE was introduced by the federal government in 2016. The pass rate of University of Tasmania students is above the national average: 97% in 2017 (nationally: 92%) and 94% in 2018 (nationally: 90%).
- From 2019, all preservice teachers in Australia must pass the Graduate Teacher Performance Assessment (GTPA) before they can be registered to teach.
- Tasmania's Education Workforce Roundtable is prioritising mentoring and induction for new teachers as a key action.

'Perceived' space: the university context

Despite a significant body of research about preservice teacher education specifically in relation to literacy, there is no conclusive evidence or agreement about good practice in relation to university coursework for learning to teach literacy.

Key findings:

- The University of Tasmania offers a four-year Bachelor of Education (BEd) with early childhood, primary and secondary teaching specialisations, and a two-year Master of Teaching (MTeach) program with primary and secondary teaching specialisations.
- The BEd comprises 32 units, of which five are particularly relevant to preparation for teaching literacy. The MTeach comprises 18 units, of which five are particularly relevant to preparation for teaching literacy.
- All units, including literacy units, are mapped to the Teacher Professional Standards (Graduate Level) as required by AITSL accreditation guidelines.
- There were some concerns that the volume of literacy-related material in the Australian Curriculum meant that teacher educators had to juggle priorities and felt compelled to pack units densely with content.
- The sequential nature of the literacy and English units in both degree programs suggests strong vertical cohesion in terms of structure between years of study.
- Literacy was emphasised as a cross-curricular responsibility, in both the BEd and MTeach degrees, but participants noted a need to focus more on how to enact this responsibility, outside of English as a subject area.
- There were mixed views about the appropriateness of online delivery, which is increasingly common.

- Experienced practitioners and beginning teachers expressed preference for teacher-educators who had recent classroom experience and were exemplary literacy teachers themselves. All the academics who participated in this research had experience of teaching at the pre-tertiary level.

'Lived' space: the classroom context

'Lived' space refers to the classroom context both during initial teacher experience—on professional experience, and after teachers have graduated.

The classroom context during Initial Teacher Education

Field experience gained in classrooms during the practicum is universally regarded as a crucial component of initial teacher education. Research evidence suggests that field experiences can be optimised, and the learning contexts of the university and the classroom better integrated by:

- ensuring alignment between coursework and professional experience;
- having experienced classroom practitioners provide mediated support to preservice teachers; and
- providing professional experience in a range of instructional settings.

Key findings:

- It was widely agreed that there is scope to further strengthen the connections between coursework and professional experience.
- All participants thought the role of supervising colleague teachers was crucial in providing mentored support to student teachers and suggested that selection processes for this role could be strengthened to ensure quality mentorship.
- Beginning teachers who had participated in the Teacher Intern Placement Program (TIPP) generally felt better prepared than their peers who had not had the experience of internship.
- Preservice teachers were placed in schools in all sectors: government, Catholic, and independent.

The school context after Initial Teacher Education

Teacher learning continues beyond graduation from ITE. There appears to be some disjuncture between understandings of 'classroom readiness' of new teachers in the conceived/policy space and strong evidence for the vital importance of intensive support, high-quality mentoring, and comprehensive induction for early career teachers in the lived/classroom space.

Key findings:

- Most beginning teachers described their first year of teaching as a struggle, which is consistent with findings from numerous studies in other jurisdictions. Participants from all groups perceived that expectations placed on new teachers to be fully 'classroom-ready' from the outset of their careers were unreasonable.
- As a comprehensive induction delivered by the Professional Learning Institute (PLI), the Department of Education's course, Meeting the Standards: Induction for Early Career Teachers was considered useful and necessary but insufficient on its own.

- Most schools provided mentoring for beginning teachers but, in many cases, it was described as informal.
- Beginning teachers were more likely to report a successful transition in schools that provided a highly supportive environment characterised by a culture of collaboration fostered by school leaders.

Continuing professional learning and development

Teachers' professional learning should continue throughout their teaching careers. Key features of good practice in continuing professional learning and development include: a focus on student outcomes; extended interventions rather than one-off sessions; opportunities to apply new knowledge concurrently with practice; and participatory approaches that generate a sense of shared purpose.

There is only sparse research establishing the types of in-service learning likely to have a positive impact specifically on literacy teaching. However, attention to three key areas shows promising results: school leadership, in-school coaching by literacy specialists, and collegial observation.

Key findings:

- While input from external 'literacy experts' was highly valued, there was an observable trend towards in-school professional learning with a focus on practice, and this was most often experienced in professional learning teams (PLTs).
- In-school literacy coaches played a pivotal role in teacher development, especially by enabling teachers to engage in data analysis to inform literacy teaching practice.
- The Principals as Literacy Leaders (PALL) program was highly valued by school leaders who had had the opportunity to participate in the program.
- Collegial observation was regarded as a highly valuable form of professional learning for building teacher capacity schoolwide.

Conclusions

Literacy teaching and teacher learning for literacy are interconnected aspects of professional practice, part of an ecosystem of interdependencies. The breadth of the Review across these matters has afforded high-level insights to emerge from the research, most of which apply to the work of all staff: in schools, in business units in the Department, and in the University. In brief, these insights suggest literacy teaching and learning in Tasmania, and elsewhere, will benefit from:

1. collaboration and communication among key actors (also see p. 187);

2. a toolkit of good literacy teaching strategies;

3. pedagogy that is 'fit for purpose';

4. consistency, but not conformity;

5. systematic and appropriate monitoring; and

6. commitment to and support for lifelong learning.

Section 1. Introduction

This report represents the culmination of the *Review of Literacy Teaching, Training, and Practice in Government Schools* conducted by the Peter Underwood Centre for Educational Attainment and commissioned by the Tasmanian Department of Education (hereafter also referred to as DoE or the Department). The research team is supported by a project reference group drawn from the Department. In this fifth and final report key learnings from the project are integrated and distilled, and lead to conclusions and implications for a range of stakeholders.

The full three-year review involved several phases. Phase 1 consisted of two literature reviews. The report from the first literature review is entitled *Teaching Literacy: Review of Literature* (Doyle, Te Riele, Stratford, & Stewart, 2017) and the second review is entitled *Initial Teacher Education for Teaching Literacy: Review of Literature* (Stewart, Emery, Te Riele, & Stratford, 2018).

Phases 2 and 3 comprised empirical research. Phase 2 was conducted in Tasmanian government schools and the report is entitled *Literacy Teaching Practice in Tasmanian Government Schools* (Stewart, Te Riele, & Stratford, 2018). Phase 3 involved data collection from pre-service teacher education at the University of Tasmania (UTAS) and with beginning teachers employed by Department and centred on investigating teacher preparation for teaching literacy. The Phase 3 report had not been published at the time of writing. Phase 4 focused on a synthesis of the findings from Phases 1, 2, and 3, together with further analysis of relevant scholarly literature and other publications, leading to this report.

1.1 Background and context

In March 2017, the Department contracted the Peter Underwood Centre to undertake targeted research as part of its *Review of Literacy Teaching, Training, and Practice in Government Schools*. The Review forms part of a state-wide agenda to improve engagement, retention, and outcomes for Tasmanian school students, and links directly to the Department's Strategic Plan goal that 'learners have the skills and confidence in Literacy and Numeracy to successfully participate in learning, life and work' (Department of Education Tasmania, 2018).

The project has entailed several phases involving both primary and secondary research.

In **Phase 1**, two literature reviews were conducted. Phase 1a focused on literature relating to the teaching of literacy in schools, reviewing existing research in this area and providing the context for the first piece of empirical research (Phase 2). In Phase 1b, attention turned to literature about preparing student teachers for teaching literacy, provided an overview of the literature related to initial teacher education and focused on preparation for teaching literacy. This review served to contextualise the second piece of empirical research (Phase 3).

Phase 2, Review of Practice in Schools, explored current literacy teaching practice in Tasmanian Government schools. Specifically, the research in this phase investigated school staff understandings of literacy as well as their literacy practices at both the whole school level and in individual classrooms from Kindergarten to Year 10. The research also examined how school staff assess the effectiveness of their literacy

teaching strategies. The findings were delineated in ways mindful of the broader context and varied factors that influence literacy teaching and student outcomes.

The fieldwork for Phase 2 involved:

- 28 schools around Tasmania: 21 primary schools, five secondary schools, and two combined schools;

- key school documentation, such as annual reports and literacy plans; and

- semi-structured interviews with 184 participants: 71 class room teachers, 63 leaders, 27 literacy-specific staff,[2] 13 teacher assistants, five non-teaching allied professional support staff, and five parent volunteers.

Ethics approval for the Phase 2 research was granted by the University of Tasmania Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) (Tasmania) Network in two stages to enable document collection to occur prior to conducting interviews (H0016589 and H0016615). Ethics clearance was also required and granted by the Department's Educational Performance Research Committee (File nos. 2017–21 and 2017–23).

Phase 3, Initial Teacher Education for Teaching Literacy, investigated how pre-service teachers (PSTs) are prepared for teaching literacy. Specifically, the research in this Phase focused on initial teacher education (ITE) offerings at the University of Tasmania. It identified areas of strength and weakness in the delivery of the skills, knowledge, and practices considered necessary to effectively teach literacy, as well as possible changes to delivery, course offering, and structure of pre-service training to improve how pre-service teachers are 'made ready' for teaching literacy.

The fieldwork for Phase 3 involved:

- documentation provided by the University, primarily unit outlines for 10 relevant units in the Bachelor of Education (BEd) and Master of Teaching (MTeach) programs;

- semi-structured interviews with 59 participants (nine academics from the Faculty of Education, 11 beginning teachers, and 39 experienced classroom practitioners who participated in Phase 2 of our research); and

- online surveys with eight final year initial teacher education students and 70 beginning teachers.

Ethics approval for the Phase 3 research was granted by the University of Tasmania Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) (Tasmania) Network (H0017501). Approval was also required and granted by the Department's Educational Performance Research Committee (File No. 2018–51) for the survey of beginning teachers. Phase 2 interview data drawn on for this report are covered by the approvals for that Phase (UTAS H0016615 and DoE File No. 2017–23).

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2   At the time that our Phase 2 fieldwork was conducted in 2017, schools employed a mix of literacy-specific staff. Some schools had Literacy Specialist Teachers, who worked directly with students requiring additional literacy support in Years 6–8; other schools had Literacy Coaches funded through the 'Raising the Bar' initiative. These positions were phased out by the end of 2018 and replaced by Literacy Coaches to provide 'at-the-shoulder support for teachers to develop and maintain effective literacy practices and ensure that all literacy instruction is aligned with the Literacy Framework' (Department of Education Tasmania, 2019, p.3). All schools now have access to a Literacy Coach.

Phase 4 (for this report) synthesises (a) key findings from relevant and respected literature about good literacy teaching practice and the preparation of pre-service teachers for teaching literacy and (b) the empirical research findings investigating these two areas in Tasmania.

1.1.1 Key definitions

By way of further background to this report, key terms used in the project are briefly revisited and use of terminology is clarified.

Literacy

Literacy in this project is understood in terms of the broad definitions provided by Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) for the Australian Curriculum. The Australian Curriculum defines literacy as 'the knowledge, skills and dispositions to interpret and use language confidently for learning and communicating in and out of school and for participating effectively in society' (ACARA, no date). A distinction is made between literacy as a general capability and the English learning area in the Australian Curriculum (AC: E). Literacy as a general capability involves students listening to, reading, viewing, speaking, writing and creating oral, print, visual, and digital texts, and using and modifying language for different purposes in a range of contexts. AC: E relates to the three interrelated strands of language, literature and literacy and is focused on developing students' knowledge, understanding and skills in listening, reading, viewing, speaking, writing, and creating.

Initial teacher education

Initial teacher education, also known as pre-service teacher education, is completed prior to entering the teaching profession and, in Australia, means gaining a tertiary qualification at a university. This qualification is usually a requirement for teacher registration, which "licences" people to teach in schools (Yeigh & Lynch, 2017).

In Australia and similar jurisdictions, the undergraduate qualification is a bachelor's degree. That qualification generally comprises three to four years of university study and a fieldwork component in schools. Alternatively, entry to a postgraduate diploma or Master of Teaching program entails formal study shorter in duration than, and following completion of, a bachelor's degree in another field. In Australia, initial teacher education programs must be accredited for graduates to be eligible to register as teachers. Accreditation requires programs to demonstrate adherence to the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers* (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2018; Darling-Hammond, 2017; Ellis *et al.*, 2012; Lynch, 2012).

1.1.2 The policy environment

To locate this report and the broader project of which it is a part in their historical and political contexts, a brief overview is provided of key federal and state policy reform initiatives that have influenced both literacy teaching in schools and ways teachers have been prepared for teaching literacy.[3]

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3   For a more detailed discussion of the policy context for this project, see Section 2 of Phase 1b report (*Stewart et al.*, 2018).

Both school education and initial teacher education have been subject to significant scrutiny and increased national regulation in the past decade and a half. This oversight has involved a push for 'standardisation' and tighter regulation of schooling, the teaching profession, and teacher education providers.

National school reforms

Key reforms in school education shaping the teaching of literacy were triggered by the release of the *National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy* (Rowe, 2005). That report was strongly influenced by another—the United States report *Teaching Children to Read* (National Reading Panel, 2000)—and its authors argued that in the first three years of school the most effective approach to teaching reading is to explicitly focus on phonics, phonemics, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension. They explicitly cautioned against using a whole-language approach, concluding that this approach is 'not in the best interests of children, particularly those experiencing reading difficulties' (Rowe, 2005, p.12).

Other national initiatives that have had, or are likely to have, a significant impact on the teaching of literacy include the:

• release of the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (Ministerial Council on Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs, 2008)*, which described literacy and numeracy as essential skills and committed all state governments and sectors to joint action;[4]

• establishment of the *Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority* (ACARA) and the administration of the first *National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy* (NAPLAN) tests in 2008;[5]

• launch of the *My School* website in 2010, which included school-level data on NAPLAN test results;

• release in 2012 of *The Shape of the Australian Curriculum (version 4.0)*, which specified that the Australian Curriculum would include a strong focus on literacy and numeracy skills;

• release in 2018 of the *National Literacy and Numeracy Learning Progressions* by ACARA which are intended to enable teachers to better identify student growth;

• release in 2018 of the Gonski 2.0 report, *Through Growth to Achievement*, which prioritised the acquisition of foundation skills in literacy and numeracy in curriculum delivery during the early years of schooling; and

• *Review of NAPLAN Data Presentation* commissioned by the Education Council of the Coalition of Australian Governments (COAG) and provided its report in June 2019. It recommended that student improvement rather than school comparisons be the focus of the My School website.[6]

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4   In 2018, the federal Minister for Education, Dan Tehan, announced an update of the Melbourne Declaration. However, at the time of writing this report a new Declaration had not yet been published.

5   Technical difficulties with NAPLAN Online in 2019 resulted in Minister Tehan announcing an independent review of NAPLAN Online. See https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-03-07/naplan-call-review-after-report-reveals-no-change-in-decade/9519840.

6   The Terms of Reference for the Review focused largely on the presentation and use of data. The review therefore did not address calls for COAG to completely overhaul NAPLAN, leading some, including the Gonski Institute, to argue the review did not go far enough (https://www.smh.com.au/education/naplan-review-calls-for-focus-on-improvement-not-comparisons-20190626-p521lw.html).

National initial teacher education reforms

Initial teacher education has been directly affected by several inquiries that had common emphasis on teaching standards. Specific initiatives that have set parameters for the work of initial teacher education providers include the:

- establishment in 2010 of the *Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership* (AITSL), with a core function to develop and maintain national professional standards for teachers and school leaders;

- passage of the *Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency* (TEQSA) Act (2011) requiring all initial teacher education providers to ensure their programs comply with Higher Education Standards;

- introduction of the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2011)*;

- introduction of the *Accreditation of Initial Teacher Education Programs in Australia (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2015, 2018)*;

- release of a report by the Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group (TEMAG) entitled *Action Now: Classroom Ready Teachers (Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group, 2014)* that recommended a new approach to initial teacher education;

- implementation of the *Literacy and Numeracy Test for Initial Teacher Education* (LANTITE) in 2016; and

- introduction in 2018 of the *Graduate Teacher Performance Assessment* (GTPA), which is expected to generate large-scale evidence of beginning teacher quality.

The Tasmanian context

Both as part of and in addition to national reforms and programs, the Tasmanian Government has implemented initiatives to lift literacy levels and improve teacher quality. The Department of Education's 2019–2022 *Literacy Framework* was released in October 2018 (see Appendix A) and its associated *Literacy Plan for Action* was released in March 2019, followed by the *Implementation Plan* in May 2019. The Framework and the Plans apply to the whole Department, including schools, Child and Family Centres and libraries. They were developed through extensive consultation with Department, industry, and community stakeholders and are meant to guide decision-making, resource allocation, and improvement planning. Building on what is currently working, the Action Plan explores what needs to be done differently to achieve system-wide improvement in literacy outcomes.

The *Literacy Plan for Action 2019–2022* is guided by the 2018–2021 Department of Education Strategic Plan, which identifies improved outcomes in literacy and numeracy as one of its four overarching goals. The Plan is also informed by the *Melbourne Declaration*, *Tasmania's Strategy for Children – Pregnancy to Eight 2018–2021*, and *26TEN Tasmania: Tasmania's Strategy for Adult Literacy and Numeracy 2016–2025*. Three system priorities are articulated in the Plan, each with three key actions (Table 1)[7].

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7   The 2019–2022 Department of Education Literacy Framework, Plan for Action and Implementation Plan may be viewed here: https://www.education.tas.gov.au/about-us/projects/literacy-framework-plan-action/

Table 1: System priorities and key actions – Literacy Plan for Action 2019–2022, Department of Education Tasmania

System Priorities	Key Actions
Attention to the importance of oral, augmentative, and alternative communication for literacy learning	• Develop a public campaign to promote the importance of oral language • Build on the collaborative culture between speech and language pathologists and educators for a more coherent approach to improve oral, augmentative and alternative communication • Increase access and support for learners to improve oral, augmentative and alternative communication
Consistent and aligned practices that are informed by evidence	• Provide system-wide guidance for literacy learning through the effective teaching of English for literacy learning across the curriculum • Provide evidence-based and endorsed resources to support effective teaching of English for literacy learning across the curriculum • Provide quality and targeted professional learning to build the capacity of educators to improve their teaching of English for literacy learning
Valid and reliable measures of impact and student growth	• Develop clear expectations and guidelines to build system-wide understanding of the measurement of learner growth in literacy • Implement the tools and supports for effective measurement of learner growth in literacy • Implement the tools and supports

In relation to teaching, the University of Tasmania is collaborating with the Tasmanian Government on workforce development strategy, including internships for pre-service teachers and accredited courses for in-service learning such as the Graduate Certificate in Inclusive Education. A major and innovative initiative is the Minister's *Education Workforce Roundtable*, established in 2018. The Roundtable includes leaders from the Department of Education, University of Tasmania, Teachers Registration Board of Tasmania, Tasmanian Principals Association, Australian Education Union, and Peter Underwood Centre for Educational Attainment.

The Roundtable has developed the More Teachers, Quality Teaching Action Plan.[8] As part of the 2019 State Budget, the Tasmanian Government has committed funding over four years to deliver three priority elements of that plan:

• a review of the Teacher Intern Placement program and provision for additional placements;

• Teacher Success Profile assessments that provide for the establishment of quality assessment protocols that will be applied at critical teaching career touchpoints; and

• a trial to introduce Highly Accomplished and Lead Teacher certification for Tasmanian teachers.

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8 https://documentcentre.education.tas.gov.au/Documents/Workforce%20Roundtable%20Action%20 Plan.pdf

1.1.3 The research, policy, and practice nexus

National and state education policies and reforms are informed by research and create an environment that influences whether and how implications from research may be acted on by teachers and by initial teacher education providers.

Recognition of the nexus among research, policy, and practice has led to the widespread use of the term 'evidence-based practice' in education and in other professions. However, confusion has been created by the use of many terms such as 'best practice', 'effective practice', 'best evidence', 'research-based', which are often used synonymously despite differences in their meaning (Hornby *et al.*, 2013 cited in Foster, 2014, p.50).

Different kinds of research have different contributions to make and different paradigms generate different types of evidence.

The traditional understanding of *evidence-based practice* involves an evaluation of evidence in accordance with a perceived hierarchy where certain methodological approaches, such as quantitative population studies and randomised controlled trials, are considered more 'rigorous' and thought to lead to stronger evidence for 'best' or 'effective' practice. The benefit of these methods is their ability to produce findings with statistical significance that have strong validity at an aggregate level. However, they tend to reduce nuance and complexity in teaching (Hayes *et al.*, 2017; Jensen *et al.*, 2019). Duke and Martin (2011, p.19) suggest that it is therefore misleading to position randomised controlled trials (RCTs,) for example, as the 'gold standard' in educational research because 'the educational enterprise is far too complex for one type of research to answer all our questions or meet all our needs'. It comes down to the 'fitness for purpose' of each method.

However, as Jensen *et al.* (2019, p.2) point out, scale and complexity are 'dual imperatives' in teaching effectiveness research and so the 'inescapable tension' between them must be addressed if education policy is to be enacted with adequate conceptualisation of evidence (see also Darling-Hammond *et al.*, 2010). Therefore, a broad interpretation of evidence-informed practice incorporates both scholarly research and practice-based evidence—that is, evidence generated by education practitioners (Lingard & Renshaw, 2010).

Practice-based evidence involves the use of teaching expertise and professional judgment to gather and synthesise evidence obtained during practice. Practice-based evidence is captured in the idea of the 'evidence ecosystem' (Evidence for Learning cited in Vaughan *et al.*, 2017, p.35) which is informed by three principles:

1. To effect change in practice, the use of research by practitioners needs to be understood.

2. Placing frontline professionals and students at the heart of the work requires updates to thinking about their roles in research and evidence. They cannot be regarded as passive recipients of knowledge but as active generators of new knowledge.

3. The relationship between frontline professionals engaging in a cycle of impact evaluation in their schools and other contributors in the wider evidence chain must be one of mutual dependence in a network of shared pursuit to improving educational outcomes.

A focus on 'good' practice rather than 'best' practice

According to the International Reading Association (2002), the quest to find the 'best' or 'most effective' programs for teaching literacy has largely been unsuccessful. This lack of success is attributed to a mistaken emphasis on the materials teachers use rather than on what they do routinely in their engagement with students. In contrast to discrepant findings in studies designed to identify programs that 'work', studies examining practices that have led to highly consistent results provide evidence of strong relationships between specific practices and student achievement.

While the term 'best practice' is ubiquitous in both policy and practice documents, the authors of the International Reading Association report share both Biesta's (2007) ambivalence about the use of the term and McWilliams's[9] concerns about the problematic assumptions on which it is based. McWilliams outlines these concerns as follows. Best practice:

1. assumes the existence of a definite set of pedagogical activities that locates someone as the 'knower' of this type of practice, and others as 'un-knowers', reinforcing a hierarchical relationship between 'experts' as 'suppliers' and practitioners as passive recipients;

2. tends to position teachers as technicians required to follow set procedures fostering a culture of dependency and imitation, rather than as professionals expected to utilise their adaptive expertise;

3. assumes that optimal activities can be 'delivered' by external experts without the need for 'translation' to local and specific classroom conditions;

4. assumes a consistent and known quality of implementation only achievable in mechanical and/or automated systems that are not relevant in education practice;

5. may lead teachers to pay less attention to the quality of implementation, which may normalise suboptimal quality practices within classrooms; and

6. ignores the changing contexts of implementation, implying a degree of fixity inconsistent with ongoing changes.

In this report, therefore, the term 'good' practice is used in preference to 'best' practice in recognition of the constantly evolving state of knowledge about literacy learning and teaching. While 'there are still missing pieces in the evidence ecosystem' (Vaughan *et al.*, 2017, p.35), the report assembles a comprehensive snapshot of evidence of good and improving practice in literacy teaching and teacher education for teaching literacy occurring locally in Tasmania and reflected in Australian and international scholarship.

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9   See http://www.ericamcwilliam.com.au/beyond-best-practice-how-teacher-improvement-actually-works/

1.2 Phase 4 synthesis

The aim of Phase 4 is to integrate the findings from Phases 1 to 3 of the *Review of Literacy Teaching, Training, and Practice in Government Schools* project, draw out the key learnings, and outline implications for possible action by policy makers, schools, initial teacher education providers, and education researchers.

1.2.1 Method

The method of synthesis entails three steps, outlined below.

Highlighting the key findings

Mindful of the pitfalls of making pronouncements about 'what works' (see section 1.1.3), the authors draw on multiple sources of evidence generated throughout the project to make connections between:

- *scholarly literature* about good literacy teaching practice and the preparation of pre-service teachers for teaching literacy (that is, what the literature says about *what works*, *in what circumstances/under what conditions*); and

- *empirical research* investigating

  – current literacy teaching practice (that is, *literacy teaching practice happening* in Tasmanian government schools) and

  – initial teacher education for teaching literacy (that is, *how preservice teachers are prepared* for teaching literacy in initial teacher education programs at the University of Tasmania).

Comparing current practice with good practice

Current practice is discussed in light of what research suggests is good practice in teaching literacy in schools as well as in relation to good practice development in pre-service and in-service learning for teaching literacy.

The Phase 1a and Phase 1b literature reviews provide key sources of scholarly literature. These have been updated with additional, recent literature searches, incorporating suggestions from recognised literacy experts who were invited to recommend sources they regard highly.

On that basis, this report draws primarily on three types of research syntheses: large-scale systematic reviews conducted by teams of researchers; edited handbooks, also generally compiled by teams of researchers; and individual analyses of literacy topics. A series of vignettes placed throughout the report highlight key points, putting the project's research findings into dialogue with the scholarly literature.

Articulating the implications

Inferring relationships across sources of evidence, the report draws conclusions and suggests areas for action for stakeholders. While the project in general dives into two distinct areas of research and practice—literacy teaching and teacher learning for teaching literacy—this report specifically puts the case that these two fields are inextricably linked, and it highlights connections between contexts for learning and teaching in classrooms and schools and at the university. In this endeavour, the

authors hope to illuminate important implications for stakeholders and participants in this project, and to contribute to ongoing conversations among literacy scholars, practitioners, and policy-makers.

1.2.2 Framework for the report

The report is structured in ten sections and divided into two parts. Part 1 focuses on literacy teaching practice in schools. Part 2 turns to teacher learning for teaching literacy.

Following this introductory section, section 2 discusses understandings and influences on literacy teaching practice. Section 3 focuses on how practice is enacted in classrooms, across the range of school year groupings (that is, K–2, 3–6, and 7–10). Section 4 looks at practice at the whole school level. Section 5 attends to evaluating the impacts of practice.

Part 2 of the report begins with section 6 which provides an overview of initial teacher education. Sections 7, 8 and 9 are framed in terms of three spaces (Soja, 1996) of teacher education both during and after initial teacher education: the 'conceived' space of policy; the 'perceived' space of the university; and the 'lived' space of the classroom.

Finally, Section 10 draws conclusions about the current state of literacy teaching practice and teacher learning for teaching literacy in Tasmania, pointing to the implications for change, outlining what needs to happen to close any identified gaps between *current* practice and *good* practice.

Part 1:
Literacy teaching practice in schools

Section 2. Understandings and influences

In Part 1 of this report the literature about good literacy teaching practice is considered in relation to the project's research findings exploring current literacy teaching practice(s) in Tasmanian government schools. Section 2 begins with a discussion of understandings of literacy that underpin teaching practice and provides a brief overview of the factors known to influence literacy development.

2.1 Understandings of literacy that underpin practice

All teachers bring to their teaching their own understandings and beliefs about literacy that inevitably influence their daily classroom practice and decision-making. Implicit and explicit theories about literacy, learning, and teaching contribute to shaping schooling environments and the contexts in which children learn to become literate (Flint *et al.*, 2014; Flint *et al.*, 2019).

Although approaches to teaching literacy are sometimes hotly contested, those in the debate agree on the importance of literacy for individuals and for society. This consensus in both the literature and in the findings from this research is highlighted in vignette 1.

The changing meaning of literacy: dynamic and involving multiple connected processes

Conceptualisations of literacy and what it means to 'be literate' have changed dramatically over past 20 to 30 years (Frankel *et al.*, 2016). Ideas about the meaning of literacy are thus in flux and subject to ongoing change, evolving to accommodate the changing needs of society.

Participants in this research frequently articulated an understanding of the dynamic nature of the meaning of literacy and the role of schools in equipping young people with:

> the tools to understand the world and to be able to communicate, and analyse, and [develop] all the skills that you need in adulthood … to be a critical person, really … They used to call all of that three Rs in the old days … but now, I think it's a whole lot more. I think digital technologies are a huge part of literacy. [PS-CT]

Noting that 'understandings of literacy and what it entails will change as technology advances' [PS-CT], some schools were 'gradually moving into more digital literacy … equipping our kids for the move to digital learning and digital literacy'. [PS-P]

A few participants also specifically noted visual literacy as an aspect of 21st century multimodal literacy, emphasising the importance of 'seeing signs and seeing pictures, seeing video, and being able to understand the messages that are being communicated in that' [CS-CT]:

especially in today's times with a lot of social media and instantaneous access to news … everything's on film, everything's on video, pictorial, all that sort of thing [CS-AST].

Significantly, these understandings were also characterised by a view of literacy as involving multiple connected processes (Van Merriënboer & Kirschner, 2017), including those needed to make informed decisions about using interrelated skills flexibly and with confidence.

In the present research, those participants who held such a view described literacy as gathering and filtering information, supported by an ability to 'unpack, infer, understand, analyse, evaluate' [PS-TA]. Thus, for example, literacy so understood, involves:

> thinking about who your audience is when you're writing, being a critical reader when you're reading, being able to discern fact from fiction … and drawing out key ideas when you're reading information texts and synthesising those to be able to communicate them. [PS-LS]

2.1.1 Complex understandings

Frankel and colleagues (2016) offer a useful overview of four key shifts in thinking about literacy that have increased in salience over time. These are that literacy:

- involves both productive and receptive processes;
- is grounded in and shaped by social and cultural practices;
- varies across disciplinary contexts; and
- is multimodal, introducing both new complications and possibilities.

These four key changes mean that learners' experiences of texts today are different from those experiences had by their parents and grand-parents and involve literacy practices rapidly changing from print-based and linear modes, to digital and multimodal forms. It is 'no longer feasible to speak of literacy as if it were a unitary concept' (Fehring, 2005, p.95).

These shifts are reflected in contemporary understandings of what it means to assist learners to become literate adults and are also evident in the definition of literacy formulated by ACARA (see section 1) and are echoed in the Australian Literacy Educators' Association (2015) Declaration: Literacy in the 21st Century:

> Literacy is the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute, using printed and written (and visual) materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy involves a continuum of learning to enable an individual to achieve his or her goals, to develop his or her knowledge and potential and to participate fully in the wider society. (adapted from the UNESCO Education Position Paper, 2004)[10]

In this study, participants in schools (Phase 2, see section 1.1) were asked how literacy is understood in their school. Just over three quarters of participants (76%) gave responses that reflected the key shifts in thinking outlined by Frankel *et al.* (2016) and that are evident in the Australian Curriculum and in much of the literacy

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10 The plurality of literacy and the implications of its policies and programs and can be accessed at:

teaching good practice literature (see Hayes *et al.*, 2017; Sheils, 2012; Westraadt, 2016). The comments from one early years teacher illustrate this broader awareness:

> Well, I guess the automatic response is you think about reading and writing, but it's so much more than that. It's beyond just the knowledge and skills of reading and writing. It's actually allowing the children to make meaning … and being able to use it in their world. [PS-CT]

Literacy is productive and receptive

Literacy entails both productive processes as well as receptive processes that are more alike than different (Smagorinsky, 2001). This combination is mirrored in the Australian Curriculum,[11] where two key organising elements for literacy as a general capability are composing texts (speaking, writing, and creating) and comprehending texts (listening, reading, and viewing). These two elements are woven across the literacy continuum from level 1 (early years) to level 6 (Year 10). One participant summed up this twin focus by referring to students as 'prosumers' of texts.

> The way texts are constantly changing and evolving with technology, we really look at literacy as the ability to consume and produce. So, we try to see kids as prosumers. [That is] they can access texts, understand how they're made and, therefore, produce them themselves for different audiences, purposes, etc. So, if we want them to be persuasive writers, they need to be able to first consume persuasive writing, understand what it is, the text features, the structures, the language features, etc. before they then become producers of persuasive writing [themselves]. [HS-AP]

Literacy is socio-culturally constructed

Literacy develops in the context of social practices that are culturally and historically based (Cole, 1996; Vygotsky, 1978). The historical aspect is taken up in the Australian Curriculum: English (AC: E), which 'provides students with a broad conceptual understanding of what a language is' and uses 'historical and linguistic accounts of the English language which draw attention to the ways in which languages change'.[12] The cultural aspect helps to highlight that literacy is also about critical and civic engagement with society (Cazden *et al.*, 1996; Luke, 2003a). As the rationale for the AC: E puts it, literacy 'helps create confident communicators, imaginative thinkers and informed citizens.'[13]

This aspect of literacy was noted by participants in the present research, who highlighted, for example, that ultimately literacy is 'about having the tools to understand the world and to be able to communicate, and analyse, and having all the skills that you need in adulthood … even thinking and listening, and being a critical person' [PS-CT], 'able to discern fact from fiction' [PS-LS].

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11   https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/general-capabilities/literacy/
12   https://australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/english/rationale/
13   https://australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/english/rationale/

VIGNETTE 1: The importance of literacy

The report from the *National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy* (Rowe, 2005, pp. 4-5) highlights that:

> literacy competence is foundational, not only for school-based learning, but also for students' psychosocial wellbeing, further education and training, occupational success, as well as productive and fulfilling participation in social and economic activity.

In addition, Luke (2003b; 2012) argues that literacy enables people to make sense of the world and is a form of socio-cultural capital for civic engagement.

There was widespread agreement among participants in this study that literacy is a foundational capability necessary for learning in school and for functioning successfully in life. School personnel were committed to fulfilling their responsibilities to ensure that students achieved their literacy development milestones and left school prepared for life as literate and productive community members.

Literacy was regarded as crucial for learning and 'being able to understand what's going on in the classroom' [PS-LT], a pre-requisite for accessing the whole curriculum, without which 'other learning just doesn't happen' [PS-P]. Many participants emphasised the point that being literate 'underpins everything we do in the classroom' [PS-AST] and is needed 'to function in other disciplines' [PS-CT].

Participants said in general terms that they and their schools focused on students being literate, so they can 'function as a part of the greater world' [PS-AP]. One school leader said: 'I think most of our teachers would consider literacy to be the skills, dispositions, and knowledge we want students to have so that they can operate in society' [PS-P].

Indeed, being literate was seen as an essential capability to succeed in life (Ball & Freedman, 2004), whether it was used for purely functional purposes such as 'reading a timetable to go and catch a bus … or reading the television guide' [PS-CT], or to 'access higher level thinking' [HS-CT]. Adding a layer of nuance that is suggestive of the critical thinking dimensions of literacy noted by Cazden *et al*. (1996), one primary school teacher described literacy as being 'about making connections … and understanding how everything is connected, interconnected' [PS-CT].

In this context, several participants invoked the metaphor of a 'key' that 'unlocks' potential:

> [Literacy] opens the doors for so much in life, doesn't it? I mean, future jobs. It's just such a huge thing. I'm finding it difficult to put into words … to give it the justice it deserves. There's so much: listening, speaking, reading, writing, and opportunities to create and solve problems, to communicate. It's just so huge. And the way society is—for you to contribute and participate in meaningful ways. [PS-LT]

As one of the 'foundation pillars of all learning … for lifelong learning' [PS-P], literacy was seen by participants as an education-enabler and as a life-enabler (see Trilling & Fadel, 2012). Many spoke in terms of literacy giving students the ability to 'share their wonder' [PS-P] and 'read the world around them' [PS-CT]. One parent's definition captured this idea succinctly: 'It's how you communicate and manage the world really, isn't it?' [PS-PV].

Literacy varies across disciplines and is also cross-curricular

Literacy is enacted in school settings in disciplines such as the humanities, social sciences, mathematics, and science, all informed by their own knowledges, inquiry practices, conceptual frameworks, texts, and language conventions (Goldman *et al.*, 2016). This aspect of literacy is made explicit in the Australian Curriculum, where a specific icon is inserted whenever literacy is relevant, in text describing the various learning areas. Highlighting the crucial role teachers play across all disciplines, the Australian Curriculum[14] states that all teachers must understand 'the literacy demands and opportunities of their learning area/s' and 'are responsible for teaching the subject-specific literacy of their learning area/s'.

Participants in the present research who demonstrated an expanded understanding of literacy tended to be vocal about it as a cross-curricular capability, vigorously expressing the view that literacy was not 'just a subject' but crossed all curriculum areas 'across the whole day's learning' [PS-CT]. This idea is illustrated by comments from an early years teacher: 'Well, I mean, literacy is such a broad and encompassing area and it permeates so many different areas' [PS-CT]. As a primary school leader put it: 'Literacy is a basic building block that pervades all subject areas, from kindergarten to year six' [PS-P].

Literacy is multimodal

Juxtaposing literacy modalities beyond written language—for example, in sound, image, or gesture—brings both complications and possibilities to making meaning from multimodal texts (Kress, 2003). Such multimodal texts are explicitly included in the Australian Curriculum, which explains these as 'combining language with other means of communication such as visual images, soundtrack or spoken words, as in film or computer presentation media'. This conceptualisation of literacy is also reflected in the Department's articulation of the meanings of literacy across a range of domains, as outlined in the *2019–2022 Literacy Framework* (Department of Education, Tasmania, 2019).

In the present study, participants who understood literacy as multimodal and multifaceted recognised the significance of students being able to draw on a range of linguistic and visual resources to produce and access information, and to make effective choices in consuming and producing text. One literacy support teacher said:

> In this school, literacy is about working with a range of texts both written and multimodal. It's about developing deep comprehension in students. It's about being able to create a range of flexible text types but also knowing how those text types are put together. [PS-LT]

Recognising the wide range of text types to which literacy applies, another participant described literacy as:

> the ability to make meaning from texts, which can be anything … from a novel to a DVD or a poster or [some other] form. Whatever it is, literacy is simply the ability to make meaning from texts, whether it's visual, or written, or spoken. [HS-TA]

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14 https://australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/general-capabilities/literacy/

In relation to digital literacy, it is worth noting that a recent national survey of 1,000 teachers and principals in Australia conducted by the Gonski Institute has found that excessive screen time may have negative effects on children and young people's literacy development. Noting an association between adolescents' declining writing standards (as measured by NAPLAN) and their growing inability to engage deeply with texts, the Growing Up Digital Australia study suggests that while 'digital technology has transformed education' (in some ways enhancing learning opportunities), it is proving to be a 'double-edged sword', with skimming, browsing and word-spotting becoming 'the new normal' for young brains reconfigured for digital reading.[15]

2.1.2 Tight understandings

Broader and more complex understandings of literacy as outlined in 2.1.1 are now widely accepted by scholars, policy-makers, and at the chalkface, as was evident in this research. However, Unsworth *et al.* (2019, p.128) argue that there is 'an educational chasm' between the Australian Curriculum—which recognises the requirements for the development of multimodal literacy—and 'the very substantially mono-modal literacy of the reading tests of the Australian National Assessment Program in Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN)'. Not surprisingly, this latter approach has provided fertile ground for more tight understandings of literacy to persist. These were reflected in responses from a significant minority (24%) of participants in the present research.

Print-based emphasis and a focus on 'the mechanics'

The general move towards 'standardisation' in education alluded to in Section 1 arguably runs counter to embracing more complex notions of literacy and risks encouraging a restricted print-based view. Moreover, some influential sources equate literacy with reading and writing and, in particular, with learning to read and write. A prominent example is the *National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy* (Rowe, 2005), which focused solely on reading. Given this disjuncture between scholarly definitions and curriculum guidelines on the one hand, and literacy assessment and monitoring regimes as well as (some) policy reports on the other, divergent conceptualisations of literacy among practitioners are to be expected.

Participants reflecting narrower interpretations of literacy tended to emphasise print-based literacy, suggesting understandings that were strongly shaped by their school's emphasis on literacy testing and assessment. Generally, these responses emphasised the skills conventionally associated with literacy, reading, and writing. One participant stated that, for them, 'it's the ability to read and write' [PS-TA]. Another described literacy as 'the ability to understand and use words. That's it. Brief, but that's how I see literacy' [HS-AST]. A school psychologist told us:

> My understanding of the term literacy is how we engage with the code letters, and then words, and how we make meaning of print, and how we produce that. So how we encode and decode and how functional that is. [PS-PSY]

Interestingly, a few participants qualified their responses, emphasising that what they shared with us reflected how they thought literacy was primarily understood at their schools, suggesting that their own understanding was probably broader. For example, one said:

> Well, I think that here at this school … it's probably thought of as students' ability to read and write. As simple as that. (HS-LS)

One participant made the point that 'literacy here is sort of the nuts and bolts of language basically' [HS-CT], or as another put it 'the mechanics' [PS-AST] of language, reflecting a focus on the NAPLAN literacy domains of reading, writing, and the language conventions of spelling, grammar and punctuation. These responses illustrate the tension, noted by Unsworth *et al.* (2019), between the broad Australian Curriculum guidance for literacy teaching and mandated centralised large-scale testing approaches to literacy assessment, which are prioritised in some schools.

Literacy as 'English'

To some extent, differences among teaching staff reflected the stage of schooling with which they were involved. For example, on average, slightly more secondary school teachers (36%) than primary school teachers (21%) gave responses suggestive of a narrower, more specific, understanding of literacy, largely delimited as the province of teachers of English. Consistent with a tendency noted in the literature (see Ewing, 2016), we found that high school teachers were more likely than their primary teaching peers to equate literacy with the curriculum area of English as a subject.

Overall, most people interviewed across the 28 schools in Tasmania reflected the more complex understandings of literacy now widely advocated in research, policy, and professional organisations. Nevertheless, there is a clear role for professional learning around the meaning of literacy, since people's practice is informed by their perceptions and understandings. Approaches to capacity building are taken up in Part 2 of this report.

2.2 Factors influencing literacy development

A major evidence-based review of literacy development by Breadmore *et al.* (2019) in the United Kingdom concludes that to maximise every child's chances of reaching their full potential, educators need to consider both the proximal and distal factors that affect literacy development. Neglecting such consideration, they argue, results in a failure to understand how and why some children struggle with literacy and fall behind their peers.

2.2.1 Proximal factors

Proximal factors directly affect literacy development and include the skills used to make links between spoken sounds and the written forms of language, as well as the ability to make meaning. The ability to make links between spoken and written language depends on three component skills, namely phonological skills, orthographic skills, and understanding letter-to-sound correspondences. The ability to make meaning similarly depends on a constellation of skills including vocabulary, knowledge of morphology/semantics, grammar, and syntax, comprehension, and

pragmatics. The development of these skills is the focus of discussion in Section 2.3.

Importantly, these proximal influences on a child's literacy development heavily and directly depend on the literacy teaching practice to which they are exposed. This insight goes a long way to explaining the intense research focus on establishing 'what works' in literacy instruction, when, for whom and under what conditions.

2.2.2 Distal factors

Distal factors, on the other hand, have an indirect impact on literacy development, but do influence the skills that in turn influence literacy processes. Distal factors may be divided into child-based and environmental influences. Evidence suggests that these factors are 'generally less malleable and the evidence for the mechanisms explaining how these factors influence literacy is less well developed' (Breadmore *et al.*, 2019, p.6).

Child-based factors include speech, hearing, visual, and motor difficulties, as well as cognitive processes, metacognition, and memory. Breadmore and colleagues (2019, p.6) note that these skills are 'difficult to train' and that 'it may be more effective to consider strategies to minimise the burden on these skills'.

External environmental influences include family background, socio-economic status, home literacy environment—including parental attitudes towards and experiences of literacy, as well as language and cultural environment—including bilingualism/multilingualism. Breadmore *et al.* (2019) make the point that while it may be neither possible nor desirable to alter the impacts of these factors, it is important that educators understand their influence to know how best to support a child's engagement with literacy in the classroom. Crucially, 'high quality literacy education embedded within a rich school literacy environment can go a long way to overcome these challenges' (Breadmore *et al.*, 2019, p.6).

In section 2.4 on whole school change, family and community engagement and school leadership are discussed as two key aspects that mediate literacy learning.

In the next section of this report, attention focuses on what constitutes high quality literacy education.

Section 3. Enacting literacy teaching practice in the classroom

In this section, discussion of the enactment of practice in classrooms focuses first on good teaching practice in general. It then examines in turn literacy teaching in the foundational years (K–2), the upper primary years (3–6), and finally in the secondary years (7–10).

As understandings of what it means to be literate have changed, incorporating the complexity and interconnectedness of how we 'communicate and manage the world', it follows logically that good literacy teaching practice should reflect these shifts.

Informed by contemporary understandings of literacy, Flint and colleagues (2019) have proposed six guiding principles as a framework for literacy development in the 21st century. These are:

- Principle 1: Literacy practices are socially and culturally constructed.

- Principle 2: Literacy practices are purposeful.

- Principle 3: Literacy practices contain ideologies and values.

- Principle 4: Literacy practices are learned through inquiry.

- Principle 5: Literacy practices invite readers and writers to use their background knowledge and cultural understandings to make sense of texts.

- Principle 6: Literacy practices expand to include everyday texts and multimodal texts.

When teachers consider these principles in relation to their literacy teaching, Flint *et al.* (2019) suggest it requires them to think deeply about their praxis, as they seek to align their ideologies and values with their instructional decisions.

Comprehensive research reviews conducted over the past two decades indicate widespread agreement among literacy experts concerning the literacy practices used by effective teachers (see, for example, Gambrell *et al.*, 2015; Gambrell & Mazzoni, 1999; Guthrie & Alvermann, 1999; Hall & Harding, 2003; Kamil *et al.*, 2001; National Reading Panel, 2000; Taylor *et al.*, 2002). Notwithstanding the authors' ambivalence about the use of the term 'effective' (noted in Section 1 of this report) for purposes of clarity, literacy teaching practices will be referred to as 'effective' if they have been shown to have a measurable impact on student learning. These practices have been described as those that result in positive outcomes when used 'under similar conditions with children similar to those who participated in the reported investigations' (International Reading Association, 2002).

3.1 Good teaching practice in general

Good literacy instruction is situated in the broader context of the classroom and what research suggests 'works' generally. While different methodologies for teaching effectiveness research have produced varied results, Hattie's (2009) extensive review of over 800 metanalyses has generated a solid and growing evidence base. Notwithstanding the critique of Hattie's work (see for example Romer, 2019), one of Hattie's key findings that *it is what teachers do in the classroom that makes the most difference to student learning* is the basis of the review of literature underpinning this report. (see also Allington, 2002 regarding teacher effect). Indeed, it is precisely this understanding that underpins the ensuing discussion of *enacting* practice.

Many participants in the present research noted the need to embed literacy teaching within a sound pedagogical framework. A common through-line in interviews with participants across all year levels was that evidence-based good teaching practice underpins effective literacy teaching (see also Muijs & Reynolds, 2017, especially chapter 15). For one primary principal, the key question was 'not just how do you teach literacy, but how do you teach effectively?' [PS-P]. A number of participants' comments reinforced the idea that 'to talk about literacy on its own is obviously quite hard, because everything's linked' [PS-CT]. Another principal observed:

> to be honest, I think effectiveness is about pedagogy. I think without great teaching all those things related to literacy are not going to come together … So, my overall feeling is that it's how we teach that's most important, no matter what learning area or what strand. [PS-P]

Emerging from Hattie's (2009, 2012) work and from that by Marzano (2007), there is now widespread agreement on what have come to be known as 'High Impact Teaching Strategies' (HITS), ten instructional practices thought to reliably increase student learning, regardless of where they are applied. The HITS are:

1. setting goals;
2. structuring lessons;
3. explicit teaching;
4. worked examples;
5. collaborative learning;
6. multiple exposures;
7. questioning;
8. feedback;
9. metacognitive strategies; and
10. differentiated teaching.

Working within the framework of a sound pedagogical model, encompassing high impact teaching strategies as outlined above, the teaching of good teachers exhibits certain characteristics that researchers agree result in positive outcomes for students. Summarising the research evidence about effective literacy teaching practice, Hervey (2013, p.1) asserts that 'we can now say, with certitude, that effective teachers of literacy' exhibit the following key characteristics:

• they know the literacy processes and the pedagogy that determines how their students learn;

- they know what their students need to understand and be able to do to meet the Standards;

- they know their students as learners;

- they have high expectations for their students and encourage risk taking;

- they flexibly use a range of instructional practices; and

- they engage students in challenging learning experiences.

These key teacher characteristics may be seen as giving expression not only to the necessary deep content pedagogical knowledge (Hayes *et al.*, 2017), but also to relational/interpersonal skills. In sections 2.3.1, 2.3.2 and 2.3.3 that follow, content and pedagogical knowledge specific to the teaching of literacy at different developmental stages of learning are discussed. First, however, attention is directed to the more generic relational and pedagogical skills that are the foundation of good literacy teaching.

3.1.1 Relational knowledge and interpersonal skills

As Hervey (2013) notes, good teachers have high expectations of their students and encourage risk-taking. They convey strong messages to students about their learning potential (Hayes *et al.*, 2017). Many participants in this research also noted that having high expectations of students is crucial to effective teaching. Related to this understanding was a perception that it is vital to build in opportunities for all students to achieve, because 'no kid's going to want to come to school if there is no element of success' [PS-CT]. This perception is critically important given findings in the international literature that suggest that some teachers are subject to unconscious bias in relation to students' backgrounds and demographic characteristics (Golann, 2015). One participant made the point that holding high expectations of *all* students meant 'making sure you've given enough scope so that each child has got something to be successful in' [PS-LT], reflecting an observation made by Hayes *et al.* (2017) that teachers who use 'turnaround' pedagogies—that is, those that made a significant positive difference to students' literacy outcomes—resist deficit discourses about struggling students and/or those from disadvantaged communities.

Significantly, some teachers added a caveat that the classroom should also be 'a free-to-fail environment' [PS-AST] in which students feel confident to 'have a go … and not be scared to make mistakes, because that's how we learn' [PS-CT]. In particular, 'you've got to establish a good class climate where the kids feel confident enough to share their mistakes, or the risks that they've taken' [PS-CT]. Further to this insight, many participants noted that 'a calm, happy environment … in which kids are feeling safe' [PS-PV] is central to learning because 'if students aren't calm and steady and emotionally regulated to learn, the learning's not going to happen' [PS-P].

Hervey (2013) also suggested that effective teachers know their students as learners. Ethnographic case study research in high poverty areas in Australia reported by Hayes *et al.* (2017) adds an important dimension to the body of evidence about good literacy teaching practice: in it, one of the features of 'turnaround pedagogies' was incorporating family and student experience into classroom practice. Many participants in the present study also emphasised the importance of knowing each of their students and, by extension, their families 'because the thing is kids don't fit into boxes neatly' [PS-CT]. A participant providing literacy support noted that 'the

way I look at everything that I do with teaching is about the student first, learner first, and I have to get to know the student: what it is that they need to improve on, what it is they feel successful about [HS-LT]. For an AST, 'it's important to think of where the child is at when they come to us: where they are first of all, where they are developmentally, where they are emotionally, and socially [PS-AST] (see Lewallen *et al.*, 2015).

Establishing a classroom climate of trust is integral to fostering self-efficacy in students; so, too, 'activating students as owners of their own learning' [PS-CT], noted by Fisher *et al.* (2016) as a central tenet of good teaching. Such a climate is 'where they feel that their work is going to be valued by their peers and by each other' [PS-AST]. One teaching assistant posed a rhetorical question: 'if they don't trust you, why are they going to want to take any notice of what you've got to say?' [CS-TA]. An AST said simply: 'I need the kids to believe in me. I need the kids to believe in themselves' [PS-AST].

3.1.2 Pedagogical knowledge and skills

Regarded as one of the recognised high impact teaching strategies, differentiated instruction figures prominently as a key feature of effective teaching. As Dixon *et al.* (2014, p.111) have established, differentiated approaches make sense because they offer 'different paths to understanding content, process, and products, considering what is appropriate given a child's profile of strengths, interests, and styles.' When commenting on how they adjust their teaching for different students, several participants suggested that differentiated instruction entailed engaging all students in challenging learning experiences, also noted by Fisher *et al.* (2016) as a hallmark of effective teaching.

> So, we're aiming the curriculum at just the right level. It needs to be challenging enough that they've got to push, but not so hard that they give up. So … that's a skill of teaching, really, isn't it? All kids are different, and you need to make sure you're hitting that mark for each child. [PS-P]

Participants referred to Vygotsky's work on the zone of proximal development (ZPD, on which, see useful summaries and updates in Clarà, 2017) and this focus on challenging students was also reflected in the documentation provided by some schools.

Most participants reported that they grounded their practice firmly in the 'gradual release of responsibility' model (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983), which involves moving from initial high levels of teacher control to increasing levels of student control over learning activities (Department of Education, Tasmania, 2013). For those participants, the essence of good teaching was 'lots of modelling … and then guiding kids to that next level of being able to do things independently' [HS-CT]. One principal drew on language from the Good Teaching Guides to describe the approach:

> It's the 'I do, we do, you do' thing, so it's a gradual release. Teachers are doing that a lot better now because it's an expectation that we have it as a sort of instructional model, that's how you frame up your lessons and it's making a big difference. [PS-P]

In some schools, this pedagogical approach to lesson planning had become non-negotiable: 'All teachers will be using the gradual release of responsibility instructional approach in their classroom practice' [PS-AR16]. The GRR model was linked to a 'constructivist approach to how we teach' [PS-CT] and to student ownership of learning: 'Students are activated as owners of their own learning and as resources for others' [PS-OP-lit15].

The 'whole-small-whole' lesson structure was a common way to enact differentiated instruction within the gradual release of responsibility model. Typically, this structure started with a teacher-led 'mini lesson' before the class was divided into small groups. Often this approach involved students rotating among different activities and then regrouping at the end of the lesson to recapitulate and reflect on learning.

> I love rotations; I think that they're great. Because it helps with differentiation. I've got kids in my classroom working from a prep level to a year four level, so being able to have them in groups and able to rotate through different stations, allows me to set up different activities. [PS-CT]

These differentiation practices enabled teachers to get to know their students' capabilities and achievements better. As one elaborated:

> I'd say the whole-small-whole structure allows us to assess for learning … you're making sure you're getting around each group. You're knowing where you need to go next, what you need to work on with certain groups or individual students … Being able to have your whole-small-whole allows you to target … ones who slip through the cracks a little bit or ones who really get it and you can say "oh, you really understand this. I'm going to extend you and really bump you up to this next level". [PS-CT]

In relation to the composition of small groups, Fisher *et al.* (2016, p.161) argue that, while common in many schools and often used by 'well-meaning educators', ability grouping is 'not a defensible practice' because 'there is no evidence that this practice will yield breakthrough results.' This advice may seem counter to the well-established good practice of differentiated instruction and is not to say that needs-based instruction with flexible groups should be eliminated entirely. Rather, 'the key to this approach is the condition that the groups change, and the instruction must match the needs of the learner' (Fisher *et al.*, 2016, p.163).

A close study of a sample of teachers whose students were making marked gains in literacy by Wray *et al.* (2000) found that a distinct feature of these teachers' practice was explicitness. Clarifying purposes and processes through modelling and demonstration, explanations and examples encouraged 'a "mindful" approach to the learning of literacy' (p.83). Explicit teaching was highly valued among participants in the present research. 'Clear learning intentions and success criteria' had become a mantra among participants and is evidence of the widespread influence of Hattie's work on teaching effectiveness (see Fisher *et al.*, 2016). As one AST said:

> Never underestimate the importance of explicit teaching. It's not just going to happen. It has to be planned for. It has to be implemented, it has to be modelled, it has to be demonstrated, and then it has to be observed. [PS-AST]

VIGNETTE 2: Gradual release of responsibility

The gradual release of responsibility (GRR) model of classroom instruction is widely recognised as a successful teaching approach for enabling students to take responsibility for their own learning, by moving from teacher-centred whole-group delivery through student-centred collaboration to independent work (Department of Education, Tasmania, 2013). The GRR model is based on instructional scaffolding and informed by Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the 'zone of proximal development' (ZPD)—the distance between a learner's actual and potential developmental levels. As a pedagogical construct, the idea was taken up by Pearson and Gallagher (1983) who coined the phrase 'gradual release of responsibility'. Fisher and Frey (2007) later developed the model into the 'I do, we do, you do' lesson structure.

GRR structures

Participants from across all year levels said their practice was based on the GRR model, for example characterising the essence of good teaching as 'lots of modelling ... guiding kids to that next level of being able to do things independently' [HS-CT]. In some schools, GRR was a non-negotiable aspect of a whole school approach to literacy. In those schools, it was expected that 'all teachers will be using the gradual release of responsibility instructional approach in their classroom practice' [PS-AR16], activating students 'as owners of their own learning and as resources for others' [PS-OP-lit15].

The 'whole-part-whole' workshop structure was common, teachers typically leading with a 'mini lesson' before dividing class members into small groups and then having them return to a whole group setting near lesson end. A literacy support teacher suggested 'it's a bit of a paradigm shift in the way that literacy has been taught previously' [PS-LT].

The GRR approach often involved students rotating through differentiated activities and regrouping to recapitulate and reflect on learning. As one literacy support teacher reflected:

> Developing that learning culture and that confidence in having a go is probably the most important thing, because they see you do it first. They see you do it again, and again, and again, and then they feel comfortable to come on board. So, then you're doing it together, until they finally feel comfortable to have a go by themselves. [PS-LT]

Another teacher explained how the whole-part-whole structure helped formative assessment because:

> When you're in that small group, you've got more time to identify certain needs, or you've just got more time, I guess, and more resources at your disposal to work with a kid one-on-one or in smaller groups. And then the idea is that once you've had that time, you can then release the responsibility to each of them, to see if they can perform the activity or the learning task without your assistance. And that's where you can see how they're going. [PS-CT)

Having worked 'for quite some time' to establish the whole-part-whole lesson structure as 'one of the key tenets' of their whole school approach to literacy, one teacher said, 'now we are really starting to see the fruits of [our] labours in that we have this consistent approach to literacy' [PS-CT].

GRR for reading and writing

In relation to guided reading, the findings show a general pattern of moving from teacher-directed to student-led practice (see Denton *et al*., 2014). In Year 3–6 classrooms in schools we visited, there was widespread use of the 'Readers' Workshop', incorporating the Reader's Notebook (Fountas & Pinnell, 2002). Many teachers were using this model to structure their guided reading because they viewed it as facilitating differentiation and encouraging students in their growth toward independent reading: 'it gets them to actually think critically about the text and not just sit there and read it and not engage with it' [CS-CT]. As a literacy support teacher outlined:

> The workshop model allows you to spend time conferring with students and working with students in small groups which means that you can really differentiate your teaching. And the process of getting to students at their point of need is a lot easier because you can set up a structure in your classroom where students can work independently while you are conferring or doing small group work. [PS-LT]

Teaching writing also tended to unfold according to the GRR model, with many teachers in our research carefully modelling and scaffolding different writing genres:

> I model first, and I try and do that thinking out loud of what I'm doing when I'm teaching different text types … and then the children then have a go at their own type of writing. [PS-AST]

As one teacher pointed out, many primary school students "still need heaps and heaps of scaffolding and heaps and heaps of guidance, about how to structure, how to plan their writing' [PS-CT]. A key

word used by many teachers was 'scaffolding'—for building skills and capability and also 'to build up their confidence to get them to the point, that end point where they can write a narrative' [PS-CT]. Secondary school teachers also spoke about the continued need for modelling and scaffolding writing, one English teacher describing the 'Writer's Workshop' as an example of using the GRR model with older students.

GRR for professional learning

Finally, an Assistant Principal and literacy coach described a different twist to using GRR:

> Part of my role is to share good practice across the school and I can make sure that if say, for example, a teacher is not feeling confident with prediction, I can go in and model and they can watch me and then I do the gradual release of responsibility, where I support them, we do some team teaching together, then they have a go. [CS-AP]

This highlights how GRR is not only used to benefit students' literacy learning, but also to support ongoing teacher professional learning in Tasmanian schools.

As one participant put it, 'teaching and learning [are] more effective when … students know what they're focusing on and why what they're doing is valuable' [PS-LT]. Where explicit teaching had become a whole school practice linked to a common instructional model, the leadership team typically invested substantial time in collaborative professional learning focused on 'what makes really good learning intentions' [PS-P]. According to one school leader, the quality of learning intentions and success criteria was evident in how they 'unpack the learning for our learners' [PS-P].

Staff also connected explicit teaching with metacognitive strategies, which have a strong influence on facilitating learning (Fisher *et al.*, 2016; Hattie, 2009). In particular:

> Everything needs to be very clear. We're not just doing this to fill in some time. Why are we doing it? How does it help you? From a very early age, you want five-year-olds to be able to tell you what they're learning, and why they're doing it, and what you're looking for. [PS-LS]

A connecting thread running throughout all the discussion about good teaching practice was the importance of engaging students by maximising their interest. One teacher observed that 'you've got to make it fun and interesting and engaging for kids. That's half the secret' [PS-CT]. Another said, 'without interest, there's nothing, so use that student interest to really motivate them' [PS-CT] (Hayes *et al.*, 2017; Krapp, 1999). Key to student engagement is the contextualisation of literacy activities (Wray *et al.*, 2000), especially when used to balance 'direct skills teaching' (Hall & Harding, 2003).

Observing practices used by teachers regarded as effective on the basis of students' high literacy achievements and peer nominations, Topping and Ferguson (2005) referred to high levels of teacher-student interaction, and open rather than closed questioning of students. Such practices contribute to a classroom environment in which students are collaborators in learning enterprises, and their understandings are checked frequently and never assumed (Hayes *et al.*, 2017).

Finally, Hall and Harding's (2003, p.3) meta-analysis of research into literacy teaching also noted that 'the "effective" teacher of literacy uses an unashamedly eclectic collection of methods' and avoids 'the partisan adherence to any one sure-fire approach or method'. This sentiment was echoed in comments from many teachers participating in this research, who observed that the corollary to the 'learners first' maxim was the need for flexibility, or, as one participant put it: 'If children aren't learning the way that we teach, we need to teach the way they learn' [PS-CT]. Key to good teaching practice was having a toolkit of strategies and being 'open to change if it's not working' [PS-CT]. One teacher said, 'I don't think there is a magic bullet. I think it's a lot of experimenting with different things to find out what works. And what works for one kid is not going to work for another' [PS-CT]. A literacy coach also pointed out that 'there's an inherent danger in being reliant on one way of doing anything because we don't have children that are all thinking one way' [PS-LS]. These comments resonate with Hall and Harding's (2003) finding that effective teachers eschew reliance on any one approach and reflect a point made by Hayes *et al.* (2017) that effective teachers are open to new ideas and learning from colleagues to improve their practice.

3.1.3 Disjuncture between good practice and what happens in many classrooms

A solid corpus of research confirms the characteristics of effective teachers in general and of literacy teachers specifically and, from that body of research, it has been possible to discern some common features of good literacy teaching practices, beyond enacting an overall approach informed by an expanded and expansive view of literacy. However, Hayes and her colleagues (2017) found those standout features to be relatively *uncommon* in the many classrooms they visited. These 'uncommon' pedagogies stand in stark contrast to the more 'common' pedagogies they observed, which they describe as both limited and limiting. Comber and Woods (2016) refer to the more common pedagogies as 'fickle literacies' characterised by:

> rote learning, repeated test preparation, copying, colouring-in and other time-filling, challenge-free, thought-less activities, which will not build their capacity for academic learning and complex literacies. (Comber, 2016, p.xiv; see also Gonski *et al.*, 2018)

This situation begs the question: Why is there a disjuncture between what we know is good practice and what happens in literacy teaching practice in schools?[16] Many argue that the persistence of the industrial model of schooling is partly responsible (see Gonski *et al.*, 2018). Reflecting a 20th century aspiration to deliver mass education, critics of the current model of schooling argue it is outdated and no longer fit for purpose. Grounded in a year-based curriculum tied to standardised testing, the industrial education model, it is argued, is detrimental to individual student outcomes because:

> it is not designed to differentiate learning or stretch all students to ensure they achieve maximum learning growth every year, nor does it incentivise schools to innovate and continuously improve.[17]

Comber (2016, p.174) sounds a warning bell regarding the effects and implications of how literacy is constituted by many politicians, policy-makers, principals, and practitioners. In her view, 'too often, it is about fixing deficits, raising scores, and bolt-on classes. The vision is narrow. The literacy is reduced'. In contrast, she argues that:

> In times when educators are increasingly under pressure to produce measurable standardised outcomes in short periods of time, it is crucial not to lose sight of the bigger purposes of schooling. Indeed, producing inclusive critically literate graduates is more urgent than ever.

From the foregoing discussion, it is evident that educators in many classrooms across Tasmania are nesting their literacy teaching practice carefully and thoughtfully within a pedagogical framework incorporating many features of teaching practice that research has established as effective. It is also evident from participants' own accounts that such good practice was not universal.

In the sub-sections that follow, attention turns to the evidence relating to how enabling pedagogies are used specifically in relation to literacy teaching practice

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16 This Tasmanian study did not involve classroom observation, and so this question is based on the findings by Hayes *et al.* (2017) and Comber (2016).

17 https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/apr/30/australia-must-overhaul-industrial-school-model-says-gonski-chaired-review

in K–2 classrooms, in 3–6 classrooms and in 7–10 classrooms in Tasmania, paying attention also to the conditions that may constrain their more widespread use.

The *Improving Literacy Guidance Reports* produced by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) in the United Kingdom provides the basis of the organising framework for Section 2. Based on extensive reviews of the available evidence, the EEF has formulated the key findings from international research on teaching literacy into a series of evidence-based practical recommendations for educators across all stages of schooling, from the early foundation years to the primary years and through to the secondary years (see Appendices B, C, D). Discussion of good literacy teaching practice is based on the EEF principles for each stage and the evidence provided is supplemented with additional evidence drawn from this project's own literature review. This combined evidence is then examined in relation to the findings of the Tasmanian-based research.

3.2 Enacting practice in the early years (K–2)

While some researchers and educationists argue that there is now general agreement about how young children learn to read (see for example Castles *et al.*, 2018), literacy pedagogy, particularly in the early years, remains contentious (Hall, 2013), perhaps reflecting the divergent conceptualisations of literacy discussed in Section 2.1. Indeed, the science of *learning* to read and of *teaching* of reading both remain to some extent unsettled by research. Debate about literacy pedagogy has spawned a large and growing body of empirical research conducted mainly in the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand, seeking to clarify good practice in the teaching of literacy in the crucial early years of schooling.

Notwithstanding methodological differences and the fact that most available studies privilege print literacy,[18] Hall (2013) suggests that one key message clearly emerges from the research. Effective teachers of literacy in the early years of school integrate and balance two important aspects of literacy teaching and learning: learning the codes of written language with the purpose of literacy in ways that are meaningful to the learner (Au *et al.*, 2002; Hattie, 2005; Hiebert & Pearson, 2000; Knapp & Associates, 1995; Louden *et al.*, 2005; Medwell *et al.*,1998; Morrow *et al.*, 1999; Parr & Limbrick, 2010; Pressley *et al.*, 1996; Pressley *et al.*, 2001; Rankin-Erickson & Pressley, 2000; Taylor *et al.*, 2000; Taylor *et al.*, 2005; Topping & Ferguson, 2005; Weber *et al.*, 2009; Wharton-McDonald *et al.*, 1998; Wilkinson & Townsend, 2000).

In her extensive review of the evidence about effective literacy teaching in the early years, Hall (2013, p.525) asserts that 'taken together all these studies offer a consensus on what exemplary literacy teachers do in their classrooms and how they do it'. Noting that literacy teaching expertise involves 'the smooth interweaving of a whole host of elements', Hall also makes the important observation that while effective literacy teaching undoubtedly involves using evidence-informed practices, it also incorporates crucial evidence 'about actual children's literacy practices and experiences' (p.535). This practice means that 'effective literacy teaching in the early years of school is about far more than "method"' (p.535). Indeed, the complexity of what effective literacy teachers do in the early years, Hall concludes:

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18 Two exceptions to this are Harden's (2016) research about using dramatic pedagogies in early years literacy learning and Mackenzie and Veresov's (2013) study about how drawing can enhance young children's writing development (see also Mackenzie, 2011, 2014).

should lead us to question the validity of perspectives that seek to find a single best approach. The effective teaching of literacy cannot be packaged in teacher-proof scripts or prescriptive programmes on the assumption that 'one size fits all' (p.535).

In the present research, all participants working in K–2 classrooms were cognisant of the crucial importance of the early years of schooling in laying the foundations for children's literacy development. Many also spoke of their literacy teaching practice in terms that echo Hall's (2013) conclusion that expert literacy teachers interweave a range of elements into their pedagogy.

> If you do all of them together really well … they work together. You need to have all of it for it to work, I think. Literacy just can't be put into a basket … [as if] "okay, we've done this. Okay. Let's give it a tick. Now we're moving on to the next bit". [PS-CT]

The EEF's guidance for teachers to improve literacy in Key Stage 1 (KS1) of schooling (which equates to K–2 in the Australian context) includes the following eight practical evidence-based recommendations for the teaching of literacy to children aged between five and seven years old:

1. develop pupils' speaking and listening skills and wider understanding of language;

2. use a balanced and engaging approach to developing reading, which integrates both decoding and comprehension skills;

3. effectively implement a systematic phonics program;

4. teach pupils to use strategies for developing and monitoring their reading comprehension;

5. teach pupils to use strategies for planning and monitoring their writing;

6. promote fluent written transcription skills by encouraging extensive and effective practice and explicitly teaching spelling;

7. use high-quality information about pupils' current capabilities to select the next best steps for teaching; and

8. use high-quality structured interventions to help pupils who are struggling with their literacy.

These recommendations are discussed below, with reference to the findings of the present research.[19]

3.2.1 EEF 1: Developing speaking and listening skills and wider understanding of language

The evidence that strong oral language skills are of paramount importance at the foundational stage of schooling is strong (Higgins *et al.*, 2015), suggesting that teaching targeted at improving children's speaking and listening also improves their comprehension abilities (Clarke *et al.*, 2010). Encouraging children to verbally articulate their ideas also has a positive impact on their emergent writing ability (Graham *et al.*, 2012).

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19 The last two of the EEFs recommendations, focussing on the identification and support of students who struggle with literacy have been combined here. Issues related to assessment of student progress more generally are discussed in a separate section of the report (Section 2.5, Evaluating the Impacts of Practice).

VIGNETTE 3: Developing oral literacy

Emphasising the complex and developmental nature of becoming literate, Konza (2014) notes that oral language is one of the 'Big Six' components of reading that empirical researchers have consistently identified as crucial to learning to read.[20]

The Tasmanian Department of Education (2019) also recognises the foundational importance of oral language. In its 2019–22 Literacy Framework one of the three system priorities is: 'attention to the importance of oral, augmentative and alternative communication for literacy learning'. Three key actions follow from this specific priority:

- develop a public campaign to promote the importance of oral language;

- build on the collaborative culture between speech and language pathologists and educators for a more coherent approach to improve oral, augmentative, and alternative communication; and

- increase access to and support for learners to improve oral, augmentative, and alternative communication.

The early years

In the early years, strong oral language skills are paramount in themselves and for supporting reading and writing outcomes in (EEF, 2017a; Higgins *et al*., 2015). Teaching targeted at improving children's speaking and listening also improves their comprehension abilities (Clarke *et al*., 2010). Consistent with the emphasis in the literature about the importance of oracy in early literacy development (Snow, 2016; Cooper *et al*., 2002; Kendeou *et al*., 2009; Antoniazzi *et al*., 2010; Storch & Whitehurst, 2002), the development of oral language was prioritised by most early years

teachers participating in the study—including listening, speaking, and interacting with others.

Many participants spoke about the importance of developing conversation skills, including among young children. As one classroom teacher explained:

> I would say oral language is most important for kindergarten kids … It's all the little things before the actual speaking happens that we try and get right. Like, they'll come and hand you their orange, and I will say to them "oh, you want me to eat it?" And they'll go [laughter] "no, I need you to peel it for me, please". So, it's the little things like "well, you need to explain it to me". Lots of everyday language comes with me trying to expand their sentences. [PS-CT]

Unsurprisingly, speech pathologists also tended to prioritise oral literacy development as a key component of literacy learning in the early years.

> For the kids in my caseload, there's a saying in speech pathology: "If you can't say it correctly, in terms of grammar or pronunciation, you are not going to be able to write it". So, it's really important—that correlation. [CS-SP]

Middle and upper primary school

Continuing to develop children's oral language capability remains important throughout the primary school years (EEF, 2017b). Speaking and listening are the foundations of reading and writing (Higgins *et al*., 2015). Therefore, key strategies are to encourage children to articulate their ideas before writing and to listen carefully in order to develop inference skills.

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20 The 'Big Six' refers to oral language, phonological awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension.

Many of the Year 3–6 staff in the research emphasised learning to speak clearly and confidently. In their classrooms, 'We do a lot of speaking, we do a lot of presentations, and there's a lot of [guidance to] "discuss that with your partner"' [PS-CT]. Another teacher pointed to the key role of peer-to-peer talk:

> We do a lot of [children] talking to each other instead of talking to me … We went to the oral language seminar earlier in the year, and [the key message was about] children talking among themselves, sharing their ideas. [PS-CT]

In addition, learning to be 'respectful listeners' [PS-CT] was highly valued and incorporated into preparing students to give oral presentations: 'We actually went through what a respectful listener looks like, sounds like, feels like' [PS-CT].

High school

In the secondary school years, oral language remains a key tool for learning as well as a vital aspect of literacy (Myhill & Jones, 2009). Opportunities for structured talk improve students' communication skills (Murphy *et al.*, 2009); increase their understanding across all curriculum areas (Osborne, 2010); and enhance writing and reading outcomes (Wilkinson *et al.*, 2015). High school staff from the English learning area spoke about using 'discussions before we write' [HS-LS] as well as developing public speaking skills through activities such as debates and poetry competitions. High school teachers not only worked to further develop literacy but also used oral literacy activities to support engagement with learning, drawing

on students' interests. This English/HASS teacher explained:

> Giving students a choice to talk passionately about something which they find important … builds their intrinsic motivation and that tends to make them persevere and work for longer … That's what we need to do to try and awaken their attributes and their passions and shape their skills using their qualities, and public speaking is a good way of doing that. [HS-CT]

A school leader observed that as technology advances the skills required for written literacy may change, but the importance of oracy will remain:

> … in terms of the future, we always think about what literacy is going to look like. And the one thing that will never be replaced is the ability to communicate orally … oral language will always be a really important literacy skill. [HS-AP]

Reflecting the importance of oracy in early literacy development (Antoniazzi *et al.*, 2010; Cooper *et al.*, 2002; Kendeou *et al.*, 2009; Snow, 2016; Storch & Whitehurst, 2002), most of the early years teachers participating in this research prioritised the development of oral language. There was a strong focus on listening, speaking, and interacting with others in these classrooms.

Some participants spoke of the K–2 period as one requiring a focus on oral 'pre-literacy skills' [PS-AST] drawing heavily on the use of music, rhyme, and song:

> I do a lot of music with the kids that's more than just singing along. It's also looking at the lyrics and being able to read the lyrics and understand what it's all about because that then goes back to the very start. We're looking at lots of different vocabulary. They have to be fluent with it. They have to comprehend it, and they're using oracy straightaway because they're going to be singing it. So, I find music is something that encompasses everything. [PS-CT]

Early years teachers tended also to use methods that incorporated fun to foster engagement. For example, some participants used a kinaesthetic approach in their literacy teaching, accompanying singing with body movement, as a way of enhancing letter-sound associations.

> So, for example, it's sort of like the letter S is like a snake. We all sing along, and we move our arm so that that kinaesthetic movement is actually us physically in our bodies doing the action. Of course, we're also looking at the mouth form, the shape, and how the children are actually also using their tongues, because if the tongue isn't used correctly, then the sound isn't going to come out correctly. [PS-CT]

3.2.2 EEF 2: Using a balanced and engaging approach to developing reading, integrating both decoding and comprehension skills

Simply using the word 'balanced' can raise heckles, especially in relation to learning to read. Yet, based on extensive reviews of evidence, the Education Endowment Foundation purposefully refers to the need for phonics to be "part of a balanced approach"[21] (also see EEF 3 below, in relation to phonics).

There is widespread scholarly agreement that learning to read involves both decoding skills and understanding the meaning of codes (McNally *et al.*, 2016; Price-Mohr & Price, 2017; Savage *et al.*, 2015; Torgerson *et al.*, 2006; Wyse & Styles, 2007). There is also evidence that introducing even young children to a wide range of texts and media broadens their reading experiences and supports their developing comprehension skills (Shanahan *et al.*, 2010).

While letter-sound correspondences need to be taught explicitly, children also need to be given plentiful opportunities to practise these skills in reading and writing activities (National Reading Panel, 2000). In the K–2 classrooms of schools visited for this research, there was generally an explicit focus on developing an awareness of sounds and understanding the relationship between sounds and letters. One popular approach to teaching decoding skills was to associate animals with specific sounding-out strategies to match graphemes to phonemes, such as 'Listening Lion',

'Chunky Monkey', 'Eagle Eye', and 'Stretchy the Snake'. One prep teacher explained the use of this strategy as follows:

> I'll say "I'm not sure what this word is. I wonder if we can use our Stretchy Snake sounding strategy to work it out" and then I'll [say] "Look. This is C-C-C-C-C-A-T, C-A-T. Let's blend it all together, cat". So, I'll be explicitly showing them and modelling the language. Then, when we have them for guided reading if there are children struggling, I'll say "Okay well, can we use our Stretchy Snake?" And they can work through it that way. When I introduce a new one or I have the card with the picture of the animal and the little description on there [I'll say] "okay, well, this is Listening Lion. Listening Lion shows us that when we read a sentence, we need to make sure it makes sense and if our sentence doesn't make sense, we need to re-read it, find the word that doesn't make sense in it". I … talk them through it that way. [PS-CT]

Many teachers spoke about how they used flashcards and repetition to teach the alphabet and high frequency sight words, such as the 'Magic 100 Words' (M100W).

> I use a lot of repetition. I've gone back to flashcards this year. We did that with the alphabet. Every morning, we were having alphabet cards. A, apple, a, a, apple, just to get that repetition. To start with it was A to Z, and then we mixed them up, so it wasn't just the alphabet. We did the gold and the red words, and we'd do it all together, so that even if they weren't on those words, they were still seeing them and hearing them. So, I guess that's a repetition thing that's getting it into their mind by hearing it a lot. [PS-CT]

While there is evidence that the use of flashcards can help children, especially those with learning disabilities, to improve their visual memory (Erbey *et al.*, 2017), contemporary literacy research also suggests that teaching the alphabet in isolation from other aspects of literacy may lead to rote learning and therefore be counter-productive (Mantei *et al.*, 2001).

> Some teachers and a lot of parents put all their focus on alphabet knowledge, and they're forgetting … the foundation step of oral language and concepts of print, which is … the step for everything else. So, knowing the alphabet song, for example, doesn't necessarily teach you about sounds. Knowing alphabet names and knowing alphabet sounds are two very different things and knowing just alphabet names can be really confusing when you look at a sound. [PS-CT]

While the evidence for combining a decoding approach and a comprehension/meaning-based approach to reading is extensive, there is limited evidence regarding exactly *how* to best integrate these approaches, or guidance about precisely which skills should be taught when (Education Endowment Foundation, 2017a, p.9).

Distilling the findings of numerous large-scale reviews of research into the effective teaching of reading, Konza (2011, p.1) emphasises the complex and developmental nature of learning to read. While noting the perils of 'reducing a complex behaviour such as reading to a small number of component parts', she brings together the research evidence into an overarching framework that has become known as 'The

Big Six' (Konza, 2014). The 'Big Six' refers to six components of reading that empirical research has consistently identified as crucial to learning to read:

- oral language;

- phonological awareness;

- phonics;

- vocabulary;

- fluency; and

- comprehension.

Reference to the 'Big Six' was common among the early years teachers interviewed in this research and improving 'teacher knowledge of the Big Six' [PS OP-Lit17] was noted as a priority in many schools' operational and school improvement plans, often in the context of 'cyclical, collaborative Literacy Inquiries' [PS OP17].

3.2.3 EEF 3: Effectively implementing a systematic phonics program

An extensive body of evidence supports the use of a systematic phonics program in the early years of schooling, with multiple studies reported in several meta-analyses demonstrating a positive impact on early reading (Education Endowment Foundation, 2017a, p.10).

Heated debates about the role of phonics in early literacy teaching have long been a feature of the scholarship about learning to read. Calling for 'an end to the reading wars', Castles *et al.* (2018, p.5) recommend 'an agenda for instruction and research in reading acquisition that is balanced, developmentally informed, and based on a deep understanding of how language and writing systems work'. However, debates about how best to teach young children to read have recently been reinvigorated (see Clark, 2017, 2018; Emmitt *et al.*, 2013; Ewing & Maher, 2014), partly in response to the Australian Government's controversial proposal to introduce a phonics test in Year 1,[22] as noted in Section 1.

In their instructive and detailed article explaining why phonics instruction is integral to learning to read, Castles and her colleagues (2018) suggest that scientific research about the centrality of phonics has been slow to permeate educational policy and practice. However, teaching phonics and phonemic awareness was in evidence in the narratives provided by early years teachers participating in this research, with one participant describing phonics as 'your cornerstone of reading' [CS-AST]. Moreover:

> We do a lot of getting children up and running with phonemic awareness. So, we're looking at sounds, we're naming sounds and where they come in the word. From there, you do decoding and see how they go with three-letter words and build up from there. [PS-CT]

> Of course, we teach phonics all the time and that's what I keep telling people. Whoever said we don't teach phonics? It's just madness. Absolutely. But we teach it in conjunction with a whole lot of other things. [PS-LT]

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22 https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-06-30/australian-phonics-war-on-how-to-teach-kids-to-read-rages-on/11258944

An important finding in a United Kingdom study entitled 'In Teachers' Hands: Effective literacy teaching practices in the early years of schooling' was that effective and less effective teachers engaged in similar classroom activities (Louden *et al*.,2005). While *all* the teachers observed by Louden and his colleagues taught phonics and phonemic awareness, there were distinct qualitative differences in *how* they did so, with effective teachers paying more attention than ineffective ones to engagement, pace, metalanguage, and challenge:

> Whilst the more effective and effective teachers generally used a highly structured approach to phonics teaching, they were usually observed teaching word level skills and knowledge within a wider context, such as a theme or topic being studied, a shared book, a writing lesson or a spelling lesson, so that the purpose of learning phonics was made clear and relevant (Louden *et al.*, 2005, p.vii).

The importance of systematic teaching of phonics *in context and alongside* other clearly known strategies that foster young children's reading development has also been established in a comprehensive review of the evidence about reading development conducted by Ewing (2018; and see also Heilmann *et al*., 2018).

Relatively few studies, however, have compared synthetic and analytic phonics approaches, which means there is not enough evidence to favour one approach over the other with any confidence (Torgerson *et al.*, 2006). Many phonics programs combine both approaches (Education Endowment Foundation, 2017a, p.11) and teachers need to be familiar with both synthetic and analytic phonics so that they are able to make informed decisions about what is appropriate for individual students.

While there are many (commercial) phonics programs on offer, not all have been rigorously evaluated and so educators need to exercise caution when selecting 'off the shelf' commercially available phonics teaching packages. Slavin *et al.* (2010) suggest that consideration be given to whether certain features matter when assessing the purported effectiveness of a phonics program:

- staff using the program have been properly trained in its use;
- the program is responsive to diverse student needs;
- the activities are engaging and enjoyable to teach;
- the program has been 'adapted' as this may reduce its impact; and
- the approach to grouping students is dynamic.

3.2.4 EEF 4: Teaching strategies for developing and monitoring reading comprehension

Extensive research has consistently demonstrated the positive impact of teaching children even as young as young as five how to use metacognitive strategies for reading comprehension (Education Endowment Foundation, 2017a, p.12). Learning how to use comprehension strategies helps children to both monitor their own comprehension and overcome barriers to comprehension (Oakhill *et al.*, 2014). Teachers should model the strategies and provide many opportunities for children to practise and embed them so that, ultimately, they become automatic. The evidence supports the teaching of comprehension strategies in an integrated way, rather than in isolation from each other (National Reading Panel, 2000).

According to Duke and Pearson (2002, p.107), there has been relatively little controversy among scholars of literacy about teaching comprehension.

> Unlike decoding, oral reading, and reading readiness, those who study reading comprehension instruction have avoided much of the acrimony characteristic of work in other aspects of reading. As it should be, much work on the process of reading comprehension has been grounded in studies of good readers.

Borrowing a term 'from the decoding debate' Duke and Pearson (2002, p.107) advocate an approach to comprehension instruction that is '*balanced*', by which they mean that 'good comprehension instruction includes both explicit instruction in specific comprehension strategies and a great deal of time and opportunity for actual reading, writing, and discussion of text'.

These authors explain that their approach to balanced comprehension instruction goes beyond simply instruction in comprehension strategies and opportunities to practise. Importantly, it connects and integrates learning opportunities, in a supportive classroom context. Specifically, their model of comprehension instruction that has five components:

1. an explicit description of the strategy and when and how it should be used;

2. teacher and/or student modelling of the strategy in action;

3. collaborative use of the strategy in action;

4. guided practice using the strategy with gradual release of responsibility; and

5. independent use of the strategy.

Similarly, Moats (2007, p.5) argues that good reading programs 'interweave several components of language—such as speech sounds, word structure, word meaning, and sentence structure—into the same lessons' and extend beyond phonics instruction to include lessons on word structure and origins. Importantly, effective literacy teaching supports reading comprehension by 'focusing on a deep understanding of topic and theme rather than just a set of strategies and gimmicks.'

The importance of explicitly teaching young children how to use reading strategies for comprehension was highlighted by many participants in this research. One literacy support teacher put it like this: 'I explain it to them in a way that appeals to them. [I'll say] "you're a bit like … a reading detective and sometimes you've got to use lots of clues to work it out"' [PS-LT].

Many teachers emphasised the importance of teaching comprehension strategies to young children to ensure that they were not simply 'barking at the print' [PS-LT] when sounding out letters and words (Luke *et al.*, 2011). Ways of making their thinking visible included the teacher modelling the use of 'think-alouds' and encouraging students to visualise by 'creating a picture in their head of what we're reading' [PS-CT] (Freebody & Luke, 1990; Luke & Freebody, 1999).

The 'interactive read-aloud' was a frequently-mentioned reading comprehension strategy:

> What happens in an interactive read-aloud is that you plan specifically for a reading strategy. It might be making connections [where] you're wanting the children to think about the characters in the book and think about how that relates to them. So, it's very well planned because you've got particular

questions at different points. It might just be something where you're going to talk to a point that you're making. It might be something you ask the children to think about and just answer the question. Then there's also a turn-and-talk strategy as well. So, the children turn to each other and they discuss what was happening within the story. You can join in those conversations as well. At the end, you might choose a few people to talk about their ideas. [PS-CT]

Consistent with good practice, guided reading was commonplace among the early years teachers in this research (Fountas & Pinnell, 2017). Explaining that this strategy maximised reading time in class, one teacher noted that 'we do it every single day' [PS-CT]. The point was made that it was important to have a specific focus for a guided reading session and that it ought not be 'just sitting there hearing the children read in a round-robin' [PS-CT]. Explaining how she specifically chose books for guided reading, one teacher said:

Usually, I have a big book to start the lesson because a big book helps with the children who are still developing their reading abilities because they're seeing the text and I can say it goes from left to right. They can match spoken word with written word a bit easier. Whatever my focus for that day is, say if I'm looking at a specific reading strategy, I try to pick a book that targets that well. [PS-CT]

Most early years classrooms in participating schools had a version of 'good fit book boxes' chosen by the teacher to cater for a range of different reading levels and representing 'a good spread of non-fiction and fiction texts' [PS-CT].

Boushey and Moser's (2014) 'Daily Five' framework was used widely as an approach to guided reading in K–2 classrooms because it structures literacy time to enable students to select from five reading and writing choices, gradually moving themselves towards independence.

The Daily Five [is] read to self, read to someone, listen to others' reading, work on words, work on writing. It fits in with all the other things that we do, like Writer's Workshop, that fits in with work on writing … [The] Our Words Their Way approach fits in with spelling, fits in with work on words. And the children love the Daily 5 because they get a choice of what they're picking within the literacy block. [PS-CT]

Associated with the 'Daily Five' approach was the 'CAFE system' (Boushey & Moser, 2014), which focuses on four core components of reading development (three of which are included in Konza's (2014) 'Big Six'): comprehension, accuracy, fluency, and expanding vocabulary. This integrated approach to guided reading suggests an appreciable shift in literacy teaching practice in the early years, a point highlighted by one early years teacher:

I think, our practices have changed significantly with reading because it's not about "okay, let's read a book and do a little activity". That is the old traditional guided reading approach, which is really outdated. CAFE works hand-in-hand with our Daily 5 and is much more integrated. [PS-CT]

3.2.5 EEF 5: Teaching strategies for planning and monitoring writing

Compared with extensive research on reading, there is less about the most effective ways to teach writing, especially in the early years (Education Endowment Foundation, 2017a, p.13). Although research interest in the area of writing has grown, Kent *et al.* (2014, p.1163) note that the 'literature is still sparse at early developmental levels' and few studies have specifically examined students as young as kindergarten age (see Kim *et al.*, 2011; Puranik *et al.*, 2012). However, providing instructional experiences for young children to develop their writing is central to an emergent literacy approach to teaching in the early years of schooling. Importantly, Teale and Yokota note that these writing experiences need to be both *integrated* with other aspects of literacy and provided *separately* because:

> we know that having children write makes it easier for them to learn to read. But we also pay specific attention to writing, giving it its own identity and time in the classroom so that the unique aspects of writing are addressed separately. (in Strickland & Morrow, 2000, p.11)

The need for explicit teaching of text structure and organisation was high on the literacy agenda for many K–2 teachers in this research. One participant explained

> If I'm doing a writing lesson, I'll have my explicit teaching first … So, the other day we were looking at sequencing … orientation, problem, resolution. I showed them a framework on the smart board, and we talked through that. [PS-CT]

Explicit teaching and structured writing activities

Studies show that explicit teaching of text structures benefits even young children (Williams *et al.*, 2004) and that modelling simple sentence construction is beneficial (Saddler & Graham, 2005). Encouraging children to draft, revise, edit, and share their work with others also helps them learn to plan and monitor their own writing (Graham *et al.*, 2012).

Available evidence also suggests that teaching children pre-writing activities is a useful strategy, for example by arranging their ideas visually. Graphic organisers were often used inventively by teachers in this research to scaffold children's writing (see, for example Freedman & Medway, 1994; Graham *et al.*, 2006; Rodgers *et al.*, 2016) and to enhance student learning (Fisher *et al.*, 2016). An example is the "hamburger model" for writing, which:

> allows children to break down each text type, but with a visual picture of how it sits in their brain using a picture of a hamburger. They know that, for example, whatever text type they're actually writing, the top and the bottom bun, so the orientation and the conclusion, need to link. Then all of their little bits and pieces like the lettuce, the cheese, the tomato, are paragraphs. [PS-CT]

Teachers in our research talked often about how they moved from modelled writing to shared or co-constructed writing using the gradual release of responsibility

model (see Cremin et al., 2015; De Smedt & Van Keer, 2018; Parr & Jesson, 2016). One K–2 teacher said that there are students who are:

> ready to do some writing [and the more] they're writing about what they're doing and what they're interested in, the more luck we have in their writing … So, if they want to have a go, they can. I think it's all about saying it's okay to have a go … Someone might come up and say, "I've done this great picture" and I say "okay, let's write a sentence about it together". So, we'll write a sentence together. [PS-CT]

Small group collaborative writing exercises were considered important in some early years classrooms, in effecting the shift from teacher-modelled to independent writing.

> We might have six kids in a group [including] a non-writer [and] someone who's starting to write. Whereas if you had a whole table of non-writers, it's going to be quite challenging. They're not going to bounce off each other. Kids ultimately learn from each other as well as from their teachers. [PS-AST]

While the evidence for the value of cooperative learning with and from peers is strong (Baye *et al.*, 2018; Fisher *et al.*, 2016), the practice of grouping children of mixed abilities together for writing activities is contended, with some research suggesting that similar ability grouping is more effective for group writing activities (see Hall, 2013).

Unstructured activities and the importance of free writing

Providing plentiful opportunities for young children to experiment with their writing free of judgement about accuracy is just as important as explicit writing instruction at this stage of emergent literacy (Mayer, 2007).

In addition to guided structured writing activities, participants stressed the importance of giving students in the early years opportunities to write freely and follow their own interests:

> We do journal writing each week. It's not really a journal as such. It's writing on topics that I give some sentence stems to, or they may have some free ideas within it. But it just gives them the opportunity to write about topics that they're interested in and they can use their words. [PS-CT]

Teacher modelling was a key preliminary step, especially for those children who struggled with finding ideas for free writing:

> I'm learning that some kids don't have ideas that easily. The ones who struggle [also] struggle with the ideas. So, when I say "go and write" my upper children will go and write. They'll write an amazing story. The ones who need to use all their cognitive energy to sound out m-a-t, don't have a sentence in their head and so I need to provide that. Sometimes I will read, I will model writing about the exact story we've read. Then I will take it away and say "your turn now. It's your turn to have a go". At other times, I will provide them with something to write—writing prompts. [PS-CT]

The need to nurture confidence and creativity in writing at this early stage of literacy development was highlighted by many participants and the importance of establishing a free-to-fail classroom environment was seen as fundamental to this endeavour:

> I tell them "oh no, I'm not looking for spelling right now. I just want to see you writing. Do your best and sound it out. Yeah, that's great". So … with writing, you've got to get them to the level where they're just willing to have a go and really emphasise [the] whole process and really celebrating it with them. I find that quite important. [PS-CT]

The need to strike a balance between time for free writing and structured and explicit instruction at this crucial stage of literacy development was also noted.

3.2.6 EEF 6: Promoting fluent written transcription skills by encouraging extensive and effective practice and explicitly teaching spelling

Evidence related to physical handwriting and/or keyboarding skills is limited because there have been relatively fewer studies about teaching children transcription skills than other components of writing (Education Endowment Foundation, 2017a, p.14). Research has established, however, that the speed/fluency of children's writing has an impact on their composition skills (McCutchen, 2000). Thus, it follows that children need to be given many opportunities to practise, that they need to be motivated to engage in extensive practice (Graham & Harris, 2005) and their efforts need to be supported by effective feedback.

As a key component of writing fluency, spelling needs to be explicitly taught (Berninger *et al.*, 2002). While there is limited evidence about what constitutes an effective approach to spelling, there is evidence that teaching word patterns may be helpful (Goodwin & Ahn, 2010; Nunes & Bryant, 2006). There is also some evidence that techniques such as 'look-say-cover-write-say-check' are helpful for some children (Fisher *et al.*, 2007). Research suggests that teachers consider explicitly teaching children the strategies that good spellers seem to use, such as sounding out, analogy, learning 'tricky words' is also suggested (Waugh *et al.*, 2019).

Physical writing skills

Notwithstanding findings reported by Kent *et al.* (2014) about the links between handwriting and compositional fluency in kindergarten, overall there is limited evidence about the influence of physical writing skills on literacy development (Education Endowment Foundation, 2017a). However, a number of participants in this research accorded considerable importance to handwriting.

One K–2 teacher advocated the use of a 'finger gym' (Dolya, 2016), to help children develop the necessary 'muscle tone'. As one described it:

> the finger gym might be using tweezers and tongs or something, or it might be to develop the pincer grasp. It might be [tying] shoelaces; it might be a whole range of things just to develop the muscles in the fingers to be able to write. [PS-CT]

Many participants working with children in the early years, including literacy support teachers, emphasised the need to explicitly teach 'the mechanics' of writing:

> Some children actually need to be explicitly taught "this is how we go about writing … Then we leave a space between the words. Not a finger space, a visual space. Use your eyes. Where do you think the next word will go?" After we've written the sentence together—if they've worked out it's a "d" at the start of dog, and they're not sure how to make the "d", then that would turn into a handwriting exercise as well. [PS-LT]

Keyboarding skills were recently included in the National Literacy Learning Progressions (ACARA, 2017), and are part of the Australian Curriculum from Foundation[23], and that development was emphasised in a few schools, with one principal specifically noting:

> We have a typing program right from kinder. Every child is learning to type … So, hopefully we're equipping our kids for the move to digital learning and digital literacy. [PS-P]

Spelling

The International Literacy Association (2018, p.2) advises that if spelling is taught well 'reading and writing also improves'. Moats (2005) confirms that research shows that learning to spell and learning to read do indeed rely on a common knowledge base (such as letter-sound relationships) and that spelling can be taught in a way to assist young learners better understand that key knowledge (Ehri & Snowling, 2004; Ehri, 2000; Snow *et al.*, 2005).

Research also bears out a strong relationship between spelling and writing and, according to Moats (2005, p.12):

> Even more than reading, writing is a mental juggling act that depends on automatic deployment of basic skills such as handwriting, spelling, grammar, and punctuation so that the writer can keep track of such concerns as topic, organization, word choice, and audience needs.

This observation leads Moats to make an additional point that 'poor spellers may restrict what they write to words they can spell, with inevitable loss of verbal power, or they may lose track of their thoughts when they get stuck trying to spell a word' (p.12).

Bowers and Bowers (2017, p.124) argue that early reading instruction should be designed to make sense of spellings 'by teaching children that spellings are organized around the interrelation of morphology, etymology, and phonology'. In their review of the linguistics of English spellings, they show that spellings are highly logical once all the relevant sub-lexical constraints are considered, making a case for instruction that targets all the cognitive skills necessary to understand the logic of the English spelling system.

In the present study, two main approaches to spelling were prevalent in K–2 classrooms: learning spelling strategies, and testing students on lists of words. Some teachers combined these approaches to create their own spelling programs.

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23 https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/Search?q=hybrid+text&sp=50988

Spelling strategies are intended to build spelling knowledge and focus on the sounds in words (phonological knowledge); the look of words (orthographic knowledge); thinking about meanings of words (morphological knowledge); making connections with other words; and making use of other resources to check words. As with reading strategies, spelling strategies encourage students to make their thinking visible. Some educators called this approach to making thinking visible 'word study'. One AST explained the reason for this change in terminology as follows:

> The reason we use the term 'word study' and not 'spelling' is because we saw that there was a need to teach children about the strategies, not using just one strategy. We wanted to move away from 'look, say, cover, write, check'. I'm not saying there's anything wrong with that, but if that's the only way you teach them, then they have to remember it … If that's the only way they've been taught to spell words, that's like asking them to memorise an infinite number … it's not an effective way to get our kids writing because they get to a word and they go 'I don't know' or 'I can't remember'. However, if we look at the strategies, we can get the kids using that metacognition … [and then saying to themselves or to us] 'I don't know to spell this word, but I'm going to try and connect it to another word'. That way we have more success. [PS-AST]

Noting that 'unfortunately, spelling is more likely to be tested than it is to be taught', the International Literacy Association (2018, p.2) suggests that this is probably a consequence of a general perception that English spelling is a skill more amenable to rote memorisation than to any considered teaching. However, as Bowers and Bowers (2017) note, memorising ever-growing lists of words is unsustainable as a literacy development strategy. Nevertheless, that approach was relatively widespread in schools participating in this research. Among the teachers who favoured this approach, regular spelling tests and quizzes were often used:

> Every day the children come in and, before they start school, I check their spelling words. Then in the afternoon, they'll do a spelling activity. These things are sort of short and sharp, but it's constant, so I think the constancy is what is effective. I only give them … six words that are family-based, so we … talk about rules and sounds and all that sort of thing. [PS-CT]

> I use a lot of mnemonics. I have a test each week of at least three words taught and then tallied up, so we'll get up to a few hundred in a year of hard-to-spell words that are outside the usual phonics or phonemic or phonograms that we use—like the words would, could, and should. An example of that is 'Oh, U Little Devil'. To remember O-U-L-D. So, we want them to learn how to spell these trickier words. [PS-CT]

3.2.7 EEF 7 & 8: Using high-quality information about students' current capabilities and high-quality targeted interventions to help students who are struggling with their literacy

Literacy teaching focus and approach need to be adapted to meet the changing needs of learners. This adaptation involves accurate literacy assessment and diagnostic testing starting in the early years and continuing throughout a student's schooling. There is moderate evidence to support baseline testing to ensure appropriate intervention (Education Endowment Foundation, 2017a, p.17). However, staff administering these tests need to be appropriately qualified, so they are able

to properly conduct the tests and understand the results (McKenna & Stahl, 2015). If a problem is identified, early intervention is vital, especially in the early years (Van Geel *et al.*, 2016).

Appropriately differentiated teaching that reflects the principles previously discussed should reduce the need for targeted interventions. Nevertheless, it is likely that in all classrooms, there will be some learners who will benefit from additional and appropriately targeted intervention (Slavin *et al.*, 2011). Extensive and consistent evidence suggests that early identification and intensive, structured intervention and support have positive impact on the literacy development of young children otherwise not reaching their literacy milestones (Education Endowment Foundation, 2017a, p.18).

Identification

In the present research, children needing extra literacy support were generally identified using early diagnostic assessments and continued regular testing, re-testing, and tracking in running records (Clay, 2001). As a primary school principal and an AST point out:

> We're pretty good at looking for those that might be at risk of phonological awareness deficits. So, they're identified at end of Kinder through the KDC. [PS-P]

> Through the ongoing regular testing that we do, and with our running records as well, we're pinpointing those children who, for whatever reason, aren't reaching the benchmarks. [PS-AST]

The role of literacy support teachers in K–2 classrooms in early identification of children with literacy problems was paramount in terms of 'finding those children who are slipping through the cracks' [PS-LT] because 'if you don't get a kid by the time they reach the end of prep, then it's really hard for them to catch up' [PS-LT]. To this end, many literacy support teachers were involved in administering 'obsurveys—a variety of early assessments—when the children come out of kinder and go into prep' [PS-LT]. The 'observation survey', developed first in 1993 by Marie Clay (2016) provides a systematic way to capture early reading and writing behaviours. The purpose of the 'obsurveys' was described as to identify:

> what they can hear, see and do and from there it can give you little signs that, 'Ah, we might need an eye test here,' or 'We might need a hearing test there.' So being able to get onto it early is really important … We have a nurse here once a week and a 'speechy' [speech pathologist] once a week and also a psychologist. But gee, we've got a lot of needy kids here and we've got so many kids waiting for assessments and the waiting list is two years now. [PS-LT]

Support and intervention

Research indicates that, on average, the impact of support programs and structured interventions tends to be greater the smaller the group, with one-to-one tuition yielding the greatest gains. However, study findings are variable, with some suggesting that the quality of teaching may be just as important as group size (Education Endowment Foundation, 2017a, p.17).

The available evidence suggests that effective interventions share several common features:

- sessions are brief, but regular over a sustained period;

- those delivering the intervention have been extensively trained;

- structured supporting resources are included;

- there is regular assessment to ensure progress is being made;

- sessions are additional to but explicitly linked to what the rest of the class is doing; and

- connections are made between out-of-class learning and in-class learning (Sharples *et al.*, 2016; Slavin *et al.*, 2011).

The EEF (2017a) cautions that while there are various 'catch-up' literacy programs available, not all of these have been rigorously evaluated and so educators need to select with care. Several literacy programs were used specifically for remedial intervention in K–2 classrooms in the schools visited as part of this research.

 In interviews with early years and primary teachers, the most frequently mentioned intervention was 'Reading Recovery', which staff in almost half of participating schools referred to (although it was only mentioned in documentation for five schools). This program was at the forefront of literacy intervention for decades but proved to be highly resource-intensive and so was often implemented without fidelity to the original program, as a 'watered-down version' [PS-LT]. While the program is no longer funded by the Department as a state-wide intervention strategy, some schools in Tasmania with specially-trained Reading Recovery teachers continue to offer it and report good results:

> The Reading Recovery Program is really important, because I have found that, from my experience from teaching this year area, I haven't been able to pick up those children who have been struggling to grasp the strategies of reading, because I haven't had that one-to-one time with them and been able to really focus and dedicate my time to them. But because they have had that development through the Reading Recovery program, they can cope with their general learning much better. So that's a really important thing, I think, that has worked at this school. [PS-CT]

According to May . (2016, p.2), a four-year evaluation of the program in the United States among 6,888 students in 1,222 schools found that it had 'immediate impacts on student literacy'. They have suggested that the program could now be scaled up and lead to further successful outcomes. However, Chapman and Tunmer (2016, pp.14–15) have questioned an admission in the aforementioned research about the "not significant" long-term effect on students' reading skills. They conclude that there is limited evidence of the efficacy of 'Reading Recovery' as a long-term reading intervention, noting that while the program 'may be of some benefit to

some children … [it] is of limited or no benefit to those children who most need early literacy supports'.

In over one third of the primary schools visited in the present research, the Early Literacy Foundations (ELF) program developed by speech pathologists was used with children in K–2 who needed an extra boost to their literacy. Participants reported that these children 'benefitted greatly from the three sessions each week working in pairs with an adult' [PS-P]. One Teacher Assistant (TA) explained how the program operated in her school:

> [Those] children are selected for the ELF program … [are] tested by speech and language, and then they're directed to, well, to me I guess, and [I provide] a phonological awareness program, and give them a 10-week course, three times a week, and hopefully, by the end, we've got some good results. We do blending and segmenting and spelling and reading and all the strategies. We don't do the motor skills. I think some schools do and that's part of it, but we haven't got time to do that. [PS-TA]

In some schools, however, the motor skills component of the ELF program was highly valued because it assists with developing 'handwriting, holding pencils, hand grip, sitting correctly, so we do use those parts of it because I actually want the children to be able to form their letters correctly' [PS-P] (but see Wright (2012) for a viewpoint that questions the emphasis on the phonological and postural elements of the program).

In schools visited as part of this research, TAs were often the staff conducting one-to-one intervention programs with struggling students. One TA explained that the speech pathologist at the school 'will assess the children … and that's where I might pick up some intervention with them' [CS-TA]. Despite the widespread deployment of TAs in this context, it is important to note that there is strong evidence that interventions delivered by teacher assistants, on average, have a lower impact than those delivered by fully qualified teachers (Sharples *et al.*, 2016). However, when TAs work closely with teachers, interventions can have a positive impact.

Working with allied professionals

The Department of Education encourages school staff to work with allied support professionals in identifying and addressing the needs of students struggling with literacy. The Department's *2019–2022 Literacy Framework* specifically outlines that Action 2 is to 'build on the collaborative culture between speech and language pathologists and educators for a more coherent approach to improve oral language' (Department of Education, Tasmania, 2019a).

One speech pathologist interviewed spoke about the fact that many of the students in her caseload were having difficulty in a range of areas, in addition to speech problems, and 'are often having trouble with their literacy secondary to other issues' [PS-SP].

> So, they've been having trouble with their speech sounds … there's a lot of research [which says that if kids are not saying their sounds] age-appropriately by the time they start formal literacy instruction in prep, [then] they're at a higher risk of literacy difficulty. So, I guess that's our focus and [explains] why we work so heavily in kinder and work with pre-literacy skills as a priority—to try and avoid getting into that scenario. But for the kids who have had speech

issues, having the speech aide program is probably one of the things that [most] helps remediate those difficulties, because it gives them individual attention twice a week on specific things that we've done the assessments on. [PS-SP]

Many participants also spoke about increasing numbers of children and young people with backgrounds of trauma and neglect, often manifesting in mental health and/or behavioural issues at school. A systematic review of the correlations between such experiences and educational attainment has recently confirmed that school-aged children experiencing neglect or abuse exhibit far-reaching symptoms and side-effects including aggressive externalizing and internalizing behaviours, poor self-regulation, low self-esteem, depression, difficulty with friendships, and low levels of educational attainment, including literacy outcomes (Maguire *et al.*, 2015).

Participants in this research, teachers most especially, spoke about even very young children in their classrooms displaying signs of trauma and anxiety. One described having a 'student in my class who—he is a humanitarian refugee. He has severe trauma and learning is just the last thing that is on his radar at the moment' [PS-CT]. Another said 'I actually have about five [students] with high anxiety rather than other behaviours. So, if they don't have success, they find it very confronting and distressing [PS-CT].

One school psychologist spoke about how collaboration and scaffolding were key to working successfully with one such student and his teachers:

> Because of his anxiety, this student has developed a sophisticated set of avoidance strategies, which mean that every time a pencil is mentioned, or a writing task is mentioned, he's out of there. So, thanks to the amazing [people] in this school, this child can actually sit and tolerate that pressure now, sit there. Working together, we've put in some strategies already because we could tell what was happening with him. So really scaffolding, going back to the basics, to help him. [PS-PSY]

Overall, the commitment by school staff to support young children who are struggling with their literacy in the early years was strongly evident in the interviews. At times, their heartache at being unable to help more was evident, as with one teacher who talked about a student with foetal alcohol syndrome: 'It doesn't matter how much I'm putting time and effort into this poor little girl, she can't move because she just doesn't intellectually have that capability' [PS–CT].

To sum up, there is undeniable concern and commitment among K–2 teachers in Tasmanian schools to provide targeted literacy support and intervention to children in the crucial early years. Less certain is their capacity to meet identified needs, as evidenced by the complexity of the work (often undertaken by para-professionals), the intensity of some students' needs, and what may be described as frequent 'cherry-picking' of programs. Such uncertainty exists despite evidence indicating that fidelity to the implementation of remedial programs is good practice and that 'adapting' programs can reduce their impact (Slavin *et al.*, 2010).

3.3 Enacting practice in the upper primary years (3–6)

As children move from the foundation years of schooling into the upper primary years, they are starting to consolidate their receptive and expressive literacy skills, building their vocabulary and developing their fluency as speakers/listeners, readers/viewers, and writers/creators. Good teaching at this developmental stage involves moving students towards independence as the depth and breadth of their knowledge and skills increase and they learn to use literacy strategies that are increasingly complex.

The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) offers seven practical principles to underpin literacy teaching in Key Stage 2 (equivalent to Years 3–6 in Australia), emphasising that they should be considered together as a group, and not implemented selectively, but enacted as an integrated approach to teaching literacy. These are:

1. develop pupils' language capability to support their reading and writing;

2. support pupils to develop fluent reading capabilities;

3. teach reading comprehension strategies through modelling and supported practice;

4. teach writing composition strategies through modelling and supported practice;

5. develop pupils' transcription and sentence construction skills through extensive practice;

6. target teaching and support by accurately assessing pupil needs; and

7. use high-quality structured interventions to help pupils who are struggling with their literacy.

These recommendations are discussed below, with reference to the findings from the present research.[24]

3.3.1 EEF 1: Developing oral language capability to support reading and writing

The EEF (2017a) notes that there is now extensive evidence derived from nine metanalyses that include studies of children aged seven to 11 years supporting the importance of developing children's oral language capability at this stage of development.

Speaking and listening are also vital in the development of vocabulary. The EEF KS2 Guidance notes that at this stage children may have acquired the decoding skills needed to vocalise a word, but they are unlikely to understand its meaning if it is not in their vocabulary. For this reason, explicit teaching of new words is advocated. Two approaches to vocabulary building are recommended:

- explicit teaching (Biemiller & Boote, 2006); and

- exposure to language-rich environments where children can experiment freely with words (National Reading Panel, 2000).

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24 As with the EEF recommendations for KS1 (K–2), the last two of the EEF's recommendations for KS2 (3–6) have been combined here and focus on identifying and supporting students who struggle with literacy. Issues related to assessment of student progress more generally are addressed in a separate section of the report (Section 2.5, Evaluating the Impacts of Practice).

VIGNETTE 4 – An integrated approach to teaching literacy

The term 'integrated approach' in relation to teaching literacy is used in different ways. In the Australian Curriculum, it refers broadly to integrating literacy teaching across the whole curriculum, linking content from English to other learning areas such as science, and across year levels[25].

In the literacy literature, and in practice, the term 'integration' is used more specifically, and commonly refers to integrating the teaching of different elements of literacy, drawing on multiple pedagogical strategies.

Integrating literacy teaching across the whole curriculum

The Australian Curriculum designates literacy as a general capability (ACARA, no date). This designation means that teachers are expected to address literacy through the content of learning areas and ensure that all learners can manage literacy demands within each learning area (Department of Education, Tasmania, 2019). Reflecting this responsibility, many participants in this research understood literacy as not 'just a subject', but as a 'basic building block that pervades all subject areas, from kindergarten to grade six' [PS_P], 'crossing all curriculum areas … across the whole day's learning' [PS-CT]. For example, several primary teachers said they explicitly taught different text types by carefully weaving genre writing throughout their various subject unit plans, as the following example demonstrates:

> Last term we had the information text and we based it around our science units. We try to be cross-curricular with everything, so it's not disjointed. So, the science unit was about mammals and … they had to write an

information text about mammals. This term, it's writing to instruct, so procedural texts, and we thought a good way to finish up the year was with cooking and following instructions in recipes. [CS-CT]

In high schools too, literacy was referred to as 'basically every single subject area's responsibility … because that's the gateway to one's engagement or understanding of subject matter' [HS-CT].

Although most participating high school staff were from the English learning area, in some schools there were references to cross-curricular approaches to literacy. In particular, the use of 'writing-to-learn' (Zinsser, 1988) strategies and 'word walls' for vocabulary-building illustrated how some secondary school teachers were integrating literacy teaching in subjects other than English.

In one high school, where 'writing-to-learn' strategies were being introduced across all learning areas, the assistant principal gave the following example:

> [We might] give them a question or something to write as an exit statement. So, "before you leave class today, I want you to …" and it might be "explain why tectonic plates move" or "explain how to put numbers in ascending order". That was one we did in Maths. So that becomes the focus of the learning, but it's also getting them to write. [HS-AP]

As in primary classrooms, secondary teachers frequently linked vocabulary work with their spelling approach, often displaying new words on 'word walls' in classrooms, across a range of learning areas, including industrial arts.

> I mean, it doesn't hurt, visually, for our students to look up and see the word

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25 https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/resources/student-diversity/
    students-with-disability/illustrations-of-practice/an-integrated-approach/

"lathe" for example on the woodwork room wall and know how to spell it. [HS-TiC]

Integrating the teaching of different elements of literacy

The National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy (Australia) recommends that teachers provide 'an integrated approach to reading that supports the development of oral language, vocabulary, grammar, reading, fluency, comprehension and the literacies of new technologies' (Rowe, 2005, p.14). This position is supported by Moats (2007, p.5), who argues that effective reading programs 'interweave several components of language (such as speech sounds, word structure, word meaning, and sentence structure) into the same lessons' and extend beyond phonics instruction to include lessons on word structure and origins.

In both K–2 and 3–6 classrooms in this study, widespread use of the 'CAFE' system provided the basis for a well-integrated approach to literacy teaching. 'CAFE' (Boushey & Moser, 2014) focuses on four core components of reading development—comprehension, accuracy, fluency, and expanding vocabulary.

Since they rely on a common knowledge base, reading and writing are complementary literacy skills (Shanahan, 2016; Graham *et al.*, 2018; Baye *et al.*, 2018; Graham & Herbert, 2011). An integrated teaching approach maximises this interconnectedness. The EEF (2019) therefore suggests it would be a missed opportunity in literacy development if reading and writing activities were not combined, where possible and appropriate.

As outlined early in section 2.3.2, the UK Education Endowment Foundation (EEF, 2017b) offers practical principles to underpin literacy teaching in the middle to upper primary years. One of these explicitly names three aspects of literacy: 'developing students' oral language capability to support their reading and writing'. Moreover, the EEF emphasises that all seven principles should be considered as a group and enacted together in an integrated approach to teaching literacy. Findings from this study demonstrate that many teachers in the middle and upper primary years infuse their literacy teaching with the EEF principles of integration, as illustrated by the following comments:

> You can't teach reading without teaching the writing component because they don't work in isolation. [PS-AST]

> It's all about making links. I mean, if you draw a picture and do some talking about it, it's making the links between words and thoughts [PS-CT].

As one participant said, 'if you do all of them together really well … they work together, but you need to have all of it, for it to work'. [PS-CT]

At the secondary school level, an AST commented on improving high school students' writing by focussing on expanding vocabulary, observing that:

> Kids can't read the question if they don't understand the vocab. It's the same with writing. You can't expect kids to improve their writing if they can't use more complex words to express themselves. There is always that interconnected link. [HS-AST]

Teaching children about morphemes (such as root words, prefixes, and suffixes) is recommended at this stage because it contributes to vocabulary growth and also to improvements in phonological awareness and spelling (Goodwin & Ahn, 2013). As Hirsch (2003, cited in Scott *et al.*, 2016) notes, building vocabulary knowledge builds knowledge of the world as well as knowledge of how words work in the English language.

Scott *et al.* (2016, p.2) note the importance of developing a 'word-conscious classroom' and focusing on word meanings in an integrated approach to language development, and observe that:

> Learning about words is as central as breathing in a literacy classroom, because words are the cornerstone of both oral and written language. Learning about words is inseparable from learning about reading and learning about writing. And, when they are taught together, a synchrony exists that goes beyond all three.

Speaking

In general, participants in this research talked relatively less about oral language in Years 3–6 classrooms than in K–2 classrooms. However, this finding does not necessarily indicate that teachers accorded less emphasis to this element of literacy. Indeed, many classroom teachers of Years 3–6 spoke about how they prioritised opportunities for students to practise oral presentation skills, observing that such opportunities develop students' confidence and 'they learn a lot from each other when they stand up in front of people and present to them' [PS-CT].

Highlighting the importance of providing a range of opportunities to practise speaking skills, the principal at a primary school noted that their strong drama program had had a 'demonstrable effect on the students' ability to communicate when they're presenting' [PS-P]. Some teachers emphasised the importance of developing conversation skills, one saying:

> I truly believe if they can't string a sentence together, or if they can't look someone in the eyes as they're speaking, it's going to hold them back so much … I've had to put a lot of work into this group to be able to get them to have the confidence to be able to actually hold a conversation, basically, with their peers, as well as with adults. [PS-CT]

Listening

While there was less explicit focus on listening as an aspect of oracy, several participants noted its importance, acknowledging that they 'probably don't teach listening enough' because it's 'one of those things that you think 'oh, well they're doing that anyway. They listen anyway. They follow instructions anyway' [PS-CT].

Some primary teachers explicitly linked listening and speaking by incorporating learning to be 'respectful listeners' [PS-CT] into preparing students to give oral presentations.

> We actually went through what a respectful listener looks like, sounds like, feels like … It culminated in oral presentations. So, they had an oral presentation where I gave them a topic. I had a rubric and a letter was sent home to the parents, because the children do this at home …Then, once they'd done their

first oral presentation, I would sit down … with them … I truly believe if they can't string a sentence together, or if they can't look someone in the eyes as they're speaking, it's going to hold them back so much. I just think, especially, as I said with this group, I had to put a lot of work into them to be able to get them to have the confidence to be able to actually hold a conversation, basically, with their peers, as well as with adults. [PS-CT]

Vocabulary

While few participants specifically mentioned teaching vocabulary, for some teachers expanding children's vocabulary was key to literacy development at this stage of schooling (see Temple *et al.*, 2018). One teacher who thought that vocabulary was crucial said:

> I look for authentic texts that have rich vocab because I think if you can start with vocab there's all sorts of things that you're improving. You're improving their comprehension [and] understanding [of] the text and … word meanings. You're also improving their speaking because they've got access to more vocab. [PS-LS]

This comment resonates with an argument mounted by Shanahan *et al.* (2010) about providing opportunities for primary school aged children to engage with a wide range of texts, including digital texts, underpins the development of more sophisticated skills, such as deep comprehension and reasoning.

Reflecting Goodwin and Ahn's (2013) findings, many teachers also emphasised the close connection between vocabulary and spelling, noting the affordances of the curriculum to maximise this connection:

> I base my spelling around developing vocabulary. So, we'd go from a particular theme that we might be studying. We might brainstorm those words. Then we might look at how those words form together. We look at the etymology of the word, the dictionary meaning, and then we'd put those words in sentences. So, if we were looking at democracy or government, for example, a lot of our vocabulary and spelling would come from those topics. Then we'd build on that by reading literature that's based around that too. [PS-CT]

Considering effective ways to teach new words in context, several participants referred to using the 'Vocab Cycle' workshop model developed by Van Vyve,[26] which appealed because it uses words that students have already encountered and 'allows for them to draw on other knowledge' [PS-AST]. Importantly, one AST said that 'children are really excited about the vocab cycle' and went on to recount an example of how this method supports the transfer of new knowledge:

> I remember, last year, we were walking back from an excursion and we had just read a book and there were four new words. One of the girls made up a sentence as we were walking back, using all four of those new words within a sentence, describing what she could see … She was trying to put the new words into place at a time when it wasn't actually asked of her. She was just talking to me and said "I can see the rain on the leaves and it's shimmering and glistening" … So that's just one example of where the vocab cycle has become infectious amongst the children … So, if you're reading a novel, or another

picture book that's got that word in it, they draw on that … [and are] starting to transfer it to their own writing—and that's our aim. [PS-AST]

3.3.2 EEF 2: Supporting students to become fluent readers

While 'the evidence for a balanced approach to reading is extensive', there is 'limited evidence on the best way to combine approaches for different ages and capabilities to develop fluency' (Education Endowment Foundation, 2017b, p.11). The EEF concludes, therefore, that overall the strength of the evidence is moderate in relation to how best to develop children as fluent readers in Key Stage 2 (KS2 = Year 3–6).

However, broad academic consensus suggests there are two main strands to reading development: word recognition and language comprehension (Price-Mohr & Price, 2017; Savage *et al.*, 2015; Torgerson *et al.*, 2006; Wyse & Goswami, 2008).

Scarborough (2001) notes that these two main strands are composed of multiple sub-strands that children need to learn to 'entwine' as their reading fluency develops. While the EEF KS2 guidance (2017b, p.11) notes that 'there are no quick ways to develop reading fluency', the point is made that most children benefit from explicit instruction that includes both guided oral reading instruction and repeated reading practice (National Reading Panel, 2000; Scott *et al.*, 2016; Therrien, 2004).

Importantly, fluency in reading supports comprehension because the less a reader needs to focus on word recognition, the more they can direct their attention to understanding the meaning of the text (Swanson & O'Connor, 2009).

Guided reading

Guided reading took various forms in middle and upper primary classrooms at the schools visited as part of this research and was, to some extent, influenced by whether there was a whole school approach to literacy (see Section 2.4). Such reading was also shaped by teacher preferences and the invariably diverse range of reading levels in each class. Nevertheless, there was a general pattern in guided reading moving from teacher-directed to student-led practice, again reflecting the prevalence of Pearson and Gallagher's (1983) gradual release of responsibility pedagogical model (see also Denton *et al.*, 2014; Fountas & Pinnell, 2017).

In Years 3–6 classrooms in schools visited for this research, there was widespread use of the 'Readers' Workshop'**,** incorporating the Reader's Notebook (Fountas & Pinnell, 2002). One AP explained in detail how she uses the 'Reader's Notebook' to introduce different text types and reading strategies, noting that when it works well it has:

> huge impact on students' engagement with reading: their ability to read more difficult texts as they go along, and interpret and understand, and be able to discuss their ideas about what they've read. So … I would buy an expensive notebook for each student, to begin with, a hardback one. Then I would discuss the kinds of things they read each day and try and point out that they often read things without realising they're reading—like if they read a sign or an advert. To model this, I tend to take photos of the things I read every day, like my watch, or my phone, or a road sign. And I say, 'why do I read those things? What does it mean to me?' Then I get them to have a go in 24 hours of their life. What kind of things do they read? And then when

they bring that [information] back we discuss different reading strategies and different types of reading: skimming and scanning reading, using inference, finding deeper meanings, spending a lot more time reading something that's more challenging or for enjoyment. [CS-AP]

Reading practice

The significant role of motivation in reading development is well-recognised (Gambrell, 2011; Malloy *et al.*, 2013); this points to the importance of engagement, which clearly has implications for teacher practice (Guthrie & Humenick, 2004; Guthrie *et al.*, 2000; Tracey & Morrow, 2006). On this basis, Gambrell (2011, pp.173–76) proposes seven key research-based practices for promoting students' intrinsic motivation to read, arguing that students are more motivated to read under the following conditions:

1. reading tasks and activities are relevant to their lives;

2. students have access to a wide range of reading materials;

3. there are many opportunities to engage in sustained reading;

4. students have opportunities to make choices about what they read and how they engage in and complete literacy tasks;

5. students can socially interact with others about the text they are reading;

6. students have opportunities to be successful with challenging text; and

7. classroom incentives reflect the value and importance of reading.

Explaining how she structured reading practice to reflect these principles in her classroom, one teacher said:

> In reading, everyone gets their turn to read. With the lower groups, we read together as a group first, and when they're all comfortable with that, we'll go and we'll do it individually as well. So, I just try to make it as supportive for them as it can be. I try to target what this particular group needs, whether it be a comprehension [strategy] that we're working on, whether it be how they're reading, whether it be even simply voice projection or something like that. So that's how I run it. [PS-CT]

The link between self-efficacy and reading fluency has also been established. Carroll and Fox (2017, p.8) note that 'while ways to improve children's self-efficacy are currently under-researched, they are likely to include repeated successful encounters with print'. The implication for teacher practice is that children need regular and frequent practice at reading to increase their self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997; Guthrie *et al.*, 2000).

3.3.3 EEF 3: Teaching reading comprehension strategies through modelling and supported practice

Extensive evidence from eight meta-analyses confirms that teaching metacognitive strategies to children aged seven to 11 years has a strong impact on improving their reading comprehension; among those strategies are predicting, questioning, clarifying, summarising, inferring, and activating prior knowledge (Oakhill *et al.*, 2014). As with developing reading fluency, good teaching practice in developing reading comprehension involves teacher modelling, followed by student practice

(Stuart & Stainthorp, 2015). Importantly, readers need to learn both what the strategy is and how, when, and why to use each strategy (McKenna & Stahl, 2015).

The gradual release of responsibility model (Department of Education Tasmania & Derewianka, 2015, 2016a, 2016b; Pearson & Gallagher, 1983) allows students to move from (a) listening to the teacher provide an explicit description of and model the strategy to (b) working collaboratively with peers to use the strategy in small groups to (c) guided individual practice and finally to (d) independence in using the strategy. Selecting texts that are appropriately challenging is of key importance.

In this context, it is worth noting that the apparent slowing in reading progress as measured by NAPLAN among Australian students in Years 5, 6, and 7 may not necessarily be the result of poor early reading instruction or inadequate emphasis on phonics. Rather, according to Peter Goss in work at the Grattan Institute, it signals 'a failure to stretch students in upper primary school'.[27]

A consistent finding in the literature related to effective teaching of reading comprehension is that primary students in classes with teachers who ask higher-level questions tend to show greater growth in comprehension than those in which teach telling predominates (Topping & Ferguson, 2005). Importantly, Taylor and colleagues (2002) found that teacher telling of information had a negative relationship with comprehension growth, whereas purposeful teacher questioning that challenged students was associated with significant positive growth. Thus, a framework for cognitive engagement in reading that includes both student support and their active engagement, Taylor *et al.* (2002) suggest, is key to improving reading comprehension.

Reading strategies

The present research suggests that consolidating reading skills receives substantial emphasis in Years 3–6 classrooms. Moreover, teaching reading fluency and reading comprehension were entwined in primary classrooms (Scarborough *et al.*, 2009), and there was a strong focus on reading-to-learn, rather than learning to read. As one teacher pointed out: 'they can all read—or they should be able to by now—so there has to be a learning activity attached to reading' [PS-CT].

Primary teachers interviewed for this research reported using a range of reading approaches with their students. However, the 'CAFE' approach (Boushey & Moser, 2014) that focuses on four core components of reading development—comprehension, accuracy, fluency, and expanding vocabulary—and which was in wide use in K–2 classrooms (see section 2.3.1) was also popular in middle and upper primary classrooms. Similarly, reinforcing and building on the reading strategies (visualising, predicting, summarising, and connecting) introduced in the early years was seen as integral to teaching reading in 3–6 classrooms:

> We have a big push towards using reading strategies [so they are] able to articulate which strategy they're using, why they're using that strategy. Getting them to give a lot of feedback, too. [PS-AST]

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27 https://theconversation.com/reading-progress-is-falling-between-year-5-and-7-especially-for-advantaged-students-5-charts-124634

[Our non-readers] bring in a comic, and we say that's fine. Then, at the end of it, we do things like 'can you tell us about the character that you really connected with in your book?' Then the next week's focus might be 'before you start, let's go around and everybody make a prediction'. [PS-CT]

Supported practice

Another common way to support students in the primary years to develop their comprehension was the literature circle (Daniels, 1994; Tompkins *et al.*, 2014). One teacher explained the value of the literature circle in terms of practising the range of comprehension strategies:

> In literature circles, they all read the same book, but then they all have a different role. So, one of the kids is the discussion director and [has] the job of thinking up some discussion questions for the group. We … focus on what's a good question. It's not a yes-no type question. It has to be one that generates an opinion. Another one of the roles is a connector. So [the person with that role] makes connections to expand everyone else's comprehension of what might be going on in the story or relating to the character or a text-to-world connections. You've seen in the news, that kind of thing. Another role is a vocabulary enricher. So [that person] finds interesting phrases, or tricky words, or really interesting turns of phrase in the book. One's a summariser. They all get a turn in the different roles, which is building their skills. They have to prepare [for] the role and the next day they come back and have a discussion that is led by whoever's the discussion director that week. [PS-CT]

In the context of the gradual release of responsibility model, this approach gives students substantial responsibility for their own and their peers' learning. The process also requires a willingness on the part of teachers to relinquish control to an extent in order to facilitate collaborative learning and active engagement. On this point, several participants referred to using a 'reciprocal teaching' approach to 'promote independent reading … and make students responsible for their own reading' [HS-LS], by getting them 'to actually get them to think more deeply about text and to actually have conversations around it' [PS-LS].

As one literacy coach explained:

> In a small, flexible group, the teacher facilitates the students … in a very guided discussion around that text. So, you'll do some predicting before you start so that you can generate and discuss their prior knowledge. And there is distinct time that you stop, and you look at various higher order questioning. It's very effective because it is teacher-supported, but it's not teacher-led. And it is all around reading to understand. I particularly like that model … it works well, especially for year two, three, four, five, and six … This is reading to learn. [PS-LS]

It is worth noting that a recent evaluation by the EEF of reciprocal reading as a targeted intervention delivered to a small group of students identified as struggling with their reading showed promising results (O'Hare *et al.*, 2019). The study found that these students made the equivalent of two additional months' progress in both overall reading and reading comprehension, compared to equivalent children who had not participated in a reciprocal reading program.[28]

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28 https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/projects-and-evaluation/projects/reciprocal-reading/

3.3.4 EEF 4: Teaching writing composition strategies through modelling and supported practice

The EEF (2017b) KS2 Guidance notes that there is extensive evidence (drawn from three meta-analyses) to support the explicit teaching of writing composition strategies. Teaching students that writing is a process involves explaining the series of strategies—planning, drafting, sharing, evaluating, revising, editing, and publishing—that lead to the production of a polished piece of writing. It also involves providing opportunity for practice. Using 'think-alouds', teachers can share their thought processes for each strategy, providing the appropriate modelling and making their thinking visible to students. Using the GRR model, students eventually develop the mastery required to take responsibility for choosing and using the writing strategies (Graham *et al.*, 2012), recognising that writing is not a linear process and often involves many steps, backwards and forwards. Learning to write also involves considering audience and purpose and children at this developmental stage need to start to learn the features and conventions of the different narrative, informative, persuasive genres as they develop their own writing identities.

Ryan (2014) notes that students' emergent writing identities are shaped and performed in various ways that may be enabled or constrained by the objective conditions that prevail in how writing is taught in schools. She argues that the 'overwhelming constraints of accountability, visibility and comparison in the teaching and learning of writing, largely resulting from standardised tests' can make it difficult for both teachers and students to exercise agency in developing children's writing identities (Ryan, 2014, p.144). While she agrees that all students need explicit instruction in writing composition strategies and text types, Ryan (2014) also notes that children need less structured opportunities to avoid their writing becoming formulaic. They need time to engage critically and creatively to develop their own voices as confident writers for real audiences (Ryan & Barton, 2014). Making the point that 'students need a reason, other than standardised testing, to invest in writing', Ryan (2014, p.145) asserts that:

> To enable writing that is technically and rhetorically appropriate, yet also allows the writer to perform for the audience, there must be a balance of sustained preparatory strategies and opportunities for reflexivity that is made social.

Modelling and scaffolding

As with the teaching of reading, the gradual release of responsibility model was also used in the teaching of writing, with primary teachers in this research carefully modelling and scaffolding different writing genres:

> I like to model what a good piece of writing in each of the genres looks like. I like to sit down with the whole class, and for one hour we write a piece … together. I'll write it up on the board. They give me all their ideas and I talk them through exactly what we're doing and why we're doing it. Then after we've done that once for each text type, I ask a child to type it up for me. We print it out and then we all sit around in a circle and we go through that text type. They have a margin down the side of the page, and they take notes about why it's important to have this many paragraphs, what each paragraph should look like, what the main idea is … what sort of vocabulary this text type needs. Then we do the nitty gritty of looking at the structure. Have we got the

paragraphs? Do they make sense? Does the piece of writing make sense from start to finish? How's your grammar looking? How is your tense looking? All of those sorts of things and your spelling as well. So, we go through the entire thing. So that's generally how I would start writing genre in my class. [PS-CT]

As one teacher pointed out, at this developmental stage students 'still need heaps and heaps of scaffolding and heaps and heaps of guidance 'to build up their confidence to get them to the point, that end point where they can write a narrative' [PS-CT].

Learning about genres and audience

Reflecting Ryan's (2014) contention about the constraints imposed on writing development, this study found that NAPLAN was a significant influence on writing and creating in Years 3–6 classrooms, since students are tested by NAPLAN in Years 3 and 5 (ACARA, 2016, 2018). There was a strong emphasis on teaching the different genres of writing and understanding the different purposes and audiences for various text types (see Freedman & Medway, 1994). As one teacher explained:

Well, we've got NAPLAN testing coming up. So, until May, we're very much "right, let's teach the genre of the narrative". You're … obliged to do that, and probably towards the end of this year, we'll do persuasive text. So that's … set, I guess, to give the kids the best chance of doing well on NAPLAN. [PS-CT]

However, one teacher also cautioned against 'falling into the trap of ticking boxes' [PS-CT], saying:

it's also about revisiting [material]. It's not about ticking off boxes and saying 'okay, well I've done persuasive text now. It's term one and I've done narrative. Now I'm going to do scientific writing, and I'm going to do this' because it's all cross-curricular and linked'. [PS-CT]

Importantly, several participants commented on how they explicitly taught different text types by carefully weaving genre writing throughout their various subject unit plans, as the following example demonstrates, one noting this:

Last term we had the information text and we based it around our science units. We try to be cross-curricular with everything, so it's not disjointed. So, the science unit was about mammals and … they had to write an information text about mammals. This term, it's writing to instruct, so procedural texts, and we thought a good way to finish the year was with cooking and following instructions in recipes. [CS-CT]

Despite the pressures imposed by NAPLAN, many teachers said that they tried to avoid the test dictating entirely how they teach writing to middle and upper primary students. For example, while paying attention to narrative and persuasive writing, some liked to 'mix that up with some poetry and some other short pieces of writing' [PS-CT]. Cognisant of the overarching need for student engagement and enjoyment in learning, many participants stressed the importance of including an element of fun into teaching writing:

Now we're at the fun stage where we're looking at different features of writing. We're doing poetry at the moment, looking at metaphors and similes and hyperbole and all that sort of thing, and they're really enjoying it. They're really enjoying sharing. There's a poetry slam coming up so that will be cool [laughter]. [PS-CT]

Like its companion the 'Readers' Workshop', the 'Writers' Workshop' model—developed from the early work of Donald Graves (1995) and popularised by Lucy Calkins (2006, 2011)—was widely used to teach genre-writing in middle and upper primary classrooms. An integral part of the model is the 'Writers' Notebook', which is personalised. Using an inquiry-based approach, the model allows for differentiation and individualised teaching and supported practice. One AST explained that it encourages students to take ownership of their writing, while accommodating one-on-one conferencing 'at the point of need, so that students know what they actually need to work on' [PS-AST]. That staff member illustrated in some detail how the process works:

> Students choose a 'seed' to unpack. The seed can be anything that interests them. It could be a photo. It could be a skeleton. It could be an actual seed. It can be images. It can be a newspaper clipping. It can be anything to stimulate their thinking. They have to unpack the seed using a visible thinking routine or graphic organiser; this might be a "I see, think, wonder" routine or a "describing wheel", where they write down all their thinking about the seed. Then, next to it, they list all the different text types that they could write. So, it might be "I want to write a recipe about how to use this". Or "I want to write a narrative". Or "I want to write a procedural text". Or "I want to do a persuasive text". It's built in that the teachers explicitly teach the text types, but the kids get the opportunity to explore … After they brainstorm the text types, they go off on their own, unpacking and writing their own text types, while the teacher's doing small group conferencing or one-on-one conferencing based on what the kids need. There's a reflection built into [the exercise, as well]. It fits beautifully with our inquiry approach to teaching, so it's a process we're embedding in all classrooms. [PS-AST]

3.3.5 EEF 5: Developing students' transcription and sentence construction skills through extensive practice

As noted in Section 2.3.1, there is limited evidence about good practice in developing transcription/physical writing skills, and what there is generally based on single studies. Noting that 'the research base for claiming that spelling is important for young children is solid', Moats (2005, p.12) has observed that the research related to teaching spelling to older, primary school aged children is scant. Indeed, high quality evidence about how best to teach spelling generally is limited (Education Endowment Foundation, 2017a, p.17).

However, emerging evidence suggests both that spelling is most effectively learned when contextualised (Bowers & Bowers, 2017) and that it is important for teachers to respond to spelling errors with appropriate strategies, which will vary depending on whether the error is phonological, orthographical, or morphological (Goodwin & Ahn, 2010; Nunes & Bryant, 2006). A promising approach to the teaching of spelling is 'structured word inquiry' (SWI; see Bowers & Bowers, 2017; Bowers & Kirby, 2010). This approach introduces children to 'word families' to identify associations between and among words, based not only on their structure but also on their meanings.

SWI is grounded in the linguistic knowledge that English does not have an irregular spelling system, with lots of 'exceptions to rules.' Rather, there is a problem in how the English writing system has been understood, with relatively too much focus on grapheme-phoneme correspondences at the expense of morphology. The

importance of morphological instruction is increasingly supported by research as an effective way to teach spelling in a meaningful context, especially for less able students (see Carlisle, 2010; Devonshire *et al.*, 2013; Goodwin & Ahn, 2013).

Moats (2005, p.42) argues that while 'spelling instruction may be old fashioned … its importance has not diminished with computerized spell checkers—and there's no reason to believe that it will diminish in the foreseeable future'. Moreover, Moats (2005) argues that the benefits of in-depth word study extend well beyond good spelling, enabling students to develop a deep understanding of English by studying the meanings of roots, prefixes, and suffixes, families of related words, the historical development of the English language, and words' languages of origin.

While few participants in this research spoke directly about developing transcription skills in the primary years, spelling was a central element of literacy teaching for many and was woven throughout the curriculum:

> You improve their spelling, you improve their understanding of how words work, so you improve their grammar and you improve their writing. We don't have spelling every day because it's throughout everything. So, whenever they're writing anything, in any subject, whenever they want to spell something, they will just have a go first. [PS-CT]

In general, in this study it was found that the two approaches to spelling that were dominant in K–2 classrooms continued to be in evident use in 3–6 classrooms: learning spelling strategies and memorising and testing lists of words.

Learning spelling strategies and unpacking words: a word study approach

One participant commented that teaching spelling strategies was the best way to 'get kids over the year 3 hump … when they hit a wall where we don't seem to make much progress if they haven't been taught all the other ways to learn spelling' [PS-CT] (see Topfer 2010, 2014). In schools where this strategy had become a whole school approach to spelling, 3–6 teachers were helping students learn the metalanguage of spelling. An AST explained that staff had:

> looked at the single-word spelling test and worked out that a lot of the kids didn't understand prefixes and suffixes. So [now] we teach them the metalanguage and expect them to use it, too; so that's been the big push and really effective in getting them to think about their learning, as opposed to regurgitating lists of words. [PS-AST]

Reflecting this word study approach to spelling, many primary teachers also spoke about approaching spelling by focusing on word origins, and many were indebted to work by Misty Adoniou (2014), incorporating etymology as a strategy for teaching spelling, and Christine Topfer (2014, 2015). While this approach is neither new nor 'owned' by a single expert (SWI; see Bowers & Bowers, 2017), many participants used the phrase 'the Misty approach'. For one teacher, Adoniou's work was 'the most exciting thing that's happened in spelling for a while' [PS-CT].

Noting the tight connection between spelling and writing, Bayetto (2010) argues that expanding students' word knowledge supports many constituent parts of their literacy development. Teaching students how to correctly spell relevant high frequency words is also noted in the literature as part of a balanced spelling

program (see Beckham-Hungler *et al.*, 2003). In this research, the Oxford Word List (OWL) was frequently mentioned by Years 3–6 teachers as a way to confirm known words and teach words that need to be known next. An advocate of the OWL, Bayetto (2010, p.8) suggests both that 'students will benefit from being taught how to read, understand, and write these 404 frequently occurring words' and that this facility with spelling, in turn, supports them to become thoughtful writers (see also Allington & Cunningham, 2002).

Memorising words

Many teachers participating in this study favoured memorisation of spelling and a 'spelling journal'—introduced in some K–2 classrooms—was maintained by some teachers in Years 3–6 classrooms. As one teacher described it, the:

> children have a spelling journal [in which] they learn five focus words every day, and they have a partner test after school and that's just look-say-cover-write-check. Those words come from errors in their writing or errors in their testing. [PS-CT]

While there is some evidence that the 'look-say-cover-write-check' approach is effective for students with persistent spelling difficulties (Fisher *et al.*, 2007), the research suggests that this strategy is most effective when part of a broader approach to spelling, as this teacher explains:

> In my spelling program, I still do 'look, circle, write, check', which sounds dreadful, I know, but I have four levels of it … My big spelling session is based on the single-word spelling test. I look at that, and each week I plan what these children might need to know, drop the Y, add I-E-S, and we do an investigation on why that might be happening. So, it's investigative spelling … [Or we] might be looking at suffixes or prefixes, or the E-A sound, but it's all very investigative, which seems to be more interesting … that's been really successful. [PS-LT]

For another teacher, the spelling journal became a hybrid of the memorisation and word study approaches to spelling, including both the child's individual focus words and also 'some of the families of words or some of the spelling rules that we've been working on' [PS-CT].

On the basis that 'spelling is the most boring thing in the world' [PS-CT], many staff tried to enhance student engagement with the tasks involved in learning spelling, recognising that it was vital to 'make spelling fun and to develop a love of words for kids' [PS-CT]. To this end, quizzes and games were popular: 'We play spelling games … more than anything because they love it. If they have a competition in year six … they'll play it until the cows come home … But they won't learn if you say "write a list of spelling words ten times over"' [PS-CT].

Sentence construction, grammar, and punctuation

In contrast to the evidence base for teaching transcription and spelling, evidence for teaching sentence construction (inclusive of grammar) is 'more robust and consistent' (Education Endowment Foundation, 2017a, p.17). Research indicates that learning to construct sentences should start with simple sentences and progress to multi-clause, more complex constructions (Berninger *et al.*, 2002; Graham *et al.*, 2012; Saddler & Graham, 2005). Sentence construction skills need to become

increasingly automatic for students to develop their writing (McCutchen, 2000) and practice should be extensive, motivating, engaging, and supported by timely high-quality feedback to students (Graham & Harris, 2005).

Findings from the present study suggest that there is considerable diversity in teaching grammar and punctuation in middle and upper primary school classrooms in Tasmania, and some confusion about whether a 'traditional' or 'functional' grammar approach is more appropriate (see also Macken-Horarik *et al*., 2018). One literacy specialist talked in some detail about the tensions that characterise different approaches:

> There are a few schools of thought about how you teach grammar. I'm a very terminology focused person. I mean, I think you have to say, "that's a subordinate clause, that's a conjunction, and that's a dependent clause". Other people think "you need to make it visible to kids, the structure of the language and how you can wield it". I think you can use some terminology, but if you use too much, it does put them off … Some people still get out the grammar sheets. "Here's a sheet on nouns, here's a sheet on adjectives". But they don't look at it functionally, so how does it function in the text to improve the text? How can you use it to enrich your own writing? … NAPLAN doesn't use the language of functional grammar—it uses the language of traditional grammar, which is verb, adjective, noun. So, in theory, if you want kids to be able to perform in NAPLAN, you have to use the same language that [NAPLAN is] using, which [refers to] the traditional names. So that's why I tend to say "verb, adjective, noun". [PS-LS]

This comment suggests that traditional grammar and functional grammar approaches are mutually exclusive. While this is not the case, it appears that some teachers' drive to set their students up well for NAPLAN testing has led them to emphasise traditional approaches. One told us:

> I saw it coming because in NAPLAN [students] have to identify grammar and punctuation. So that's what my biggest focus was, because I had to skill them up, and because they didn't have a lot of those skills. So, we talked a lot about placement of speech marks and exclamations in the right context. [PS-CT]

Another teacher saw a need to revisit 'traditional basic grammar rules'—not so much for NAPLAN but because 'kids forget all the time even in Years 5/6 that they have to put a full stop and a capital letter. They have no idea where a sentence starts' [PS-CT]. Similarly, a Year 3/4 teacher talked about students in those years who 'when they write, they just write, no full stops, no capitals. There was no punctuation at all' [PS-AST]. That participant was one of several who explained how 'mentor sentences' are an excellent way to combine teaching grammatical terms and punctuation conventions and demonstrate the functions of these conventions:

> Rather than giving [students] a sentence with grammar and punctuation mistakes and getting them to correct it, it's giving them a brilliant sentence, a "mentor sentence", and getting them to pull it apart: "okay, we've got a capital letter at the beginning, a question mark at the end—there's a comma in there, there's two adjectives, a verb, and two nouns, and a pronoun. You can make your own sentence that uses those things now". I thought it was a really interesting way to go, because my go-to would've been "Here's a group of words that make a sentence. How do we punctuate it?" So … it was actually going from the perfect example [where I could say] "This is a really good

sentence. What makes it a really good sentence? Can you now write a really good sentence? And can you now write that in your own writing?" … It made sense for these kids … and it was that modelling, as well. [PS-AST]

That teacher also found that 'the mentor sentence was something that was … really interesting and different that I hadn't used before and I found it highly influential as far as improving their sentence writing' [PS-AST].

Other teachers focused more on making grammar lessons engaging and, in teaching grammar and punctuation in Years 3–6 classrooms, several stressed the importance of 'making things hands-on and a bit fun as well' [PS-CT]. One participant explained her approach as follows:

> Teach the idea first, name it later. So rather than [saying] 'Right. We're going to learn about writing paragraphs' … [they go] 'Boring. What's that?' … Instead, I might say 'I've noticed that you've got all these amazing ideas written down, but they're all jumbled together. Why don't we put all your ideas in one space? Leave a line now, and let's put this idea here. That's all just the one idea—leave a space'. They do all of that, and then you say, 'now we've just made … a paragraph'. So, you name it afterwards. [PS-CT]

Other teachers preferred to use students' own writings as the hooks to teach grammar. Some advocated the 'Talk for Writing' method developed by Corbett and Strong (2011) as an effective way to make those connections because the method uses children's oral language as the basis for their writing. One teacher described how she taught prepositional phrases using 'Talk for Writing':

> The grammar is already there, in their writing, and I'm just naming it. So, let's say the original prepositional phrase was 'underneath the tree'. So, we name it and then we start to innovate on that. So instead of 'underneath the tree', they might change it to 'above the clouds' or 'below the water' … So, they're learning grammar through that … I found that was really engaging for them, and it was really good for me as a teacher to [say] "Well, I can actually teach grammar in an interesting way that actually makes sense to them", because it's using their own writing. [PS-CT]

3.3.6 EEF 6 & 7: Targeting teaching and support by accurately assessing student needs and using high-quality targeted interventions to help students who are struggling with their literacy

Targeted teaching to support both high-attaining students and those who struggle with their literacy relies on accurate assessment of student progress, ensuring that all students are provided with the right support in their literacy development (Van de Pol *et al.*, 2010). This work involves accurately and promptly identifying students who are struggling so that their progress may be sustained (Al Otaiba *et al.*, 2014; Berninger & Amtmann, 2003; Wanzek *et al.*, 2016). As noted in 2.3.1, there is moderate evidence, from several reviews and intervention studies, to suggest that accurate baseline testing is important to usefully guide appropriate intervention (Education Endowment Foundation, 2017a, p.19).

For children who, for various reasons, struggle with literacy into the middle and upper primary years of schooling, high quality intervention is needed to ensure they make progress (Scammacca *et al.*, 2015; Slavin *et al.*, 2011). Needed are regular

monitoring to identify these students and diagnostic testing to accurately identify the precise nature of the difficulty and plan appropriate support (Van Geel *et al.*, 2016). The evidence in favour of structured interventions and intensive one-to-one support for students who are struggling with literacy is extensive and consistent (Education Endowment Foundation, 2017a, p.21).

Identification

Many primary school leaders and educators in this research described their literacy intervention decisions as 'data-driven':

> You look at the ones who are still down in that bottom circle [of the data chart] and you have to ask "okay so what's happening here? Let's do some more investigation. Is it a speech assessment, is it a psych assessment that's needed? What do we need to do? What's going on?" [PS-P]

In addition, keen observation by classroom teachers, coupled with peer discussion and conversations with parents, often triggered formal investigation of students who may need additional support for literacy.

> In our year group teams, we will sit down and put the data out in front of us, and teachers will have their input, "I've noticed this student …" or "these children really need some extra intervention—what can we offer them?" So, based on the input from teachers, the data and professional dialogue, we put together intervention groups of up to six children. [PS-LT]

As with those teaching students in the early years, Years 3–6 classroom teachers worked closely alongside allied professionals, where possible and appropriate, including those involved in administering diagnostic tests. Speech pathologists have traditionally had an important role in this sphere, as one explained in these terms:

> For example, we do the SPAT, which is the Sutherland Phonological Awareness Test, testing kids on rhyming and whether they can identify first … last … and middle sounds in words and then we can feed that information back to the teachers … For as long as I've been working, we've always been involved [in] testing with kids that teachers have worries about … so we can give that information back to teachers and give them ideas and recommendations about resources that they can use. [PS-SP]

School psychologists were often also involved in diagnosing non-speech related problems influencing students' literacy development (see American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

> I've just assessed a primary school student who is still not writing the letters of the alphabet fluently … There's clearly something going on. I've ruled out that it's a visual-motor problem because they're holding their pencil properly. There's nothing wrong with the way they're writing. It's not a physical problem … But it's definitely neurological in terms of a literacy problem … We've diagnosed that … So, I cross-checked with [the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders or] DSM-5 manual and he meets the criteria, so we know this child has a really significant barrier to learning how to write … and that's impacting his confidence with words … and he's got some secondary anxiety that's developed from that. [PS-PSY]

VIGNETTE 5 – Support for students struggling with literacy

In all classrooms, there are likely to be some students who will benefit from additional and appropriately targeted intervention (Slavin *et al.*, 2011). High quality intervention is needed to ensure these learners make progress and that this progress is sustained, whether they are young children not yet reaching literacy milestones or older students falling behind their peers (Al Otaiba ., 2014; Berninger & Amtmann, 2003; Scammacca *et al.*, 2015; Slavin *et al.*, 2011; Wanzek *et al.*, 2016). There is extensive and consistent evidence in favour of structured interventions and intensive one-to-one support for students struggling with literacy (EEF 2017a, 2017b, 2019)

Assessing the need for extra support

Providing appropriate additional support relies on accurate, reliable, and timely screening assessments, diagnostic tests, and ongoing monitoring to establish each student's learning needs and inform what kinds of instructional focus will meet these needs (Snowling & Hulme, 2011; Van de Pol *et al.*, 2010; Van Geel *et al.*, 2016). Baseline testing helps ensure appropriate intervention (EEF, 2017a), provided that staff administering these tests are knowledgeable about their use and the interpretation of results (McKenna & Stahl, 2015).

The Tasmanian Department of Education encourages teachers to work with allied support professionals, such as speech and language pathologists, to identify and address the needs of students struggling with literacy[29]. From 2020 a new "Educational Adjustments" funding model will apply for students with disability in government schools, which may assist in providing such literacy support.[30]

The role of Teacher Assistants

One-to-one instruction for students by qualified teachers and literacy specialists appears to be effective (D'Agostino & Harmey, 2016; Slavin *et al.*, 2011). In practice in schools in this study, teacher assistants tended to be tasked with implementing such one-to-one intervention programs with struggling students. One teacher assistant explained that the speech and language pathologist at their school 'will assess the children … and that's where I might pick up some intervention with them' [CS-TA].

Importantly, in order for interventions delivered by teacher assistants to have the same impact as those delivered by fully qualified teachers, teacher assistants need to work closely with teachers, in a structured and supported setting (Sharples *et al.*, 2016). This is illustrated in the research in a school where a teacher assistant had been allocated to every class, as a senior staff member explained:

> When it is a team meeting night, they attend and work together with the classroom teacher to collaborate and plan for, it could be a six-week block of focus for literacy. The same thing happens throughout the school so even with our grade six teachers, the teacher assistant is part of that team and plans for the spelling groups or the reading groups, or which students they're going to be working with. [PS-AST]

Approaches to support

The remedial literacy program market is burgeoning. It can be difficult for teachers to assess claims for effectiveness and to compare 'catch-up' literacy programs. Not all programs work in all situations and interventions shown to reap promising results

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29 https://documentcentre.education.tas.gov.au/Documents/Literacy-Strategy-Framework.pdf
30 https://www.education.tas.gov.au/supporting-student-need/educational-adjustments/

with some students may be ineffective—or even damaging—if incorrectly implemented (Cowen & Carthright, 2014; Sharples *et al*., 2018; Slavin *et al*., 2011). Based on its review of the evidence, the EEF (2019) suggests effective implementation of targeted interventions involves maintaining regular sessions over sustained periods and ensuring interventions are carried out by appropriately trained personnel.

In primary schools in this study, a variety of literacy intervention programs were used, among them Catch Up Literacy, Early Literacy Foundation (ELF), Get it Right for Dyslexia, Speech Buddies, Reading Recovery, and Bridges.

Support for high school students

For struggling secondary school students to make progress and flourish like their peers, interventions need to be especially effectively targeted (Baye *et al*., 2018; Scammacca *et al*., 2015; Slavin *et al*., 2019), including intensive individualized interventions provided by qualified specialists (Allington, 2013; Kamil *et al*., 2008). A literacy specialist teacher described how working with students with dyslexia in a secondary school often involved 'going back and doing more work on phonological awareness with them and then building up that awareness of phonics' [HS-LS]. This staff member continued:

> When I'm reading with them, I'm giving them feedback about what I'm noticing. They might be very good readers but not very good spellers, and then that would mean looking at what's important in spelling for them— sometimes putting in some accommodations and sometimes using a lot of multisensory strategies to teach them high-frequency spelling. [HS-LS]

The EEF (2019) recommends three tiers of support be provided to struggling secondary students: whole class teaching, small group tuition, and one-to-one support.

There is clear and consistent evidence that inclusive education 'can confer substantial short and long-term benefits for students with and without disabilities' (Hehir *et al*., 2016, p. 2). However, participants in this research were undecided about whether struggling students are best taught in, or withdrawn from, class. Some literature suggests there is a case to be made for both approaches (see Copeland & Keefe, 2019; Shinn *et al*., 1997; Slavin *et al*., 2011; Toews & Kurth, 2019) and a combined approach to targeted intervention was not uncommon in schools: 'a mix of including them in classroom activities as well as spending some time elsewhere focusing on a more individual needs basis' [HS-AST].

Support and intervention

As was the case in K–2 classrooms, in many Years 3–6 classrooms in participating schools, teacher assistants had a specific role to work with students who were struggling as well as with those with specific learning disabilities. This focus was also reflected in school documentation, where targeted TA support was frequently mentioned as a remedial strategy for these two groups of students. As a typical example, one school literacy document stated: 'Trained Teacher Assistants and support teachers will continue to target underperforming students through the CATCH-UP Literacy and facilitating differentiation in the classroom' [CS-OP-Lit15]. In addition, documentation frequently referred to the use of Individual Education Plans (IEPs) for students with learning disabilities. Again, TAs were central to implementing Individual Education Plans, as this TA explains:

> I also have a couple of children who have dyslexia and we're working on their IEP programs. So, we're doing half an hour twice a week working across all the things that is in their IEP so that they can have some one-on-one specific help with that. [PS-TA]

Commenting about working with children with autism, another TA noted that 'emotional regulation plays a part with autistic children too … so, I need them to recognise when they're feeling calm, or not' [PS-TA]:

> You have to think outside the box with kids with autism. They're not engaged in their learning and when they have minimum verbal language, it's not their preferred thing to do. It's hard. So, I have to find different ways to get them engaged and wanting to read and learn in general. I use their special interests as a motivator. I use that fundamentally, 100 per cent of the time, so you've really got to get to know them, know what they like, what they're interested in. [PS-TA]

As noted, evidence suggests that interventions delivered by TAs are generally less effective than those delivered by fully qualified professionals but do show some positive effects when TAs work closely with qualified teachers in highly structured and supportive settings (Sharples *et al.*, 2016), as was the case in some of the schools visited. Crucially, in the absence of these conditions, such interventions can have negative effects.

Many participants reported having students with substantial disabilities in their classes. Departmental guidance notes that additional support can be organised in relation to those students with Autism Spectrum Disorder or disabilities that relate to intellectual, physical, or psychiatric disability; health impairment; multiple disability; or vision or hearing impairment (Department of Education Tasmania, 2015b).

In this research, participants commonly referred to students on the autism spectrum and indicated that the type of support provided varied, depending on the extent of the disability and the availability of resources. Most often, participants spoke about literacy support teachers and/or teacher assistants being assigned to work with the students who needed the greatest support and adjustment. As one literacy support teacher explained:

> These kids have an aide and their program is quite differentiated because … well, they are participating in mainstream [schooling], but their learning plan looks a lot different and they're actually not assessed in the same way. [PS-LT]

It is important to note that the Department is implementing a new Educational Adjustments funding model for students with disability in Tasmanian Government schools, which will deliver funding to schools from 2020:

> The new Educational Adjustments approach will support inclusive practice in schools and align supports to the educational adjustments teachers make in the classroom to assist students with disability access, participate and engage in quality learning programs.[31]

In addition, the departmental guide states that 'inclusive schools demonstrate respect and support for student diversity through the school's inclusive actions and structures, [and] this includes enabling all students with disability to access appropriate teaching and learning programmes within the Australian Curriculum' (Department of Education, Tasmania, 2015b).

One literacy support teacher explained her role with students with disabilities like this:

> I'm helping develop and guide the learning plans for the students with severe disability. So, I help put supports in place for them to learn and function within the classroom setting. Then I liaise with family and the teacher aides and the teachers and the students. [PS-LT]

However, even the best-planned programs sometimes need spontaneous modification to accommodate the needs of students with disability, on any given day, demonstrating the level of skill required to work effectively with this group of students. So, for example, one literacy support teacher told us: 'I'm working with a little boy [diagnosed with ADHD] and I really have to look at how he comes in, and then make some professional judgments around what's important and what isn't on that particular day' [PS-LT].

Staff also mentioned specific interactive assistive/augmentative technology software for working with students with severe disabilities (for example, WordQ; Clicker6; Proloquo2GO). While some researchers have found that technology-supported adaptive instruction did not have positive outcomes (see Cleveland-Innes *et al.*, 2019), others have evidence to the contrary (see Coleman & Cramer, 2015; Kurth *et al.*, 2015; Spooner *et al.*, 2015). The following comment from a teacher assistant in one primary school highlights both the challenges of working with non-verbal children and the potential usefulness of new technologies:

> I haven't had a really, completely nonverbal student before. So, I spent my summer holidays learning just minimal sign language. Just so I can communicate with him—in conjunction with a program called Proloquo2Go, which is an alternative communication app. I type in and he types in and that's how we communicate. [PS-TA]

It can be difficult for teachers to assess claims and compare catch-up literacy programs because not all programs work in all situations (Cowen & Cartwright, 2014; Sharples *et al.*, 2016; Slavin *et al.*, 2011). Several different remedial literacy programs were in use in primary schools participating in this research. Along with 'Reading Recovery', the 'Bridges' program[32] was popular. Where that program was being implemented, it was well regarded by participants working specifically with

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31 https://www.education.tas.gov.au/supporting-student-need/educational-adjustments/
32 http://www.bridgesliteracy.com.au/

struggling students. Like 'Reading Recovery', the program also works on a one-to-one basis, is highly structured and intensive, and is promoted as a cost-effective alternative to 'Reading recovery'. A principal in one of the eight schools using this program described it in these terms:

> It's 20 minutes, four or five times a week, brilliant. So, the person delivering the programs sits next to the child … and it's very structured so it's perfect for people who are para-professionals. So, two minutes of recapping, two minutes of some flash words, three minutes of talking about the words, two minutes [where] the instructor or mentor reads to the child, the child reads along, the child reads by themselves … and it all happens snippity snap. We've trained parents in helping with that as well, so if we have parents working in the program, we give them the kids who need a boost … So, we give it to the 40 to 50 per cent range to push those kids over that hump to get them through. The really tricky kids who are really struggling, we give to our most trained, like our teacher assistants who know what to do. There are a couple of teacher assistants who work with three kids at a time and do the same thing because they've done it for so long. [PS-P]

Partners as Literacy Support (PALS) was also a well-established, less resource-intensive, intervention program that had been operating in one school for four to five years, with parents or community members being trained as tutors by the Flying Start Coordinator:

> PALS is a half-hour, one to one literacy tutorial for students who benefit from additional literary support … The tutorials have a set agenda and include reading, writing, and literacy games. The students build up a rapport with the tutor. Tutors can be retired people, ex-teachers and parents and often teachers in training will come and volunteer. The program is very supportive for the students and continues from year 1 to year 5. [PS-CT]

Inclusion or withdrawal?

Evidence suggests that inclusive education approaches 'can confer substantial short and long-term benefits for students with and without disabilities' (Hehir *et al.*, 2016, p.2). In the present research, opinion was divided as to the relative benefits, for students struggling with literacy, of small group teaching that takes place in class compared to withdrawing students for targeted intervention (see Copeland & Keefe, 2019; Slavin *et al.*, 2011; Toews & Kurth, 2019).

Apart from seeing the withdrawal approach as more efficient, its advocates emphasised the value for the students of having a separate space away from the mainstream classroom, as these literacy support teachers explain:

> I think the children actually enjoy coming in here, knowing that they're going to work hard but they're going to be really well supported too. Nothing is going to be too hard, but it's not going to be too easy either, and we're going to make use of every second in this room … I've got one girl [who has dyslexia] who sees this room as her safe place. [PS-LT]

> The students who come in here [need] support for literacy, numeracy, or life skills. I construct learning plans for them based around their needs … Some students who come in here … have not been able to attend mainstream classes or … have not been attending school and [are in] part-time attendance

here because of their behaviour, so they do most of their literacy, numeracy, and life skilling in here. [HS-LT]

On the other hand, those who preferred the more inclusive in-class approach to additional support argued that it is more pedagogically effective and less stigmatising for the students who needed extra support. One AST noted that:

> For our whole school literacy block, my team has a literacy intervention teacher and they use a withdrawal model, which I don't necessarily agree with … I think we should be in the classroom, but that's how it's done here. [During my time working on] Raising the Bar we were presented with a lot of research about best practice being not to do withdrawal interventions. [PS-AST]

It is likely that the answer to the question of whether inclusion or withdrawal works better depends on the nature and severity of difficulty a child is experiencing. Either way, evidence strongly points to the critical importance of close liaison between classroom teachers, literacy specialists, and allied professionals to provide timely and long-term support for children with ongoing literacy learning difficulties (Rohl & Rivalland, 2002).

Despite differences between schools in how they approached working with children who were struggling with literacy, overall, educators and school leaders who participated in this research catered as well as they could to the needs of Years 3–6 students who were not meeting literacy developmental benchmarks.

3.4 Enacting practice in the secondary years (7–10)

The transition from primary to secondary school is known to be challenging for many students, and this has generated much-needed research about the 'middle years' in school education. The evidence is clear that for young people whose literacy is suboptimal at this developmental stage, the challenge is even greater than in earlier years, because sound literacy skills are needed to access the secondary academic curriculum (Culican *et al.*, 2001). Unless they are readily identified and receive timely appropriate targeted support, students who struggle at this transition may slip into a 'literacy gap', achieving across all subjects, poorer educational outcomes than their peers (Higgins *et al.*, 2014; Ricketts *et al.*, 2014).

Literacy teaching practice in the secondary school years, however, is arguably more complex than in the earlier years of schooling because of various constraints and challenges specific to the high school setting (Alvermann, 2002). Kamil *et al.* (2008, p.6) note that:

> Adolescent literacy is a complex concept because it entails more than the scores that students achieve on standardized reading tests. It also entails reading to learn in subjects that present their ideas and content in different ways. Students need to be able to build knowledge by comprehending different kinds of texts, mastering new vocabulary, and sharing ideas with others.

Privileging academic literacy over other forms of literacy is, nonetheless, the norm in secondary schools, ignoring the fact that different texts and contexts require different literacy skills. Alvermann (2002, p.190) first contends that the dominance of 'book reading' in middle and high school classrooms 'elevates the importance

and value of academic reading but tells teachers little about their students' everyday uses of language and literacy', and then concludes that 'effective literacy instruction builds on elements of both formal and informal literacies'.

Based on current research and school-based inquiry into effective literacy instruction for adolescents, Alvermann (2002, p.201) offers five overarching statements to guide good literacy teaching practice in secondary schools.

- If academic literacy instruction is to be effective, it must address issues of self-efficacy and engagement.

- Meeting the demands of academic literacy involves taking into account what students are capable of doing as everyday users of language and literacy.

- Adolescents who struggle with literacy deserve instruction that is developmentally, culturally and linguistically responsive to their needs, working from a strengths-based perspective rather than a deficit-based view.

- Adolescents' interests in multimodal texts can be used to develop their critical literacy by teaching them that all texts, including school texts, promote some views while silencing other voices.

- Effective approaches to literacy teaching with adolescents include 'participatory approaches that actively engage students in their own learning and treat texts as tools for learning rather than as repositories of information to be memorised.

Before discussing the findings of this study in relation to the good practice literature, it is important to point out that secondary schools represented only a small proportion (18%) of the schools visited.[33] *Given this relatively small sample size, caution is needed in generalising findings about literacy teaching in secondary schools across Tasmania.*

Participants in secondary school classrooms emphasised the point that they shaped their literacy teaching practice around 'evidence of what is effective', frequently citing the work of known experts, such as John Hattie, as shown in the following comment from an English/HASS teacher:

> A lot of my literacy teaching practice is straight from Hattie's work, looking at what's effective and what's not. A lot of that really determines my practices, and then if it works for me, I'll continue doing it. If it doesn't, if it's not evidence-based, I'll look elsewhere. That's basically how I operate. [HS-CT]

The EEF Guidance for Improving Literacy in Secondary Schools (Education Endowment Foundation, 2019) offers seven evidence-based recommendations for practice:

1. prioritise 'disciplinary literacy' across the curriculum;

2. provide targeted vocabulary instruction in every subject;

3. develop students' ability to read complex academic texts;

4. break down complex writing tasks;

5. combine writing instruction with reading in every subject;

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33 Thirty-five participants were interviewed in relation to practice in secondary school settings (that is, Years 7–10 classroom teachers, literacy specialist teachers, and school leaders). These participants were drawn from five high schools and two combined primary/secondary district schools. Of the classroom teachers, most were English teachers; some also taught Humanities and Social Sciences (HASS) subjects.

6. provide opportunities for structured talk; and

7. provide high quality literacy interventions for struggling students.

Here, these recommendations are discussed with reference to the study's findings about practice in high school classrooms in the Tasmanian schools visited. The evidence base for these recommendations is presented and the sources provided by the EEF are supplemented by additional sources drawn from the literature reviews undertaken by the project.

3.4.1 EEF 1: Prioritising 'disciplinary literacy' across the curriculum

Recognising that literacy skills are both general and subject specific, disciplinary literacy is an approach to improving literacy in secondary school settings that embodies the notion that all teachers are teachers of literacy (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2012). Grounded in the premise that all subject areas have their own specific terminologies, as well as unique ways of understanding and communicating about the world (O'Brien *et al.*, 2001), disciplinary literacy firmly establishes responsibility for literacy development with all subject area teachers (Fang, 2012; Shanahan *et al.*, 2011).

The concept of 'disciplinary literacy' is frequently confused with 'content area reading'. The two practices are not synonymous however, and have 'different roots, embody different aspects of literacy, and are practised in different ways' (Hynd-Shanahan, 2013, p.93). Content area reading views reading tasks as *similar* across the disciplines, providing students with general comprehension strategies that can be used to access material regardless of the field of study. On the other hand, disciplinary literacy attends to the *differences* across disciplines. This attention requires subject area teachers to help students uncover implicit understandings about how experts in their discipline engage in literacy. Evidence suggests that teaching secondary students the literate practices in the discipline increases both their academic achievement in those disciplines and improves their literacy generally (Hynd-Shanahan, 2013). This evidence appears to be especially strong in history (De La Paz, 2005; Hynd-Shanahan *et al.*, 2004; Monte-Sano & De La Paz, 2012; Reisman, 2012) and in science (Daly-Lesch, 2019; Greenleaf *et al.*, 2009; Moje *et al.*, 2010).

Moje (2008) suggests that at this stage of schooling it may be more productive to develop disciplinary literacy instruction than to encourage subject area teachers to simply use generic literacy teaching practices and strategies. However, like Alvermann (2002), she acknowledges that there are various constraints and challenges to implementing a disciplinary literacy approach in high schools. Primarily, these constraints are anchored in the knowledge, beliefs, and cultural values held by both teachers and students, as well as in secondary school structures that tend to privilege subject area norms (see Alvermann & Moore, 1991; Moore, 1996; O'Brien *et al.*, 1995). The core problem in secondary school literacy, Moje (2008) argues, is that language and literacy practice is still conceptualised as a set of strategies for engaging with texts, rather than as an integral aspect of subject area learning. The prevalence of this dominant conceptualisation of literacy in secondary school was evident in the present research and reflects in the fact that no participants referred to the concept of 'disciplinary literacy' in interview. This silence is perhaps not surprising given the enormity of the shift in thinking and practice that is required to effect the sort of reconceptualization that Moje (2008) envisages.

One history teacher articulated well the challenge of balancing the dual responsibilities as a teacher of history and a teacher of literacy, exemplifying the tendency to focus on content area reading at the expense of disciplinary writing:

> Having the responsibility of teaching the stuff that history requires me to teach the kids, but also supporting them in their literacy so they can then access the history stuff [is difficult]. So, I suppose a lot of my time has been on the reading aspect, rather than necessarily a lot of the modelled writing. A lot of the modelling that I do is basically how you engage with the text [as a reader], first. And then probably the follow up to that is doing some modelled writing in some capacity, but not as much as the reading aspect, in terms of my focus anyway. [HS-CT]

Reconceptualising secondary school literacy, Moje (2008) maintains, requires that subject teachers provide students with opportunities to develop meta-discursive skills. Learning how and why they are engaging with different discourse communities and 'what those engagements mean for them and others in terms of social positioning and larger power relations' (Moje, 2008, p.103) necessitates a meta-discursive pedagogy that, in turn, requires teachers to work across disciplines and contexts outside of school. The complexity of such a change process is undeniable, requiring 'collaboration, communication, and a commitment to major conceptual, structural and cultural changes' in secondary schools (Moje, 2008, p.105).

Daly-Lesch (2019) suggests that one way that educators have begun to unsettle the hegemony of single-subject learning in high schools to integrate literacy with the disciplines is through inquiry-based teaching methods, often exemplified in science subjects. Adopting a critical pedagogy and fostering critical literacy encourages students to 'analyse, critique and transform social, cultural and political texts and contexts' (Luke, 2019, p.354). The findings in Daly-Lesch's (2019) review suggest that advancing critical inquiry opens up possibilities for using literacy 'as a tool to read both the word and the world' (p.55, citing Freire & Macedo, 1987), but that 'powerful structures like high-stakes testing mandates or authoritative discourses embedded in texts present serious roadblocks to pursuing critical inquiry in science' (p.55).

3.4.2 EEF 2: Providing targeted vocabulary instruction in every subject

An important aspect of developing disciplinary literacy entails providing targeted vocabulary instruction, as secondary school students need to learn specialised and technical vocabulary to access the curriculum and move between different forms of discipline-specific communication (Snow & Uccelli, 2009). Subject-specific language is often quite different from the language of communication that young people use outside of school (Nagy & Townsend, 2012) and is used less commonly than everyday talk (Perfetti *et al.*, 2005), so it needs to be explicitly taught. Work by Beck, *et al.* (2013) on the 'tiers of vocabulary' model is noted as particularly helpful in delineating between vocabulary that is used in everyday speech (Tier 1), high frequency words that are used across disciplines (Tier 2), and discipline-specific words (Tier 3).

The EEF (2019) guidance suggests that organising vocabulary into meaningful patterns within and across subjects is good practice in this sphere. Approaches based on etymology, especially recognising the Greek and Latin origins of words in science and mathematics (Green, 2008) and morphology, exploring the meanings of words and how they have changed over time, can help students learn and remember new words (Breadmore *et al.*, 2019). The use of graphic organisers, such as concept maps is also recommended as good practice (Elbro & Buch-Iversen, 2013).

Noting that there is relatively limited evidence about how best to teach vocabulary, the EEF guidance suggests that promising ways to provide targeted instruction include:

* exploring common word roots in 'word families' (for example, 'photo' in 'photosynthesis', 'photon', 'photophobic');

* undertaking 'word building' activities (matching prefixes with root words);

* encouraging independent word-learning strategies (how to use a thesaurus);

* using graphic organisers to break down complex academic terms in visual ways (using the Frayer model[34]);

* undertaking regular low-stakes assessment (Roediger III & Karpicke, 2006) (quizzes);

* consistently signposting synonyms across vocabulary tiers (look closely = examine = investigate); and

* combining vocabulary development with spelling instruction (Rastle, 2018) (highlighting morphological patterns that determine difficult spelling).

Considering a vast range of evidence in the development of their guide for improving adolescent literacy, and privileging research that met the criteria of the *What Works Clearinghouse*[35], Kamil *et al.*'s (2008) review also suggests that there is strong evidence for the effectiveness of providing explicit vocabulary instruction. They suggest that effective classroom practice includes:

* dedicating a portion of regular classroom lessons to explicit vocabulary instruction;

* providing repeated exposure to new words in multiple contexts and allowing sufficient practice sessions in vocabulary instruction;

* giving sufficient opportunities to use new vocabulary in a variety of contexts through activities such as discussion, writing, and extended reading; and

* providing students with strategies to make them independent vocabulary learners.

There was pronounced awareness among participants in this research of the importance of expanding students' vocabulary repertoire in the secondary school years, as illustrated by the following quote from an English/HASS teacher:

> We are always working on vocabulary, so vocabulary is a big thing. I feel very strongly about it. I think our students have very limited vocabularies, and so we are always building vocabulary … making sure that they leave class each time with at least one or two more words that they can add to their vocabulary. [HS-AST]

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34 See http://www.theteachertoolkit.com/index.php/tool/frayer-model
35 See http://www.whatoworks.ed.gov

Indeed, there was good evidence of teachers providing targeted vocabulary instruction in most Years 7–10 classrooms. As was happening in primary classrooms, secondary teachers frequently linked vocabulary work to the content of their lessons, often displaying new words on 'word walls' in classrooms, across a range of learning areas.

> Sometimes, at the beginning of units, we'll make a word wall. So, we've got all those words that we'll be talking about to reinforce the language that we'll be using. [HS-AP]

> I mean, it doesn't hurt, visually, for our students to look up and see the word "lathe" for example on the woodwork room wall and know how to spell it. I don't think that's a bad thing at all. [HS-TiC]

Some teachers favoured games-like activities to enhance and enrich students' vocabularies in an engaging manner. One AST whose background was in Mathematics talked about the fact that in many subjects there are technical terms that students need to understand in order to progress in their learning:

> It's about how you connect those words and their meanings, using lots of different little activities … I've used a hot seat kind of activity where students have to describe the word without using it, so it's a bit like the game Scattergories, or something like that. Using those kinds of activities to make sure that kids understand the language that they are using is important. [HS-TiC]

Notwithstanding the small sample size in the study, the findings suggest that there is evidence that Years 7–10 teachers in Tasmania are providing targeted vocabulary instruction, across the secondary school curriculum.

3.4.3 EEF 3: Developing students' ability to read complex academic texts

By the time they reach Year 7, most students have learned to read and are reading to learn. In the context of the secondary school curriculum the latter means reading increasingly complex and sophisticated texts. Some students, however, are likely to have difficulty accessing academic texts independently (McCormick & Zutell, 2015) and need targeted support (discussed later in this section).

Despite decades of calls for improvements in the reading skills of adolescents (Barron & Melnik, 1973; Baumann *et al.*, 2002; Beck *et al.*, 1982; Brett *et al.*, 1996; Nelson & Stage, 2007), evidence suggests these improvements have not kept pace with the increasing demands for literacy in the workplace (Kamil *et al.*, 2008). Moreover, as Kamil and colleagues (2008, p.4) observe 'reading instruction as a formal part of the curriculum typically decreases as students move beyond the elementary years'. To remedy this situation and 'pay serious attention' to the challenges of improving reading instruction in high schools, they suggest that secondary school teachers do the following:

• select carefully the text to use when beginning to teach a given strategy;

• show students how to apply the strategies they are learning to different texts;

• make sure that the text is appropriate for the reading level of students;

• use a direct and explicit instruction lesson plan for teaching students how to use comprehension strategies;

- provide the appropriate amount of guided practice depending on the difficulty level of the strategies that students are learning; and

- talk about comprehension strategies while teaching them (p.9).

Evidence also supports building on reading comprehension strategies introduced in the primary years, to provide structured opportunities for secondary students to consolidate and practise the following skills (Education Endowment Foundation, 2019):

- activating prior knowledge;

- predicting;

- questioning; and

- clarifying and summarising.

However, comprehension of academic texts is significantly more difficult than verbal comprehension because it contains more technical vocabulary (discussed above) and fewer cues to support understanding (Baye *et al.*, 2018). To effectively read information-dense texts, therefore, students need to be able to make inferences and draw upon knowledge of the subject to make meaning that extends beyond literal understandings of words on a page. They need to be able to construct a mental representation, a 'situational model' (Perfetti & Stafura, 2014), to be able to make sense of a challenging text. Enabling students to make sense of such texts involves cognitive engagement which can be substantially enhanced through cooperative learning and consistent feedback and monitoring (Baye *et al.*, 2018; Dietrichson *et al.*, 2017; Herrera *et al.*, 2016; Slavin *et al.*, 2008).

Reading with a purpose

Participants in this research highlighted the importance of reading for comprehension with their Years 7–10 students, stressing the need to continually strengthen their use of reading strategies, as one Teacher in Charge of English explains:

> So, for every time we read, I will have some kind of reading strategy that they need to use to monitor their understanding of the text that they're reading. It could be a strategy where they just need to make notes. Or it might be a strategy where they need to highlight three things … Depending what it is, there will always be a strategy; it's never just read. [HS-TiC]

As found in the primary school years, the 'Readers' Workshop' model was popular in secondary school classrooms as a way of encouraging students to develop their general reading strategies *while* reading. An approach that emphasises teacher-student interaction, as well as peer conversation, one principal explained the use of the Readers' Notebook to enable differentiated instruction like this:

> We have a common memo book that we share, that's between the teacher and the student. And as the teacher, I might write a leading question, something to the effect of: "How did you feel about the author? What did you think the author's intention was here?" The question is linked to the learning that you're doing in the explicit teaching. The student responds with a letter back. Instantly, the teacher knows in that response what the student's level of thinking is, their metacognition around the learning that's taking place … So, the teacher can actually tailor the learning to small groups or individuals. They know which students might be making text-to-self comparisons … and

which might be doing text-to-text comparisons. So, while the students are all parallel reading the same book, the teacher's conversation with each student is personalised. [HS-P]

Consistent with a disciplinary literacy approach, reading comprehension strategies need to be applied and modified as appropriate to different subject areas, to ensure they are closely linked to the development of subject knowledge and skills. For example, a history teacher may teach students an array of history-specific strategies (Wineburg, 1991), such as sourcing (Counsell, 2004), contextualising and corroborating. Evidence suggests that this discipline-specific approach to reading comprehension is likely to have more impact than general approaches to improving secondary school literacy, such as regular 'silent reading' sessions, which have demonstrated inconsistent effects on student outcomes and motivation (Cuevas *et al.*, 2014; Garan & DeVoogd, 2008). The lack of positive effect of providing an additional class period for reading each day was one of the most unexpected findings of Baye and colleagues' (2018) comprehensive evidence review of reading programs for secondary students.

However, several secondary teachers in the present study referred to doing silent reading in their classrooms, one principal suggesting that it was 'often used as a behaviour management strategy' [HS-P] rather than for literacy. The spirit of this statement was affirmed by an English/HASS teacher at another school who said he used silent reading specifically and deliberately as a 'calmative care tool' [HS-CT], noting that there is 'little evidence around silent reading being an effective literacy strategy' [HS-CT]. While there is some evidence that silent reading may improve students' recall of narrative passages, it appears to have no impact in relation to deeper comprehension (Schimmel & Ness, 2017) and in general the evidence for silent sustained reading is mixed and inconclusive.

One Teacher in Charge of English staunchly defended her use of silent reading, however, explaining that it is a way to encourage 'kids to spend some time actually reading for enjoyment' [HS-TiC]. Acknowledging that this practice was contentious, the teacher went on to justify her use of daily silent reading as 'one of the best ways … to broaden their vocabulary, to improve their reading comprehension for spelling, punctuation, grammar' [HS-TiC]. At the same time, she incorporated 'explicit teaching of things to look for' [HS-TiC] and went on to elaborate her use of multiple texts in the classroom:

> The one-book-fits-all model doesn't sit well with me, so I prefer to use multiple texts in my classroom for reading. Not only will it give them a bit more interest and motivation because they can choose something that they're more interested in, but you can cater to every individual in that class more appropriately. It's important that they get to choose a book that isn't too easy and isn't too hard. [HS-TiC]

This approach to reading was common, with many teachers putting a lot of emphasis on enabling students to make their own reading choices, rather than the teacher deciding on a set book, or on streaming students into ability groups. While encouraging students to select texts within their reading level is to be encouraged for sustained recreational reading, the Department's Guide for Literacy 7–10 notes that the choice of text should match the nature of the reading activity. Importantly, students ought not to exclude 'books beyond their current reading level or outside their usual choice of texts' (Department of Education Tasmania & Derewianka, 2016b, p. 43).

Reading with / for challenge

A specialist literacy teacher interviewed stressed the importance of gradually increasing the level of difficulty of texts to challenge students and develop their critical thinking skills (see Chaiklin, 2003):

> I ask them to look at the author's purpose. Should we just believe this? Should we just believe what this person said? Why does this person want us to believe that? So, getting them to question the text, read across the text, not just accept an opinion on something, but having their own opinion. [CS-LS]

In relation to differentiating reading levels and finding the appropriate level of challenge, one HASS teacher spoke about using 'tiered texts' with his students.

> The focus for me is always on the reading, so in terms of supporting that, using tiered text I find quite useful. So, I say to the kids "look, I've got a bare-bones text and a meat-on-the-bones text". In terms of how the kids are feeling in terms of their own abilities to engage with text, giving them access to those two tiers ensures that whichever text they access, they will at least have an understanding of whatever topic it is that we're looking at. And, of course, I say to the kids "look, all of you may wish to start with the bare-bones and get a foundational understanding of the topic that we're looking at, and then value-add to your knowledge by looking at the more complex text". I've just got onto Britannica Kids [britannica.com/kids], which I find is not a bad website because it offers a three-tiered text for whatever information that you're looking at. So, for me, if it's looking at the French Revolution with my year 9s, for example, I've found there was some good text on that site that'll allow me to cater for at least three reading level abilities. [HS-CT]

Noting that subject area teachers are often so focused on covering the content in their disciplines that they may adjust texts to make them easier for students to access, Kamil *et al.* (2008) make the point that this practice may be counter-productive. Rather than offering students 'easier' versions of the text under study, they advise that by helping students to learn discipline-specific comprehension strategies to grapple with 'harder' texts, subject teachers could actually increase the depth and breadth of content that could be covered efficiently (Xin & Rieth, 2001).

Overall, this research found mixed evidence of good practice in developing academic reading skills in secondary school classrooms. While there was generally a strong focus on reading among the Years 7–10 staff in the sample, teachers seemed more likely to promote the use of generic reading strategies with students, rather than discipline-specific strategies adapted for reading more complex and challenging academic texts.

3.4.4 EEF 4: Breaking down complex writing tasks

Writing is cognitively demanding because it relies on the ability to combine three processes: transcription, composition and executive function (Breadmore *et al.*, 2019). If a student has problems with handwriting/typing and spelling, then their ability to generate ideas and put these into words and sentences is compromised, which in turn negatively affects their motivation and ability to plan and review their work. If any of these processes become too burdensome, then a student's working memory is likely to become overloaded (Berninger *et al.*, 2002).

Research suggests that the most effective way to help students manage the cognitive load associated with writing is to break down writing tasks. The EEF (2019) guidance for secondary school teachers offers the following evidence-based strategies:

- focusing on the micro-elements of writing by providing word-level, sentence-level and whole text-level instruction (Graham *et al.*, 2016);

- ensuring that students are familiar with subject-specific connotations of words, especially as used in essay questions;

- explicitly teaching planning strategies, such as how to use graphic organisers (Graham, *et al.*, 2016); and

- guiding students towards self-monitoring and review, for example by providing a checklist of features of high-quality writing (Graham & Perin, 2007).

As noted previously, Slavin and colleagues' (2019) review of approaches to writing found that despite evidence that the teaching of writing can improve reading outcomes (Graham *et al.*, 2016; Graham & Herbert, 2011), there has been relatively little research focus on the teaching of writing, compared to the intense interest in reading. A notable contribution to addressing this gap in the literature, however, has been work by Steven Graham and Karen Harris and their colleagues who have proposed 'a set of consensus conclusions about what is known about effective writing strategies' (2019, p.6). Their key conclusions suggest that teachers:

- establish writing routines that create a pleasant and motivating writing environment (Graham & Perin, 2007);

- implement a process approach to writing (Graham & Sandmel, 2011; Hillocks Jr, 1986);

- create routines that ensure that students write frequently (Gallagher & Kittle, 2018);

- design instructional routines in which students compose together (Yarrow & Topping, 2001); and

- establish goals for students' writing (Rogers & Graham, 2008).

Overall, participants in the present research spoke relatively more about writing in Years 7–10 classrooms than they did about the other elements of literacy.

Modelling and scaffolding

There is strong evidence that teacher modelling of writing strategies, through the use of 'think-alouds' for example, followed by appropriate scaffolding for students are important steps in breaking down complex writing tasks (Quigley *et al.*, 2018; Rosenshine, 2012). Allowing time for reflection is also crucial, while teachers gradually withdraw the level of support for writing (De La Paz *et al.*, 2017). Consistent with Department advice, modelling and scaffolding of writing was seen by participants to be as important as at this stage of literacy development as in the primary years (Department of Education Tasmania & Derewianka, 2016b).

One Assistant Principal spoke about using a 'think-aloud' strategy while producing a piece of writing on the board:

You're talking about the word choices that you're making, your sentence structure and all that sort of stuff, as you're doing it. Then you relate that to the type of writing that you want the kids to be able to reproduce. Basically, you're sort of showing them how to do it. [HS-AP]

Another modelling strategy to focus on the 'micro-elements' of writing (Graham *et al.*, 2016) involved the common use of 'mentor texts' or 'mentor sentences', advocated by several secondary school staff (as well as by primary teachers – see section 2.3.2). This English/HASS teacher explains:

They have a mentor sentence, where the sentence itself has a particular theme in the way it is written. It might be a first person or second person or third person narrative voice. It might be an interrogative or an exclamation or some sort. We talk about the start of the sentence, what it is, where it could be used, the purposes, under what conditions you would use it, what would be inappropriate use, how you could change it, use a different tone or tense or perspective, and so on. [HS-CT]

Many participants spoke about the importance of providing scaffolding for students' writing, especially for teaching about different genres and text types (Kozulin *et al.*, 2003). One English/HASS teacher explained the use of scaffolding for persuasive writing like this:

You start with your position statement, then your three key reasons, and then go through the steps for each paragraph … make sure your sentences are full sentences and that sort of thing, and you've got the bones of an essay. The next step is to bump it up, so making sure that they've used complex sentences and that sort of thing throughout. Having that base there, that framework for them to bulk out and work on is probably the most useful writing tool that I use regularly with kids, especially in the year 7 space. [HS-CT]

Illustrating how this process reflects the gradual release of responsibility model (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983) endorsed by Department, that teacher went on to explain the value of introducing essay scaffolding early on in high school.

What you would find if you don't give them that scaffolding, and just got them to write, is they would just repeat the same idea over and over, over, over again. Well, a few things will happen. The first thing is that there will be no paragraphs. It'll just be this really long piece of writing with no paragraphing … So, with the scaffold, it forces them to brainstorm three different main points, and so instantly the quality of their work is increased tenfold because they have separate ideas. Then you say, "all right, now give me some evidence or an example of that idea". They just work through it really methodically and it's almost like a checklist. So that's the thinking around it … Eventually the idea is by the time year 10 hits, they're not using the scaffold so much anymore, or it's an optional tool, and they can respond in paragraphs. So, you slowly take it away from them. [HS-CT]

Adopting a process approach to writing

As students learn that writing involves a cycle of pre-writing, planning, drafting, and editing they are able to grasp the fact that high-quality writing is an iterative process that inevitably entails multiple steps. Reflecting this orientation towards a process approach to writing instruction, editing, and proofreading writing was high

on the agenda for most Years 7–10 classroom teachers interviewed. One English/HASS teacher noted that she had recently 'done a whole unit on editing', continuing to explain that:

> I was intentionally getting them to look at how to improve the structure of their writing and make their language very economical … just to develop their style of writing and make them really think about every word that they put on the page. [HS-CT]

The 'Writers' Workshop' is possibly the most well-known instructional method for process writing (Graham & Sandmel, 2011). Originally developed for working with younger learners (see Atwell, 1987; Calkins, 1983, 2006; Graves, 1983), the 'Writers' Workshop' model was used extensively in some participating secondary schools in this research. One literacy coach explained how he used the model:

> I am quite a fan of the Writers' Workshop. I think it's quite effective when used properly but I think it's a challenging strategy to implement effectively … In essence, it is a series of mini lessons that you run on a specific topic which the kids then practise in their notebooks. So, for example, we might focus on sentence structure. I might present a sequence of mini lessons on various aspects of that, and then the kids would need to show that they've learned it by what they're writing. So rather than filling in a worksheet on sentence structure, they are actually creating their own in their answers. [HS-LS]

Importantly, participants who used the' Writers' Workshop' model saw it as a way of building students' confidence in their own writing abilities, as this Teacher in Charge of English explains:

> You might want a paragraph in response to a particular idea and, as the teacher, you might have a vision for what you want it to look like, but it's flexible for student input. You've got a product … on the board, but everyone has their own sheet of paper too, and then students can feel more confident in doing it themselves. [HS-TiC]

Using low-stakes writing activities to build confidence and increase motivation

One high school was implementing the Writing-To-Learn (WTL) approach, developed by William Zinsser (1988) as an effective way to encourage reluctant writers. Using low-stakes writing activities, many teachers saw this approach as non-threatening to students who might be especially self-conscious about their writing.

An assistant principal at this school described the Writing-to-Learn strategies as a way of connecting students with their learning intentions and success criteria, 'a way of saying, "well, let's use this strategy to reflect on our learning"' [HS-AP]. The example given indicates this strategy was used across curriculum areas:

> Giving them a question or something to write as an exit statement. So, "before you leave class today, I want you to …" and it might be "explain why tectonic plates move" or "explain how to put numbers in ascending order". That was one we did in Maths. So that becomes the focus of the learning, but it's also getting them to write. [HS-AP]

Particularly noteworthy was the fact that the WTL strategies were being introduced across all learning areas in this school and teachers in all subjects were encouraged to use a range of graphic organisers to assist students with their thinking, through writing (Fisher *et al.*, 2016; Graham *et al.*, 2016; Rodgers *et al.*, 2016).

Research also suggests that motivation is key for success in writing (Kamil *et al.*, 2008; Myhill & Jones, 2009; Perfetti *et al.*, 2005) and that students' self-perceptions have a particularly strong influence on writing. Encouraging students to work collaboratively, in pairs or in small groups, giving each other feedback, has been shown to be effective, with adolescents as much as with younger students (Slavin *et al.*, 2019). Likewise, encouraging students to engage in positive self-talk and celebrating their writing successes has been shown to reap positive results (Graham & Perin, 2007; Perfetti *et al.*, 2005; Shanahan, 2016; Slavin *et al.*, 2019; Torgerson *et al.*, 2014).

Overall, there was sound evidence that teachers in Years 7–10 classrooms were investing considerable effort into helping their students to break down complex writing tasks, and that in some schools this was happening across subject areas.

3.4.5 EEF 5: Combining writing instruction with reading in every subject

As noted elsewhere in this report, writing and reading are complementary skills and interconnected aspects of literacy because they rely on common knowledge (Baye *et al.*, 2018; Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987; Graham, *et al.*, 2016; Graham & Herbert, 2011; Graham *et al.*, 2018; Shanahan, 2016). On this basis, guidance from the EEF (2019, p.22) suggests integrating reading and writing instruction where possible, noting that it is 'likely to be a missed opportunity to think of writing as something that happens after students have "learned the material"'. Suggestions for integrating writing and reading include:

- writing before reading, for example by asking students to jot down in dot-points what they already know about a topic;
- using annotations to identify information, for example by underlining key points;
- writing short summaries of texts to clarify comprehension;
- creating checklists based on example of good writing in each subject; and
- anticipating common errors or misconceptions in language use and showing how to avoid them.

Combining reading and writing

Alongside staff in K–2 and 3–6 settings in this research, participants teaching in Years 7–10 classrooms spoke about the importance of teaching in ways that integrate the elements of literacy. As one AST in literacy noted:

> Kids can't read the question if they don't understand the vocab. It's the same with writing. You can't expect kids to improve their writing if they can't use more complex words to express themselves. There is always that interconnected link [in literacy]. [HS-AST]

This integration is also illustrated by a Teacher in Charge of English, who described how she used extracts from published authors' books as models for students to learn about different writing devices:

> I'll teach them a couple of little writing devices that are used in books … So how has the author used whatever it might be, alliteration, or assonance, or where are the simple sentences, the complex sentences? And we will read extracts together … I will have examples from novels that I'll read with them so that I can show them that, for example, where an author uses sharp, simple sentences, it speeds up the pace, and it speeds up what's happening—the action. [HS-TiC]

While relatively few participants explicitly referred to developing visual literacy among their Years 7–10 students, there were a few exceptions. One Teacher in Charge of English spoke about using visual texts to engage students who might otherwise be disengaged in discussions:

> Visual literacy is incredibly important, especially in today's times with a lot of social media and instantaneous access to news. Everything's on film, everything's on video, it's pictorial, all that sort of thing, so I like to use visual literacy quite a bit. It could be looking at persuasive techniques, and looking at images, and that sort of thing. Depending on the students that you have in your cohort, sometimes a student, if they see a piece of text, they might just switch off straight away. But given access to something visual, they might be more open to actually engage in the task or in the topic. [CS-TiC]

Observing that 'kids can really quickly switch off, staring at a screen' [HS-TiC], another Teacher in Charge of English highlighted that giving students a specific task while viewing was a way of bringing viewing and writing together:

> One of the simplest ones that we do is "skinny notes". So, getting them to jot down some brief notes while they're viewing teaches them about note taking, how to do dot points, how to really quickly extract just the key points from anything that you're viewing. [HS-TiC]

Spelling, punctuation, and grammar

Combining the teaching of writing and reading is a way for secondary school teachers to address spelling, punctuation, and grammar. The EEF (2019) suggests that promising strategies (some of which have been noted elsewhere in this report) include:

- teaching groups of related spellings ('word families') in the context of etymology and morphology, paying attention to words that are linked to topics currently being studied;
- pre-teaching spelling of challenging words and words that are commonly misspelt;
- pointing out patterns of letters within words;
- getting students to work together to devise strategies to remember challenging word spellings; and
- teaching students to quiz themselves, perhaps using flashcards.

The evidence on the teaching of grammar and punctuation is mixed. However, the EEF (2019) notes that multiple reviews have established that teaching grammar in isolation from other aspects of literacy does not have a positive impact and indeed may even have a negative impact on outcomes. In their literature review about literacy development, Breadmore and colleagues (2019) suggest that teaching grammar in context—highlighting how grammatical changes such as verb tense

can convey different meanings in written texts—is a much more useful approach than focusing on defining and describing decontextualised grammatical terms. Importantly, this approach to teaching grammar is 'well-suited to instruction across different subjects' (Education Endowment Foundation, 2019, p.24).

In the present research, spelling was spoken about relatively infrequently in the context of literacy in Years 7–10 classrooms. When it was discussed, there was a pattern of approaches broadly similar to those used in the earlier years of schooling. One AP spoke about reinforcing the ongoing use of spelling strategies that students had learned in primary school:

> I ask students, "well, how did you know how to spell that, and what strategies did you go through in your mind?" So, I'm actually getting kids to verbalize how they've worked it out so then other students in that group or in the classroom can actually hear another student, their thinking processes. [HS-AP]

Another school was using a contextual approach to spelling, introduced by the school's literacy coach, as an alternative to 'having a particular spelling list that students work from' [HS-CT], because 'spelling's not something you can kind of do in splendid isolation' [HS-LS]. One of the English/HASS teachers at this school explains the approach as follows:

> We'll start each week with a different root word … The history behind this approach is that they looked at the units we were going to be doing throughout the year, and the kinds of words that would likely come up. So that there's that correlation between the curriculum and their spelling words. It's not just a random word … So, we'll do a word one week, and then the next couple of lessons that word appears in something we're reading or watching or talking about. So, [we're] trying to help students make those connections. [HS-CT]

At a different secondary school, the specialist literacy teacher was introducing the word study spelling strategies approach (which she referred to as 'the Misty Adoniou approach' [HS-LS], also discussed in 2.3.2) to spelling, morphology, orthography, and etymology, and focusing on the meaning-making aspect of spelling:

> At the moment, I'm working with a lot of students around semantics, understanding the meaning of words. So, we might use syllabification to work out "how do you say that word?" Then we'll look at the base word and the prefixes and the suffixes. "Okay, so what might that mean? How can we, from what we already know, how can we make meaning from that word?" So, it's not a spelling list, as such. It's not phonological. Although, that does form part of the orthography part of it. It really is based around meaning. [HS-LS]

In contrast, an English teacher at the same school focused on getting students to memorise frequently misspelt words in addition to spelling strategies, convinced that this was more effective:

> I've added something to it to make it more in line with what I'm hearing about the research on how to teach students to spell. So, it is a spelling list, which I am not sure is supported at this school as such, but as I said, I like to add in where I can. It's based on errors in their own work, so it's not words I've chosen at random … So, we've been doing that since term one … but just the first five minutes of class … We have 10 words, based on their own most misspelt words, and we have them for about two or three weeks, and

we do a little cover, write, check. We talk about the words in terms of how they sound, what they look like, what other words they're similar to, a way to remember how they're spelt, whether it's a saying, or a little symbol or something. I would say that that class is the most advanced in spelling in the entire school because of that technique. [HS-CT]

These examples illustrate the tensions that may exist between a whole school approach to literacy in secondary schools and teacher's autonomous decision-making within their classrooms (a whole school approach to literacy is discussed in Section 2.4).

The findings of this study suggest that, as with spelling approaches in secondary schools, there is no discernibly consistent approach to the teaching of grammar and punctuation in Years 7–10 classrooms. Indeed, the following quote from one Teacher in Charge of English lends weight to the finding that teaching these language conventions in high schools can be *ad hoc*:

Every now and then, I've had a focus on effective sentence writing, effective paragraph construction, punctuation, the less common sorts of punctuation. So, when is it appropriate to use brackets as opposed to the dashes? Or when would we use a colon or a semicolon, those kinds of things. I document everything that I do, and should I not be on Year 10 next year, I would pass that on to the next Year 10 teacher. However, it does lie in the lap of the teacher, to a certain extent. So, if it were not me next year, I might hand on my materials and they might not use them at all. They might decide that playing Scrabble was more important than teaching grammar! [HS-TiC].

The Teacher in Charge of English in one participating secondary school made it clear she explicitly teaches grammar and punctuation contextually, 'using texts that we study, whether it's from a novel, or story, or a play' [HS-TiC]:

I'll pull them apart. I'll look for parts from the novel, for example; look for a passage where we can look at each individual sentence, really break it down, which can be very heavy work for some of the students. Then it's about getting them to start to apply it in their own work. So, it's getting that understanding first from another author's work, and then applying it to your own. [HS-TiC]

Many of the Years 7–10 teachers interviewed in this research seemed to favour this contextual approach to teaching both grammar and spelling. One English/HASS teacher summed up a prevailing sentiment as follows: 'I think you can incorporate grammar into learning without having to walk into a class with a grammar sheet' [HS-CT]. Another English/HASS teacher in another secondary school described a collaborative approach to learning about language conventions, using the following "editing strategy":

The students are given deliberately fractured, poorly written, poorly punctuated paragraphs and they need to correct them. We do a group correction after they've done an individual one and I use the smartboard to demonstrate to them. I get the students to come forward with their answers and write, put the punctuation in, replace words or find word substitutes, change the structure of the punctuation, capitalisation, occasionally nominalisation. [HS-CT]

An innovative approach used by an English teacher in the same school involved the use of games and competitions. She enthusiastically described "the apostrophe challenge" that she had recently issued to her students:

There was quite an impressive prize, let me tell you—chocolate of course! They had to go around—they had a week to do it—and take a photo on their iPhone of a misplaced apostrophe. Goodness me, it was fun. They had a great time, just observing stuff around them in town in everyday life. One of them went to some pub … with their parents and saw a sign that said "Fish and Chip Friday's" with an apostrophe in it. [HS-CT]

This example illustrates how teachers can foster engagement using fun activities while embedding learning in 'real world' contexts, an approach advocated by primary teachers as well.

Overall, the study found sound evidence of effectively combining reading and writing in Years 7–10 classrooms. However, evidence for good practice in teaching spelling, grammar, and punctuation was mixed, with many teachers simply following their own instincts about how best to address these aspects of literacy, highlighting the traditional autonomy of high school teachers in their own class room and pointing strongly to implications for both initial teacher education and professional learning (discussed in Section 3, Teacher Learning for Teaching Literacy).

3.4.6 EEF 6: Providing opportunities for structured talk

Myhill and Jones (2009) note that oral language is just as important in the secondary school years as it is in the foundational and primary school years. Secondary students' writing and reading outcomes have been shown to improve when students are provided with opportunities for structured talk (Wilkinson *et al*., 2015). Developing the skill of oral argument, for example, seems to be especially valuable for low attaining students and those from less advantaged backgrounds (Murphy *et al*., 2009).

The EEF (2019) makes the important point, however, that it is the *quality* of talk, rather than the *quantity*, that makes a significant difference. It is therefore not a matter of less teacher-talk and more student-talk, but rather what is at issue here is the structure, variety and purpose of talk in the classroom (Murphy *et al.*, 2009).

Resnick and colleagues (2018) propose a framework for structured talk called 'accountable talk', which emphasises the significance of accountability to knowledge, reasoning, and community. Using this framework, in a debate for example, teachers encourage students to ensure they report facts accurately (accountability to knowledge); provide justifications for their claims (accountability to reasoning); and listen and show respect for others (accountability to community). The 'accountable talk' model emphasises the importance of all students in the class feeling that their contributions are valued.

Evidence suggests that providing opportunities for extended discussion of text meaning and interpretation is valuable (Kamil *et al.*, 2008). Strategies for high school teachers include asking follow-up questions that help provide continuity and extend the discussion and developing and practising the use of a specific 'discussion protocol'.

Benefits are also to be gained from students engaging in *meta-cognitive talk*, focusing on processes of learning and on addressing obstacles to learning (Quigley *et al.*, 2018). Meta-cognitive talk is often task- and subject-oriented; for example, students can be encouraged to think ahead before they begin an assigned task, asking themselves if they have everything they need before they start, or what strategies

they used the last time they approached a similar task. Similarly, emerging evidence indicates that fostering self-talk in students can improve their understanding of complex issues and aid in retaining information. Two types of self-talk that show promising results are *elaborative interrogation* and *self-explanation*, which involve students generating explanations and asking themselves questions about texts they are engaged in (Bisra *et al.*, 2018; Dunlosky *et al.*, 2013).

Based on the best available evidence, the EEF (2019) recommends the following teaching strategies for promoting high-quality talk in secondary classrooms:

- teacher modelling, using subject-specific language and meta-cognitive talk;
- sequencing structured talk opportunities in tandem with reading and writing tasks;
- providing prompts such as sentence starters to help students extend responses;
- asking open-ended questions that generate discussion;
- allocating roles for group discussions, such as questioner and summariser;
- allowing time for students after they have given an initial response to reflect and reframe and/or extend their response; and
- giving clear and specific feedback regarding the elements of accountability.

Among participants in this research, the development of oracy did not appear to be a priority in the context of literacy teaching in secondary classrooms. However, a literacy support teacher in one school did refer to doing 'lots of oral language [work], adding that '[we have] lots of discussions before we write because that's really important' [HS-LS].

An English teacher in another high school said:

> We're just about to do a speaking unit. We've just read a novel and they've done some written responses to that. But we're going to be doing some oral presentations and I know some of them are quite nervous about that because I guess they don't really have the chance to do that much because it does feel like things are focused on writing, writing, writing, writing. But I know that the verbal skills are essential for English, so I've sort of snuck that in there [laughter] as well. [HS-CT]

Overall, the study found limited evidence of providing structured opportunities for talk in the secondary schools visited, However, this is not to suggest that such opportunities do not exist more widely in Years 7–10 classrooms in Tasmania.

3.4.7 EEF 7: Providing high quality literacy interventions for struggling students

It is often assumed that by the time students reach high school, any literacy problems they may have had will have been addressed. However, even in secondary school classrooms there is likely to be (at least) a small number of students who require extra literacy support. Helping those students to keep pace with their peers is vital in the transition years and the EEF (2019) notes that it is unlikely that any single approach will be sufficient to close any literacy gap that exists at this stage. This point underscores the importance of accurate and timely intervention in the foundation and primary school years.

In the relatively small sample of secondary schools in this research, the numbers of students with literacy problems was high. The literacy specialist teacher in one high school estimated that '20 to 25 per cent' of their student population 'will fall below national minimum standard for at least one domain, often for more than one' [HS-LS]:

> They're either critically low in spelling, or they have a reading age that's significantly below their chronological age … They're really struggling in year seven, but I think that's just to do with the lack of proper diagnosis earlier on. So, you … think, "Oh, it's odd that that hasn't been investigated". But all sort of things can happen to kids, can't they, in families and all the rest of it? So yes, some have been identified. I think we've got four or five students who we know are dyslexic in year seven, but then there's another, larger group of students who we're not really quite sure what's going on yet, we haven't got a diagnosis [for] them yet. [HS-LS]

Consistent with the advice of others (see Allington, 2013), recommendations for improving adolescent literacy made by Kamil *et al.* (2008) prioritise making available intensive individualized interventions for struggling readers provided by qualified specialists**.** As with younger students, such intervention should involve:

- reliable screening assessments to identify students with reading difficulties and following up with formal and informal assessments to pinpoint each student's instructional needs;

- explicit instructional focus to meet each student's identified learning needs;

- intensiveness matched to student needs: the greater the instructional need, the more intensive the intervention; and

- a high level of instructional quality, the intensity of interventions being related most directly to the size of instructional groups and amount of instructional time.

Identification

Evidently, effective intervention relies on accurate assessment. Secondary students may struggle with literacy for many reasons, which may be related to speech and language, phonics, reading fluency and comprehension, or limited vocabulary, as well as physical characteristics related to eyesight or hearing. It is therefore essential that the root causes of literacy challenges are detected so that interventions match need. Classroom teachers regularly engage in formative assessment (discussed in section 2.5), which may broadly identify students with literacy challenges. Once identified, however, these routine assessments need to be followed up with more specific diagnostic tests (Kamil *et al.*, 2008).

Evidence gathered by the EEF (2019) suggests that good practice in interpreting the data from tests, including standardised tests, involves educators being able to answer five key questions:

- What did the test measure and not measure?

- What kind of scores do we have (reading ages; percentile rankings) and how can they be interpreted?

- What do the scores tell us about progress?

- How do these results compare to the results of other tests?

- What are we assessing with these data?

Support, intervention and adjustments

In order for struggling students to not fall further behind their peers and to make progress, interventions need to be especially effectively targeted for adolescents (Baye *et al.*, 2018; Scammacca *et al.*, 2015; Slavin *et al.*, 2019) and appropriate adjustments made for students with disability (Department of Education Tasmania, 2015b).

One literacy specialist spoke in the following terms about the accommodations provided for a student she was working with who had severe epilepsy:

> He's on medication to try and stabilise things but his hand shakes, and so that student clearly isn't going to get any value from any handwriting lessons, so he uses a computer and I completely support that. [HS-LS]

In this research, many participants in Years 7–10 classrooms referred to boys in general as a group of students who were increasingly disengaged and who often struggled with literacy in high school, an observation aligned to much evidence in the literature internationally (see Boltz, 2007; Farris *et al.*, 2009; Moss, 2000; Senn, 2012). Among participants, there was a strong sense that many boys consider reading 'uncool', particularly as they get older [HS-TiC].

Smith and Wilhelm (2002) have noted both the slower progress boys have when learning to read in comparison with girls and their lower levels of engagement with reading tasks in school. Graham (2001) also refers to boys' underachievement in writing tasks. This gender disparity in literacy development is evident in NAPLAN data, as well as in results of international tests, such as the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA). The extent to which gender variations arise from biological and/or psychological differences and are socially constructed remains a matter of debate. In a useful summary of some of the literature about boys and literacy, Bausch (2014) for example, refers to the powerful influence of sex-stereotyping from birth.

Irrespective of the source of gender differences, Smith and Wilhelm (2002) acknowledge boys' enthusiasm for—and dedicated reading in relation to—various extracurricular interests, sports, and audio-visual entertainment among them. This observation has led them to distinguish between school and life reading, and between the instrumental needs of schooling and the intrinsic worth of pursuing interests that have meaning. In the present research, targeted strategies for boys were relatively scarce except, for example, where teachers were involved in 'ordering some new, more up-to-date texts suitable for particularly disengaged boys' [HS-TiC]. This strategy is promising in terms of re-engaging boys with reading (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002).

Withdrawal AND inclusion

As found among participants in primary schools in this study, views were mixed in relation to how interventions for struggling secondary school students are best delivered. One specialist literacy teacher said:

> The specialist literacy teacher role basically gives you open slather to achieve the ends however you want … So, there's free reign there, nothing is specified. I prefer to withdraw students, work with them one-on-one or in a small group, whereas the other literacy teacher prefers the in-class approach … We were doing a lot of in-class work first semester, but I felt that it was a waste of me as a resource and I felt quite ineffective. [HS-LS]

However, a teacher assistant thought differently, observing that when staff withdraw students from classrooms, neither the classroom teacher nor the TA can always determine what is happening. Alternatively, she proposed that:

> the teacher in the classroom, with extra adult support in class, is able to gauge and work alongside the student. They're also modelling their teaching practice to the other adults … I feel like [students] don't want to be taken out [or] look different, because then everyone knows "Oh, I'm not learning, so I need to be moved". So, it's about structuring your classroom to make it work for all students in there. [CS-TA]

A combined approach to targeted intervention was advocated by one school leader, whereby the principle of inclusion was privileged, incorporating a withdrawal option as needed:

> The way inclusion is operating in our school at the moment does concern me. I believe it could be more inclusive. We have moved from students with disability coming into classrooms with an aide to work alongside their peers (which is what I believe is inclusion) to them being withdrawn from classes and working separately in a designated area of the school. While this does serve its own purpose, I think there should be more of a balance between these students working in isolation on specific skills as well as within the classroom environment. It has worked well previously—a mix of including them in classroom activities as well as spending some time elsewhere focusing on a more individual needs basis. [HS-AST]

These comments from the chalkface reflect the complexity of the broader debates in policy and scholarship about the relative merits of inclusion and separate provision for students with disability (Department of Education Tasmania, 2015b; Evans & Lunt, 2001; Slee & Allan, 2001).

Overall, and as found among educators working in the earlier stages of schooling, staff in secondary schools were doing their best to meet the needs of adolescents with subpar literacy skills. However, findings suggest that the extent of the unmet need, in some schools, necessitates urgent action.

In the next section of this report, attention turns to how a whole school approach to literacy can help to establish a learning environment in which *all* students, regardless of ability, may develop their literacy to their full potential.

Section 4. Enacting literacy practice at the whole school level

Noting that 'we are flush with information about teaching students to read and write', Fisher and Frey (2007, p.35) observe that 'the challenge is putting all this information into practice at the whole school level'. In this section, the focus shifts to addressing this challenge.

A whole school approach to literacy has been advocated for some time as contributing to improved literacy outcomes (Fullan, 1992) with case study research showing promising results (Dilena & van Kraayenoord, 1995). Hill and Crevola's (1999) evaluation of a whole school approach to literacy, implemented in Victoria (Australia) in the late 1990s, concluded that this approach was inclusive because it resulted in substantially improved literacy outcomes across a whole school population, enabling all students to succeed, including those struggling with literacy. Louden's (2015) study of high-performing primary schools in Western Australia affirmed Hill and Crevola's findings, establishing that a common characteristic shared across these schools was that there was minimum variation in teaching across classrooms. Another compelling reason to adopt a whole school approach to literacy, noted by Merga and Gardiner (2018), is that it promotes the idea, enshrined in the Australian Curriculum, that literacy is a general capability and therefore a cross-curricular responsibility, across all classrooms and learning areas.

Thus, there is a solid rationale for adopting a whole school approach to literacy, and the turn to such an approach appears to be reflected in a shift in the focus of research, observed by Hall (2013), towards school improvement studies and away from literacy teacher effectiveness studies. However, Merga and Gardiner (2018, p.45) make the important point that there is relatively limited research guiding the structure and content of whole school planning documents and so:

> In the absence of a clear and consistent framework around what whole school literacy policies could and should encompass, there is potential for important pillars to be omitted, ignored or misunderstood.

4.1 Definitions

Given its relative prominence in discussions about improving literacy outcomes, it is surprising there is no agreed definition of this approach to teaching and learning with respect to literacy specifically. A whole school approach to literacy is therefore enacted variously, subject to differing interpretations and rests largely on an assumed shared understanding—both of what it is, and of how to implement it.

A broad search for definitions of a whole school approach to student learning generally points to characteristics that may be considered key to the approach. Commonly, these wider definitions emphasise consistency, cohesiveness, collective action, and collaboration, 'in and by a school community that has been strategically constructed to improve student learning, behaviour and wellbeing' (WA Department of Education).[36]

Further to this point, a whole school approach is intended to respond to diverse learning needs, ensuring that 'differentiation occurs at each level of planning and becomes increasingly personalised' (Queensland Department of Education and Training),[37] in a culture of ongoing improvement which sets high expectations, monitors student progress with school-wide analysis of student achievement data. All members of the school community—school staff, parents/carers and community members—have a role in ensuring that all students have the opportunity to maximise their learning experience, and that insight highlights the shared responsibilities that a whole school approach entails. Importantly, 'developing an agreed whole school approach requires spending time to clarify expectations, purposes and practices' for literacy learning and teaching 'in a systematic and integrated way' (Literacy Secretariat South Australia, 2011).[38]

Tasmania's recently-released 2019–2022 Literacy Plan for Action explicitly states that literacy needs to be part of a whole school framework and improvement agenda, where all educators see themselves as teachers of literacy (Department of Education, Tasmania, 2019). In the present research, there was clear evidence that many schools were acting on this policy directive, with participants describing features of literacy practice congruent with the characteristics of a whole school approach, as described in the literature. However, both between and sometimes within schools, there was a high degree of variation in terms of understandings of what a whole school approach is and how to achieve it. In itself, this finding is not surprising. Variation is to be expected for many reasons, not least that there is no common understanding of what constitutes such an approach. Indeed, while over half of the schools' documentation that was provided referred to a whole school approach to literacy, in only a handful of schools was the approach elaborated in any detail in the school Literacy Plan. Especially interesting was the finding that when school documentation was compared with what participants reported in interviews, often there was a mismatch and in fact, in only 39 per cent of the schools was there a strong alignment between what the school documentation indicated and what participants told us.

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36 http://det.wa.edu.au/policies/detcms/policy-planning-and-accountability/policies-framework/definitions/whole school-approach.en

37 https://education.qld.gov.au/curriculums/Documents/school-approach-to-differentiated-teach-and-learn.pdf

38 https://www.education.sa.gov.au/teaching/curriculum-and-teaching/literacy-and-numeracy

Fisher and Frey's (2007) research adds to the definitions from various organisations listed above, concluding that a whole school approach to literacy is characterised by the following:

- well-developed small group instruction coupled with whole group teaching;
- staff willingness to continuously revisit and refine practices;
- professional learning communities and peer coaching; and
- support and participation of families in school community.

However, as Fisher and Frey (2007) note, implementation is the challenge in relation to a whole school approach. Noting that leadership is key, Fletcher *et al*. (2012) observe that principals in schools with a whole school approach typically:

- provide staff with sustained professional development and take part in it;
- develop schoolwide use of standardised assessment to monitor achievement and identify specific needs;
- build a trusting and collaborative environment in the school community; and
- hold and articulate high expectations of all learners.

Based on the policy descriptions and available research literature outlined above, a framework for good practice in enacting a whole school approach to literacy is based on interlocking clusters of features which may be subsumed under two broad headings:

1. consistent and cohesive teaching practice, which is systematic and integrated and responsive to diverse student needs, and in which student progress is continuously monitored; and

2. collaborative and collective school culture, which is inclusive of the whole school community and reflects shared responsibility for ongoing improvement.

These features are discussed below in reference to the project's findings.

4.2 Consistent and cohesive teaching practice

In this research, the word 'consistency' recurred frequently in discussions about a whole school approach. Sometimes, it was used to emphasise the importance of all staff aligning their practices with each other. Echoing Louden and colleagues' (2005) point about the link between school achievement and minimum variation across classrooms, one principal had this to say:

> [Over the six years] that I've been here, something we have aimed to change or to bring about is a consistent approach across the school and trying to align what people are doing rather than each doing separate things in their classroom. So, that's something that we've been working on for a while, and we will continue to work on. [PS-P]

More often, however, consistency was referred to in relation to having a sustained (and usually singular) literacy focus. The most common response to the question of what a whole school approach looked like in their school, nominated the aspect of literacy that was prioritised in the school. Participants in 75 per cent of the schools reported they had a single focus at the time the research was conducted; this was

usually either reading or spelling. Some schools reported having a dual focus of reading and spelling. Two high schools nominated writing as their literacy focus. When asked at interview how this priority focus had been determined, participants explained that it was generally decided following analysis of the school's most recent NAPLAN results, with the focus tending to change once results in that domain had improved.

When participants spoke about consistency across practices as a feature of a whole school approach, they often spoke in general terms about practice reflecting a shared understanding of literacy, across learning areas. One AST told us, for example, that:

> it's about getting some consistency across there. That's the thing that I think is really important. It's just people understanding what literacy should look like—or does look like—in their subject area. [HS-AST]

Another school leader referred to the importance of consistency in assessment practices to ensure that 'kids don't fall through the cracks … As a whole school, we've come to the conclusion that that can't keep happening. It's about creating a consistent approach around assessment as well' [PS-AP].

Being able to 'walk into most classes here, and [see] the learning intentions on the white-board' [PS-P] was an indicator of consistency for one school leader, evidencing that 'the kids know why we're learning [something] and [understand] the success criteria … what a good outcome looks like, so kids know what they're trying to achieve' [PS-P].

4.2.1 Common language

The use of common language about literacy was frequently noted by participants as important for a whole school approach. In some schools the use of a shared language had become a 'non-negotiable' whole school practice. In these schools, there was a strongly held belief among participants that using the same terminology reflected shared understandings and that, 'if we're all coming from the same place and using the same terms' [HS-LS], this consistency would translate into improved outcomes for students (Australian Government, 2016; Sawyer *et al.*, 2007).

While there was widespread agreement that consistency was important, many participants made the point that 'there are aspects of it that are negotiable' [PS-AST]. A senior staff member in one school observed:

> I wouldn't say we have a really high level of fidelity in terms of consistent practice in every room. But I'm not entirely concerned about that. I do think we've probably got to come a little bit closer with some of our practice. On the other hand, I think it's important that teachers maintain their own flexibility to teach in the best way that makes use of their own skills and style. I'm certainly not pushing teachers to start mimicking each other. [PS-AST]

VIGNETTE 6 – Consistent teaching practice

Consistency is a key characteristic of learning environments that enable students to thrive academically and socially. The most effective teachers have been shown to be highly consistent within their classroom, establishing clear routines that students can understand and adhere to (see Brophy & Good, 1986; Cantrell & Callaway, 2008; Hill *et al.*, 1999). In addition, there is a link between school achievement and minimum variation in practice across classrooms, which suggests that whole-school consistency is also important when enacting literacy teaching practice (*Louden, Rohl, Barratt Pugh et al.*, 2005).

The Tasmanian Department of Education recognises the importance of consistency in literacy teaching practice. One of the three system priorities in the 2019–2022 Literacy Framework[39] is 'Consistent and aligned practices that are informed by evidence'. Three actions follow from this priority:

1. Provide system-wide guidance for literacy learning through the effective teaching of English for literacy learning across the curriculum.

2. Provide evidence-based and endorsed resources to support effective teaching of English for literacy learning across the curriculum.

3. Provide quality and targeted professional learning to build the capacity of leaders and educators to improve their teaching of English for literacy learning[40].

Consistent whole school approaches

In this study, participants noted the importance of consistency in discussions about whole-school approaches to literacy. Emphasising the long-term nature of whole school change and the need for all staff to align practices, one principal had this to say:

[Over the six years] that I've been here, something we have aimed to bring about is a consistent approach across the school, trying to align what people are doing … So, that's something that we've been working on for a while, and we will continue to work on. [PS-P]

For some participants, achieving consistency across practices reflected a shared understanding of literacy. One AST told us, for example, that:

it's about getting some consistency across there. That's the thing that I think is really important. It's just people understanding what literacy should look like—or does look like—in their subject area. [HS-AST]

Participants also referred to the value of using a shared metalanguage about literacy. Indeed, in some schools the use of a common language had become a 'non-negotiable' whole-school practice to 'ensure that people absolutely do it' [PS-CT]. In those schools, staff understood that using a consistent terminology showed that they were 'all coming from the same place' [HS-LS], and agreed that consistency would translate into improved outcomes for students (also see Australian Government, 2016; Sawyer *et al.*, 2007):

because we know when the teachers use the same language, it just makes it so much easier for the kids to learn [in contrast to] … different formats and different words for different things. If we can all be on that one platform around reading strategies or spelling strategies, it just makes it that much easier for the kids. [PS-AST]

Consistent feedback and monitoring enable students' cognitive engagement with texts (Baye *et al.*, 2018; Dietrichson *et al.*, 2017; Herrera *et al.*,

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39 https://www.education.tas.gov.au/about-us/projects/literacy-framework-plan-action/

40 ibid

2016; Slavin *et al.*, 2008). This is reflected in a comment by a school leader, who referred to the importance of 'creating a consistent approach around assessment as well' to ensure that 'kids don't fall through the cracks' [PS-AP].

Some school leaders considered it vital that explicit learning intentions and success criteria were used consistently in all classrooms, in order to achieve improved outcomes across their schools:

> I can walk into most classes here, and the learning intentions will be on the white-board so the kids know … why we're learning [something] and [understand] the success criteria, what a good outcome looks like. So, kids know what they're trying to achieve. [PS-P]

A common approach to ensuring consistency in schools in the related to the scheduling of literacy in the school timetable. Over half of the participating schools reported they had a regular 'literacy block', during which time all classes worked specifically on literacy-focussed activities. In approximately half such schools with a dedicated literacy block, teachers used the 'whole-part-whole' lesson structure. That approach reflects Fisher and Frey's (2007) point that a whole-school approach incorporates planned small group instruction and whole-class teaching. The literacy block and 'whole-part-whole' workshop structure was explicitly and purposefully used in many schools 'so that across the school we're doing the same thing consistently, at the same time' (PS-CT).

Consistency—not conformity

Achieving 'consistency' is not an end in itself, but a means to an end—namely to maximise learning and enable all students to make gains in their literacy outcomes. On that understanding, many participants were keen to qualify their endorsement of 'consistent practice'.

A senior staff member in one school pointed to the value of flexibility and said that the leadership team was 'certainly not pushing teachers to start mimicking each other' [PS-AST], affirming that teachers need licence 'to teach in the best way that makes use of their own skills and style' [PS-AST]. Another senior practitioner agreed that having consistent literacy practice 'doesn't mean everyone has to teach it the same way … and it doesn't take away from people's individuality as a teacher' [PS-AST].

Making an important distinction between 'consistency' and 'conformity', a school principal stated unequivocally that 'you've got to allow for innovation. Otherwise, you don't have passionate and motivated teachers' [PS-P].

Some leaders had a more flexible interpretation of the whole school approach dictum, one conceding that:

> They're just guidelines and expectations, it doesn't mean everyone has to teach it the same way, but these are … the minimums, and it doesn't take away from people's individuality as a teacher [PS-AST].

Another stated 'it's around consistency, not conformity, because you've got to allow for innovation. Otherwise, you don't have passionate and motivated teachers' [PS-P].

4.2.2 The 'literacy block'

Another common response related to consistency in literacy practice related to school timetabling. Over half of the participating schools had a regular 'literacy block'. It is worth noting that only one of these was a secondary school and one was a combined school. However, the duration and frequency of this varied considerably with some participants reporting a 20-minute timeslot several times a week, while others referred to a daily two-hour block.

There was also variation in how time was used, with some schools mandating explicit literacy instruction and others allocating time to reading, usually with students in reading groups and streamed according to ability; occasionally a whole class would engage in silent reading (discussed previously in section 2.3).

In about half of the schools with a dedicated literacy block, the 'whole-part-whole' lesson structure was used, reflecting Fisher and Frey's (2007) point that a whole school approach incorporates both planned small group instruction, coupled with whole-class teaching.

4.2.3 Shared literacy resources

Participants in this research referred to the use of shared literacy resources as a key element of their whole school approach. Approximately one quarter of participating schools had what they referred to as their 'literacy folder', which was a school-based collection of literacy teaching materials that participants assured us were all 'evidence-based and aligned with the Department's Good Teaching Guides and the Australian Curriculum' [PS-AST]. In some schools, that resource was regarded as 'the bible', a touchstone for staff when they wanted to review or clarify anything related to literacy teaching practice in their school. In these schools, the literacy folder was crucial to the induction process for new staff, thereby building in sustainability of the whole school approach.

Again, there was considerable variation in how such common resources were put together and used, with some participants referring to them as providing an 'overarching framework with collated useful materials [to use] if you're a bit stuck' [PS-CT], and others noting that they were 'close to being scripted … so that everyone's giving the same messages, using the same language, and knows what is expected of that year level' [PS-LT].

In some schools, the shared literacy resource repository was put together by the leadership team and/or literacy specialist and presented to staff as a 'non-negotiable'. In others, it was an organic and evolving document that 'grew and changed over time' [PS-P]; that was 'co-constructed … developed in consultation

with staff' [PS-AST]; and that reflected a more collaborative school culture. Such patterns are noted by Fletcher *et al.* (2012) as integral to good practice in enacting a whole school approach. The importance of co-construction and collaborative inquiry, as opposed to imposition, has been established as key to effective practice change (Foster, 2014) and discussed more below.

4.2.4 State wide consistency

There was widespread consensus among participants that state-wide consistency would enable whole school consistency. Teachers reported experiencing a sense of 'going around in circles, wondering what the next big thing in literacy is going to be' [PS-LT]. One AST clearly articulated the desires for stability and consistency:

> The Department needs to give a really clear message around what they value in literacy and then not change it … have time to actually embed what we're saying we're valuing rather than moving on to something else … The Good Teaching Guides are fantastic. They're really good resources. Now we just need to make sure that the Department doesn't change tack … We just need consistency. [PS-AST]

Many participants were in favour of a 'unified approach that's going to bring everybody along' [PS-P] to ensure 'consistency across the state in literacy practice' [PS-TA]. A common theme was the idea of extending the 'whole school approach' to a 'whole department approach':

> The research says that whole school approaches are the most beneficial, right? So, there has to be something about a whole Department approach as well, because if whole school approaches create better outcomes, then surely whole Department approaches create better outcomes as well. [PS-P]

Opinions differed among participants about the right level of departmental prescription. Some suggested that 'it's now time for our Department to say "this is the best way to do it" … There are proven techniques out there' and that it would be useful for 'our curriculum centre, to say "this is the best way to do it. Here's the program you need to use. These programs work for these particular kids. This works for the general cohort"' [HS-P]. In contrast, other participants suggested that consistency was more like 'having a company policy—we all tie in to the company's policy, but we've still got our own individual ways of working' [PS-CT]. In this respect, participants acknowledged the challenge of finding the pivot point between 'system-ness and autonomy' [PS-LT]. On this point, Ryan (2005, p.114) has emphasised the complexity of translating whole school innovation into largescale systemic literacy initiatives, which highlights the pitfalls of 'imposed innovation' and the need for state-level infrastructure to support 'active (making it happen) methods for implementation' (Fixsen *et al.*, 2013, p.220).

4.3 Collaborative and collective school culture

References to 'school culture' permeated some discussions about a whole school approach to literacy. Schools that had a strong whole school approach were characterised by a culture that was collaborative, collegial, open, and trusting. Staff in those schools seemed to operate genuinely as a team, one primary school leader talking about the teamwork in their school like this:

> From the top to the bottom, we're all part of the process of ensuring that we get the best from our students; we provide the best for our students; and I feel like we support each other. [PS-AST]

This teamwork approach is consistent with the perspective taken by the Tasmanian DoE in its Supporting Literacy and Numeracy Success resource for teachers (Department of Education Tasmania, 2013). One participant described it thus:

> So that level of collegiality—and support, and team teaching, and collaboration—I think, is the most important thing in terms of supporting staff in a whole school approach. [HS-P]

In schools with a teamwork ethos, successes were celebrated, one principal noting that 'it's one of the things that holds the school together' [PS-P]. Staff also shared challenges and disappointments in schools with a solid whole school approach. This aspect of school culture was evident in comments such as 'if there's a teacher who's struggling, then there's someone there to support them' [PS-CT], because 'everyone just kind of chips in together' [PS-AST]. A 'climate of caring and sharing' [PS-P] prevailed because this approach had become 'the way of working … almost like it's cultural now' [CS-P]. The importance of school climate has been established in other contexts as fundamental to widespread success across operations (Cohen *et al.*, 2009).

Learning together has been described by Fisher and Frey (2007) as a feature of a successful whole school approach, and intrinsic to a collaborative school culture; or, as one principal put it, it is about the whole school community 'having a growth mindset' [HS-P]. Another observed that 'it's all of us learning together, so we are learners along with our students' [PS-P].

> Everyone's in a different place with their knowledge and understanding of literacy. There's an acknowledgment and an openness to accept everybody's level of understanding of literacy that allows people to say "I've got absolutely no idea what to do with this kid. I've got no idea how to move this kid forward" or "Can you please come and watch me teach? I really don't think I'm asking the right questions of such and such". I think it's a cultural thing as well that's been embedded over the last couple of years. [PS-P]

Stemming from collaboration was a culture of openness and trust, which also fostered fairness. Where a strong whole school approach was evident, the culture was characterised by open communication and enacted with open doors. Teachers were demonstrably 'willing to be open and share their classroom practice' [PS-CT] because there was a 'sense of trust' [PS-P], as these school leaders explained:

> All of the classes are very visible and open. I'm in and out of classrooms all the time as are the other senior staff. So, there's no sort of, I guess, reservation from teachers about you going into their classroom. There's no hiding [laughter] from what the expectations are here. [HS-P]

Many participants also noted that it had taken some time to establish a culture of trust and acknowledged that such a degree of openness was relatively new. One commented on:

> the shift that we've had over the years that I've been here … It used to be everybody in their room, "These are my four walls. I'm in this room". Whereas

now it's "Oh. What are you doing in your room? How come you're getting those results? Can you show me? Can you talk to me about it?" People are breaking down those barriers. [PS-AP]

4.3.1 Family and community engagement

The benefits, for children's literacy development of home-school collaboration are well-documented (see Bloome *et al.*, 2000; Cox, 2005; Gaitan, 2012; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Wilkins & Terlitsky, 2016). However, Newman and colleagues (2016, p.80) suggest that parents often feel as if they are 'operating within a teacher-directed paradigm and don't yet see the possibilities for themselves as active agents in education' and that educators may need to 'shift their "ways of being" away from deliverers of knowledge to educational partners with families and children'.

Many schools in the present research had initiatives in place to foster positive relationships with families and strengthen the home-school connection (Lewallen *et al.*, 2015) and some participants made it abundantly clear that working in partnership with families was a key part of their whole school approach to literacy, as the following quote illustrates:

> Because we have a whole school approach, we felt it was important that the parents knew what we're doing and why we were doing it and giving them the tools to be able to support it as well. [PS-CT]

Participants cited several reasons for keeping parents 'in that loop' [CS-AST], the main one being that 'they're the first educators of their children' [PS-LT] and 'they know their child better than anyone else' [PS-CT]. Added to this insight was an observation that, 'the more people that are around to help a child, then it can only be a win-win situation' [PS-CT].

For some participants, working with families opened up a completely new arena, 'a big space of exciting learning opportunities to actually work with parents so that we're all on the same page' because 'all of the research says that a child will achieve the best possible outcomes that they can if school and home are working together, in a positive manner' [PS-CT] (Chang, 2016; Daniel, 2015; Sheridan *et al.*, 2017; Torre & Murphy, 2016).

Ensuring that parents feel welcome in the school environment is crucial to establishing fruitful home-school partnerships, and there is a significant literature on such matters (Buchanan & Buchanan, 2016; Daniel, 2015; Molina, 2013; Newman *et al.*, 2016; Sheridan *et al.*, 2017; Torre & Murphy, 2016; Tran, 2014). The present study provides evidence that many schools in Tasmania have prioritised that goal and are well on the way to achieving it, often with limited resources and in the face of severe space restrictions.

> They've set up a parent room, so parents feel a bit more comfortable at school. That's still in progress at the moment. They've put a heater in and a fridge. Because we've got lots of parents who live like 50 minutes away and say if they were driving past the school, just so they could feel like they could come in and maybe go to the parent room, rather than having to feel like they have to sit in the car or something like that. So, then they feel more welcome in the school … Parents aren't afraid to sit in the staff room either … they feel quite comfortable, I guess … So that shows the teachers are helping to encourage people to be near and supporting that, so that's good. [PS-PV]

In addition to establishing partnerships with parents and providing them with literacy information and education, most of the schools we visited were actively involved in a number of literacy-focused engagement programs designed to invite and integrate families and community members into school life. At times, these programs were quite informal, using an 'open door' policy. This approach enabled schools to provide 'education opportunities for parents who might have struggled themselves in the literacy area' [PS-P] in ways that are tailored to parents' and children's needs, as they arise. One literacy support teacher described her 'open-door policy where parents can come in and chat and talk to me about their child' as 'a game changer' [PS-LT]:

> With this sort of support, we can achieve really positive things together … Sometimes parents just need some good advice about the support they can offer at home, or if a child is struggling with a particular area of their literacy, you can provide them with the resources and ideas to support that learning … I really value having not just a good, but a great relationship with parents. It's important to me to know that they feel they can come and ask for support and not feel like I'm judging them. My door's open. I have the knowledge and resources and I'm really happy to share them. We've got the same goal. We want the best for the child. [PS-LT]

Many participating schools had established a more formal home reading program as an important element of their whole school approach to literacy. In most schools, it also functioned as a key family and community engagement strategy:

> The biggest whole school focus with reading would be the home reading program that we're all on the same page with, I would say … It's to ensure they're reading as much as they can but it's also to involve their parents. So, it's not just about getting the children to read more; it's about sharing that time with their parents and making sure that parents understand and can see the value of reading with their children. [PS-CT]

Staff in some of the schools visited supplemented their home reading program with a 'before school' reading program. Combining the latter with a breakfast offering resulted in a high take-up by families and kept 'that relationship thing happening with parents' [PS-LT]. This gain was especially evident in areas where the school was seen as the source of 'a lot of social support' [CS-AP]. While the program roll-out sometimes created 'a madhouse in there of a morning' [PS-LT], there was also a strong sense of community-building:

> If we're looking at different people within our school community, then there's also parents, and through our literacy support program, every morning from 8:30 to 9:00, we have the morning reading program, where we've encouraged parents to come in and read with students before school and have a free Milo … We've taken that opportunity to share as much information as we can with parents about what we're doing and why we're doing it. I see that as a key component too when developing a whole school approach to things … Quite often, the parents of those children are coming to morning reading the following day to change the books, and we have that opportunity to share and celebrate how great their reading is going and they're recording it in the home reading diary … That contact with parents and the work that they're doing at home with the students has definitely added to the development of those kids that I've worked with. [PS-LT]

Another school had established a Reading Club, 'a nice, warm, little safe environment that they come into that we also use to talk with parents' [PS-LT]:

> We'll have times where we invite parents in. "Please come into reading club with your child and sit and listen to them read and we'll talk through the strategies that your child needs so that you can use them at home as well" … We have lots of parent support in our before-school reading club as well … We're really proud of it and we see lots of progress being made in there every day. [PS-LT]

Finally, participants referred to two formal initiatives by the Tasmanian Department of Education—Launching into Learning (LiL) and Learning in Families Together (LiFT)—as relevant planks in their whole school approach to literacy. Although LiL is not explicitly a literacy program, participants considered it useful for supporting parents of 0 to four-year-olds with early literacy. Participants in schools with the LiFT program spoke enthusiastically about its benefits in terms of parent engagement and education, highlighting the importance of customising information, advice, and resources to individual parents' needs.

4.3.2 Leadership for securing staff buy-in

There is now plentiful evidence on the impact of leadership on student achievement, including literacy outcomes (Leithwood *et al.*, 2008; Marzano *et al.*, 2001; Townsend *et al.*, 2018). The importance of school leadership in securing buy-in for whole school change is also well documented (see Auerbach, 2009 in relation to leadership in family engagement). In this research, principals spoke especially about the paramount importance of getting all teachers 'on board' [PS-P], a point made by Hattie (2009).

High on the agenda for those school leaders seeking to secure staff 'buy-in' for a whole school approach was 'shifting the mindset from "this is what I do" to "this is what we do"' [PS-P]. However, leaders were cognisant of the need to gain teachers' trust in order advance change. It was noted that for some teachers changing their practice to adopt a whole school approach represented 'a quantum leap' [HS-P] and, in such contexts, school leaders acknowledged the need to provide support for change and to proceed with patience. As one teacher noted, 'in every school, probably, there's always one or two teachers who are a little bit trickier but yeah, you've just got to plod away to get them on board' [PS-CT]. Echoing findings in Townsend's (2017) assessment of principals as literacy leaders (PALL) program, one school leader also observed that:

> We still have some teachers … [we need to work] with to [help them] take on board all of our whole-of-school approaches … as a leadership team [it's] our job to support them … so that we've all got the similar pedagogy, [and] so that all the students are benefiting from what the research is saying is effective. [PS-AST]

In general, securing buy-in was seen as best achieved by members of the school leadership team actively facilitating a "bottom-up" change movement that was teacher-driven, because 'you can't just walk in and tell people that's what they should do' [PS-LT]. The challenge of striking a balance between mandating change and encouraging shared ownership has been extensively commented upon by Connolly and James (2000).

4.3.3 Sharing responsibility

Closely related to the notion of shared ownership is the idea of shared responsibility for implementing a whole school approach. As one principal described it: 'Everybody in the school owns the success of our students, so that collective responsibility is really built-in to our whole school approach and we have high expectations about that' [PS-P].

This idea is more widely echoed in work from the United Kingdom. There, Godfrey (2016, p.301) found that marked benefits arose for school communities when their leadership teams supported a research-led school culture. In particular, Godfrey established the importance of 'systemic connectedness; leadership for knowledge creation; teaching as a research-informed practice; and the school as a learning organisation'.

The importance of collective responsibility resonates with the understanding of literacy as cross-curricular and is illustrated in the following quotes:

> I would also say that it isn't the responsibility of one person. If we're setting it up, it shouldn't depend on me, or even the "Raising the Bar" coach. It should be embedded in what happens in the school so that we can all walk away, knowing that that's still going to function and going to happen. [CS-P]

The following comment illustrates the extent of the take-up of responsibility in some schools by staff whose work is not specifically related to literacy.

> Even our HPE teacher the other day was helping me with some of the literacy data stuff … and he said, "wow, there's that huge [group] of kids I didn't realise … are working below … their spelling [level]". And I'm like "yes, that's why we're focusing on this!"' [PS-AST]

In high schools, some participants observed that the catchphrase 'literacy is everybody's business' [HS-LS] has accrued more weight with the adoption of a whole school approach to literacy. This change is particularly significant in the secondary school context, where "pushback" has been strongest (as discussed in section 2.3.3):

> At least there's that awareness now that I don't think there used to be. And there's also, I guess, that feeling of they've got some responsibility too now that I don't think used to be there, which I think is good. Yeah, so I think it has been embraced by the staff. [HS-AST]

While documentation from other high schools and combined schools was less explicit, it did refer to literacy approaches or targets that applied across the school. However, consistent with findings about the incremental process of whole school change, there is widespread agreement that 'all teachers are teachers of literacy', but this has not yet translated into universal practice and appears particularly challenging in secondary schools.

4.3.4 Understanding organisational change

Establishing a whole school approach to literacy takes time and commitment for the long haul; it requires continuity of strong leadership and buy-in from the whole school community. Many participants in this research, school leaders particularly,

spoke about the implementation of a whole school approach as a slow, complex, and ongoing process of incremental organisational change, a process to which Au and Raphael (2019) suggest the gradual release of responsibility model may be usefully applied. Consistent with Department policy, participants often referred to embedding this change as part of their school improvement agenda, specific to their own context. As such, it was seen as 'always a work in progress' because 'there's always more to improve on … always more to do' [PS-CT] in 'building people's knowledge and understanding' [PS-P].

The study findings suggest that in approximately one third of participating schools a whole school approach was 'in development' [PS-LT]. Participants' narratives suggested that once a critical mass of staff members had tipped the balance in favour of change, the school community tended to move into a phase of consolidating for sustainability. As one principal noted 'It takes a couple of years, really, to really push something in' [PS-P]. Another said:

> If you want it to be sustained over a period of time, you've got to make sure … that the teachers have a chance to really embed the practices that you want and that [they] become second nature. You have to stay the course so that it just doesn't drift away and say "oh, yeah, that was a thing then. We're going to do something else now". You want it to be second nature. [PS-P]

Importantly, even in those schools where a whole school approach was well on the way to being 'second nature', the leadership team was aware of the need to continually revisit, review and refine practice, a key feature of a whole school approach noted by Fisher and Frey (2007).

> It's that inquiry cycle and acting on that and reviewing how well it's going. Not just sitting back and saying "oh, we've done it, and moving on". We actually need to [visit it] again and say "okay, what do we need to do to get this approach going further or to make sure it's embedded?" [PS-P]

Importantly, the adoption of the inquiry cycle approach to improvement, evident in many participating schools, is consistent with that advocated by the Department in its 2018–2021 Strategic Plan (Department of Education Tasmania, 2018). Encouragingly, while that Plan was released midway through data collection, the concept and practice of the professional inquiry cycle appeared to be well understood, and indeed on the way to being embedded, in over half of the participating schools. Professional learning and practice development are discussed in Section 3.

Overall, the findings of the present study support research highlighting that schools need to carefully plan for implementation of a whole school approach to literacy (Sharples *et al.*, 2018). An overriding emphasis on consistency risks neglecting the vital ingredient of collaboration. In the worst-case scenario, the mantra of 'consistency' can metamorphose into mechanical conformity, with little evidence of a collaborative school culture in which responsibility for growing literate young people is genuinely shared among all members of the school community. This is not to say that there was evidence of this in the schools visited during the project; merely to underscore that it is vital that a whole school approach to literacy is not enacted as an end in itself but as a means to an end, which is maximising learning and making gains in literacy outcomes for all students. The implication of this strategy is that school leaders and educators need to be constantly vigilant that student progress is being monitored via ongoing assessment.

Section 5. Evaluating impacts of literacy teaching practice

It is a truism to state that ongoing monitoring and assessment of student progress is integral to good teaching practice. Few educators, parents, or policy-makers would argue that assessment is *not* a vital component of effective literacy teaching practice (Westwood, 2009). Likewise, it seems self-evident that regular monitoring and assessment of students' progress provide essential information about the effectiveness of literacy instruction to guide teachers in where and how to adjust their practice where necessary, identifying as early as possible those students who may be having problems. However, while there is agreement about the basic principles underpinning assessment, 'the nature, scope and format of the assessment process have become the focus of debate' (Westwood, 2009, p.3). Answers to the crucial questions of how, what, and when to assess are contested.

Westwood (2009, p.3) contends that debate is between 'those who subscribe to a cognitive, skills-based, explicit teaching orientation' and 'those who regard themselves as members of the so-called 'New Literacy Studies' (NLS) movement'. He goes on to explain that the approach advocated by the former group directly 'targets the key skills and knowledge involved in reading, writing and spelling' while the latter proposes a 'less precise and potentially more subjective 'always-in-context' and 'always-authentic' approach'. Noting that 'authenticity is an important element of new modes of assessment' that seek to keep pace with and reflect new and broadened understandings of literacy, Gulikers *et al*. (2004, p.67) make the point that because the dimensions of authentic assessment remain unspecified, it is frequently perceived as unscientific and unreliable.

Grounded in different discourses about literacy, clashes in assessment practices can catch teachers 'in the middle' (Johnston & Costello, 2005, p.264). Concluding that while assessment approaches need to be anchored in current understandings of literacy, learning and society, Johnston and Costello (2005, p.265) maintain that they also have 'to remain open to evolution … which at the very least means encouraging some diversity in assessment practice'. Indeed, the available literature indicates that *both* skills-based and authentic assessment are needed, but for different purposes and audiences. For example, while the former may be suited for summative assessment purposes, the latter may lend itself better to formative assessment (or assessment for learning). The evidence for these different forms of assessment is discussed below.

5.1 The purposes of assessment

At the outset of this discussion, it is important to note that the title of this sub-section of the report 'Evaluating the impacts of practice' has been chosen deliberately to underscore a common thread in the literature: that the over-arching purpose of assessment is to inform teaching practice. In this vein, Hempenstall (2009, p.19) notes that:

> literacy assessment itself has little intrinsic value; rather, it is only the consequences flowing from the assessment process' that have the potential to enhance students' literacy development.

Citing studies by Alessi (1988) and Wade and Moore (1993) about how educationists view the source of literacy problems, Hempenstall (2009, p.19) makes another point that most classroom teachers in those studies believed that when students failed to learn, student characteristics were responsible. Only three per cent considered that their own teaching, or the education system more generally, were more important factors in student achievement, 'a finding utterly at odds with the research into teacher effects (see Cuttance, 1998; Hattie, 2009; Hattie *et al*., 1995). This is not to suggest children's social locations and contexts ought not to be considered. Indeed, as Whitehead and Wilkinson (2008, p.22) note, 'privileging teacher quality without reference to the infrastructure that mediates their work, is potentially dangerous' and risks placing unreasonable demands of teachers. Crucially, what it does mean however, is that literacy assessment must focus not only on *students' learning*, but also on *teachers' teaching*.

Acknowledging the diversity in assessment tools and processes, Afflerbach (2016, p.413) advises that good practice in the sphere of literacy assessment should be guided by the following credo:

> Assessment should produce information that is useful in helping students become better readers, and assessment should do no harm.

Adhering to this credo, Afflerbach argues, enables teachers to critically evaluate reading assessments, determining their value and ascertaining that they cover what is important in reading development. In addition, it helps guard against overassessment. While Afflerbach refers specifically to reading assessment here, his comments may be taken to apply more broadly to apply all aspects of literacy.

5.2 Types of data used for gauging effectiveness

Different types of data are generated by different forms of assessment and, in turn, influence pedagogical decision-making. Afflerbach (2016) notes that the 'stranglehold' of high-stakes standardised testing on literacy assessment resources has exerted a pervasive negative influence on literacy instruction, privileging particular types of data over others. This 'stranglehold' was reflected in responses from participants in this research who, when asked how they gauge the effectiveness of their literacy teaching practice, typically referred to student assessment data 'because it's factual' [PS-P] and because 'people tend to go straight to student data when they're trying to justify if something's working' [HS-AP].

VIGNETTE 7 – Assessing learner growth

Literacy assessment matters because 'the consequences flowing from the assessment process' have potential to enhance students' reading, as well as broader literacy, development (Hempenstall, 2009, p. 19). Assessment needs to be intentional and, importantly, all types of assessment must work synergistically together, in order to ensure assessment meets the purpose of informing the planning of instructional action and making decisions about learner progress (Afflerbach, 2016).

Kennedy *et al*. (2012) distinguish between assessment *for* learning (or formative assessment) and assessment *of* learning (or summative assessment). Formative assessment gives students the opportunity to improve their learning, informing both the teacher and the student as to the appropriate next steps, whereas summative assessment is a process whereby students need to prove what they have learned by a certain deadline (DuFour & Reason 2016, p.135).

The Tasmanian Department of Education recognising that both types of assessment are important. Its *2019-2022 Literacy Framework and Plan for Action* emphasises the need for 'valid and reliable measures of impact and student growth' (System Priority 3), leading to three key actions:

1. Develop clear expectations and guidelines to build system-wide understanding of the measurement of learner growth in literacy.

2. Implement the tools and supports for effective measurement of learner growth in literacy.

3. Implement the tools and supports to measure the impact of system-wide literacy actions on our learners.[41]

The central role of formative assessment

The *2019–2022 Plan for Action* notes the value of summative data for 'highlighting system trends and gaps in performance' (Department of Education, Tasmania, 2019b, p. 13), but argues such data is less helpful for informing teaching and assessing the impact of teaching. The Plan goes on to state:

> timely and accurate feedback to learners has a positive effect, but it requires educators to provide learners with detailed information about where they are in their learning and what both learners and educators can do to improve (p.13)

Formative assessment provides such information and 'may arguably be considered the most important assessment practice in which educators engage' (Kaminski *et al*., 2008, p. 1181). In most schools in this study, formative assessment was considered central to practice and in some schools was 'the primary source of data' [HS-AP]. One high school's Operational Plan for Literacy explicitly stated:

> Much of the time, assessment is taken as the measurement of an end point of learning. It starts with the measurement of a student's ability or skill and ends with the reporting of a year or score. However, our position is that assessment is for teaching. It is the starting point for learning and the beginning of change. [HS OP-Lit]

Regarded as 'the cornerstone of assessment' [PS-CT] and a 'mark of good quality teaching' [PS-AST], formative data enabled educators to 'really engage with students' work and [think about] where to go next with it, rather than just leaving a grade on it' [HS-P].

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41 https://www.education.tas.gov.au/about-us/projects/literacy-framework-plan-action/

Formative assessment strategies

Formative assessment can draw on a wide variety of tools and strategies, such as class discussions, reading and writing conferences, journal writing, observations of classroom learning, checklists, anecdotal notes, video-records and work samples (Flint *et al.*, 2019; Ratcliff, 2001). Drawing on the work of Dylan Wiliam (2011; 2013), the Department of Education's guidance to teachers outlines several formative assessment strategies, including:

- clarifying, sharing, and understanding learning intentions and criteria for success;

- engineering effective classroom discussions, activities, and learning tasks that elicit evidence of learning;

- providing feedback that moves learning forward;

- activating learners as instructional resources for one another (peer assessment);

- activating learners as owners of their own learning (self-assessment) (Department of Education, Tasmania 2014, pp. 11–15).

Staff in this study engaged in a wide range of formative assessment strategies. This included formal assessment tools to monitor progress in specific aspects of literacy as well more informal strategies, such as exercising their professional judgement and gathering feedback through conversations with colleagues, students and parents/carers.

In both primary and secondary schools, the ACER's online Performance Achievement Testing (PAT) was the most widely used formal tool to assess reading 'across the board' [PS-CT]. PM benchmarking was commonly used to assess reading comprehension among students in early years and primary classes—and even 'up to year 7, year 8 in some cases' [CS-AST]. For at least one AST, PM benchmarking was 'part of [the] data-driven process at this school … done twice a year, as a checkpoint' [PS-AST].

Early years teachers frequently referred to running records (Clay, 2001), which they completed throughout the school year to gauge 'whether [students have] improved … in their reading' [PS-LT]. Running records can provide teachers with vital information to 'map out where your teaching practice needs to go to help each child improve' [PS-LT] and to ensure that students are always 'working at their level' [PS-AST].

Many teachers maintained portfolios of student work samples to assess improvement in students' writing because, as one teacher pointed out, 'the evidence is in their portfolio task … day to day, and I can just see it in their written work' [PS-CT]. Reviewing students' writing samples and tracking them over time through the teacher inquiry process (Hardy, 2016) enabled teachers to compare 'the work we were getting then, to the work we're getting now' [PS-P].

Finally, many participants spoke about the value of actively engaging students in dialogue to gauge the effectiveness of their literacy teaching, because 'the evidence is there in day-to-day conversations' [PS-CT]. Indeed, for one principal:

> One of the greatest formative assessment strategies you can ever have is a daily or a regular conversation between a teacher and student … All you need to do is start a conversation [HS-P].

Teachers in participating schools gathered a range of quantitative and qualitative data to gauge the effectiveness of teaching and student progress. However, in some schools, there was an observable tendency to privilege quantitative data over qualitative data. There was also evidence of resistance to that tendency, however, with several participants expressing caution about the proliferation of quantitative assessment tools and the perceived dominance of numerical measures and 'objective tests'—because 'tests are not the be-all-and-end-all … kids have bad days, as we all do' [HS-CT]. There was also a propensity among some participants to conflate numerical test results with summative assessment and unquantifiable information with formative assessment, a misperception that some school leaders were working to correct, as otwo participants explained:

> It's been a learning curve for our teachers who saw data [only] as summative data. So, they're now actually becoming a bit more excited about data and seeing [it] as more than just our NAPLAN and our PAT testing and things like that. [PS-P]

> I would hate to think we'd got to the time where it was just numbers, that count as evidence of success … There's all of the other data that we collect as teachers. Now, some of that's really hard to record and so it's hard to provide evidence for and that's the problem. It is hard to measure. [PS-LS]

In general, however, school leaders emphasised the point that they encouraged the collection of multiple types and levels of data to 'paint a really clear picture of student achievement' [PS-P] and that they valued teachers' 'own balanced judgements' [PS-P] in this process.

5.2.1 Data walls

The widespread use of 'data walls' in staff rooms in participating schools is evidence of the extent to which quantitative data collection and analysis have become embedded in 21st century school culture. As Bishop and Bishop (2017, p.i) note in Queensland, the 'importance of data and evidence in school improvement agendas is now driving change in educational practice'. In a bid to 'humanise' numerical test results, many schools are now 'putting faces on the data' (*Sharratt & Fullan*, 2012), so teachers really know each student's progress and recognise and better connect with the students who are behind the numbers. Documentation in approximately one quarter of the schools in the present research explicitly referred to the 'faces on the data' method, in order to 'identify intervention approaches and differentiation which will see selected students improve testing scores' [CS OP-Lit15] and to 'be at the forefront of planning sessions highlighting progress for all students' [PS AR16].

Enabling staff to see trends across the cohort of 'students as a whole' [PS-LT] and to gauge whether 'what we're doing is working well' [PS-LT], data walls were regarded as valuable visualisation tools. Participants reported that having a data wall had 'made a massive difference [because] you need to see the results to know what you're doing is working' [PS-CT]. One participant described the data wall as a way of ensuring that:

> nobody falls under the radar, not even that little child who sits quietly in the middle of a classroom … They're not underachieving, they're not overachieving, but you wouldn't notice that they had not moved maybe in two months [if they weren't on the map]. Well, obviously, that's not good enough … But if it's mapped on the data wall, it's in our face. We're looking at it constantly … So,

we don't just pay attention to the children who we know need extra support or the ones at the other end who need an extra push. It's actually mapping all of them. [PS-CT]

5.2.2 Observation of engagement

When pressed further about other ways by which they assessed whether their literacy teaching practice was 'working', many educators spoke at length about student engagement. Indeed, for most participants, student engagement was the very bedrock upon which the foundations of literacy were constructed (Flint *et al.*, 2019; Lennox, 2012). It was also a key to gauging their teaching effectiveness, with many teachers drawing the conclusion that 'if they're engaged in their learning, then I figure that must be working' [PS-CT]:

> I gauge effectiveness initially by the children's engagement … I need to continually reassess what's going on … I do make sure that I'm wandering around the room, checking in with kids [PS-CT].

The words 'enthusiasm', 'enjoyment', and 'confidence' recurred regularly in this context, engagement being ascertained by whether 'the kids are generally keen and interested to get into doing the stuff' [PS-CT]. One parent volunteer said simply:

> You can tell if it's working just by the enthusiasm and the confidence of the child, if they're prepared to have a go at it. [PS-PV]

However, as Fisher *et al.* (2016) point out, while engagement and enjoyment of literacy activities are necessary conditions for learning, they are not sufficient basis for assessing the effectiveness of teaching. On that point, one AST emphasised the importance of looking closely at 'engagement and learning and the links between them' [PS-AST]. An evocative example of this deeper engagement in learning was provided by another school leader:

> When you've got kids engaged—if you walk into the drama space—it's just beautiful. You've got kids who are writing scripts, you've got kids who are coaching each other about how to project their voice, or intonation, all that stuff is happening … So, you can tell how engaged in the learning they are when they're doing anything that's challenging or lifting them into a different level of thinking. [HS-P]

5.3 Forms of assessment

If the overarching purpose of assessment is to inform teaching and enhance student learning, then it needs to be accurate, thoughtful and supportive (Flint *et al.*, 2019) and, importantly, all types of assessment must work together 'in a highly coordinated effort' (Afflerbach, 2016, p.415). Indeed, if assessment data are not used to plan instructional action and to make decisions about student progress on a continuous basis, their use is limited.

5.3.1 Pre-assessment/diagnostic testing

Fisher *et al.* (2016) make the point that evaluating the impact of teaching starts with preassessment because, without a baseline, it is difficult to determine whether learning has occurred. Equipped with accurate preassessment data teachers can, in

principle, design instruction to close the gap between what students already know and can do and what they are expected to learn at any given developmental stage. Clark (2018), however, warns of the dangers of using a single baseline score as a measure of a child's literacy competence. Used to find out about students' prior knowledge before instruction, diagnostic assessments are a type of preassessment used to benchmark student learning in comparison with a cohort in terms of their learning strengths and areas of weakness (Flint *et al.*, 2019) and are intended to provide teachers with information to provide differentiated instruction to meet diverse student needs.

Flint and colleagues (2019) note that examples of diagnostic assessments used in schools in Australia include the South Australian Spelling Test (SAST), Tests of Reading Comprehension (TORCH), the Progressive Achievement Tests in Reading (PAT-R), and the Waddington Reading Test. Neilson (2009) also notes that the Sutherland Phonological Awareness Test-Revised (SPAT-R) is an example of a test that can be used diagnostically to identify various aspects of phonological awareness that have implications for literacy teaching at different points in children's schooling, usefully pointing to what needs to be measured and when.

All these tests are in use in Tasmanian schools. For example, many participants in this research professed to having 'a big reliance on PAT testing' [HS-AP], reflected in the prominence accorded to PAT results on most schools' data walls. However, some teachers expressed ambivalence about the reliability of PAT test results:

> To me, they're not showing it's working. If you look at these test results in isolation, they don't really show what the children are capable of. So, we did the PAT-R and vocab and I did the PAT spelling and grammar as well, and punctuation. They did it all on computer and some children got exceptional marks, yet I don't see evidence of that in their everyday work. [PS-CT]

Another school used the TORCH-3 ACER test of reading comprehension (developed by the Australian Council for Educational Research) to test students at the end of Years 6–10 to 'determine whether they actually have made any significant progress' [HS-TiC]. They then compared these data with PAT reading comprehension data. Again, some participants expressed uncertainty about the value of the test:

> I do wonder though whether the TORCH-3 test is the most useful gauge … I'm fairly sure that in a discussion that I've had with a literacy expert in the past she said that the TORCH-3 test really doesn't cater very well for your top-end students so you can't actually show much improvement in your year 10 and above because it doesn't really measure over and above. We've certainly seen students who get almost the top mark—125—in the TORCH-3 test at the end of their Year 9, get only 115 when they do it again in Year 10, for example. And it's often to do with the marking because there are some very specific rules about marking the TORCH-3 test that if they get more than three in a row wrong, you stop marking this whole section. [HS-TiC]

The ambivalence expressed by participants towards these assessment tools may, to some extent, reflect misinterpretation of their intended use. It may also highlight the importance of analysing the outcomes of different types of assessment together, a point made by Afflerbach (2016). This issue points to data interpretation and analysis as a focus for professional learning, which is discussed in Section 3.

5.3.2 Formative assessment

The main purpose of formative assessment is to support student learning by adapting teaching to meet student needs and therefore 'it may arguably be considered the most important assessment practice in which educators engage' (Kaminski *et al*., 2008, p.1181). Used to measure progress during a learning activity, formative assessment gives teachers information about students' progress as they participate in a literacy event, which they can use to make informed choices about how to adapt teaching and learning to meet students' needs.

Flint *et al*. (2019) offer a range of examples of formative assessments, including class discussions, reading and writing conferences, journal writing, and observations of classroom learning. Ratcliff (2001) adds checklists, anecdotal notes, video-records, and work samples as ways to authentically assess and accurately document children's literacy behaviour and skills. The Tasmanian Department of Education's (2014, pp.11–15) own guidance to teachers also clearly outlines a range of formative assessment strategies, including:

1. clarifying, sharing, and understanding learning intentions and criteria for success;

2. engineering effective classroom discussions, activities, and learning tasks that elicit evidence of learning;

3. providing feedback that moves learning forward;

4. activating learners as instructional resources for one another (peer assessment); and

5. activating learners as owners of their own learning (self-assessment).

This approach is supported in the scholarly literature, not least in Black and Wiliam's (1998, p.2) seminal work 'Inside the Black Box', in which three key questions are posed: 'Is there evidence that improving formative assessment raises standards? Is there evidence that there is room for improvement? Is there evidence about how to improve formative assessment?' Their review shows that the response to each question is 'yes', which leads them to propose four steps to effectively implement formative assessment practices: learn from development; disseminate findings; reduce obstacles to formative assessment; and value and engage in research.

On balance, participants in the present research spoke a lot more about formative assessment practices than they did about summative assessment. While some participants believed there was 'a bit too much testing' [PS-TA], formative assessment was generally considered central to practice—'the cornerstone of assessment' [PS-CT] enabling educators to 'really engage with students' work and [think about] where to go next with it, rather than just leaving a mark on it' [HS-P]. One primary school noted its emphasis on 'continual assessment throughout the school "as" and "for" learning to inform planning' [PS AR16].

Three types of formative assessment practices were evident in this study:

• relatively formal assessment tools to test for progress;

• more informal monitoring and observation; and

• seeking feedback from others.

Formal testing tools

Given its 'privileged position among the set of practices that comprise literacy' (Whitehead & Wilkinson, 2008, p.22), it is not surprising that the bulk of research relating to literacy assessment focuses on reading. Noting that large scale standardised reading assessment measures may be useful in a global and descriptive sense, Hempenstall (2009) argues they can provide little in the way of information that individual teachers can use to inform their instructional practice. Advocating for a level of assessment that requires 'drilling to the core' in order to assess 'those aspects of reading that have been identified by research as critical to reading development' Hempenstall (2009, p.17) proposes designing reading assessments based on the findings of empirical research on reading instruction. In particular, he notes the findings of the National Reading Panel (2000), which identified five key elements that were crucial for reading instruction: *phonemic awareness*, *phonics*, *fluency*, *vocabulary, and comprehension*.[42] He also suggested that 'designing assessment around these five areas offers the best chance of detecting where something goes wrong, rather than solely that something is wrong' (p.23).

Testing of reading figured prominently in most schools' assessment schedule, with the results for every student, of various tests, displayed on data walls in some schools. Across both primary and secondary schools, the most widely used tool for assessing reading was the online ACER Performance Achievement Testing (PAT). This test is intended to be administered twice in the first year of operation to provide a baseline and thereafter annually, in October. It focuses on 'assessing and monitoring student growth over time and is underpinned by an understanding that students of the same age and in the same year of school can be at quite different points in their learning and development' (Australian Council for Educational Research, 2018). Although PAT can be seen as a summative test, in many schools, teachers used this as part of formative assessment. Among those we worked with, participants shared a range of perspectives, including these:

> Our students do the PAT reading and PAT comprehension tests, and that is a kind of formative assessment that we can use to inform our teaching strategies for the students. That's something that's used across the board here. [PS-CT]

Similar to PAT, PM benchmarking was also widely used to assess the reading comprehension of early years and primary students, and even 'up to Year 7, Year 8 in some cases' [CS-AST]. Nelson describes this formative assessment digital resource [Centgage] as follows: 'designed for schools to confidently store comprehensive whole school literacy assessment data in one location, empowering teachers to track student progress and identify areas of development'.[43] For at least one AST:

> PM benchmarking is something that's really important as part of that data-driven process at this school. It is a model that's run differently in different schools and often depending on the staff, it's run differently. Before I was here, another teacher was responsible for doing all the PM benchmarking. The kids were withdrawn, benchmarked, and then that information was held by that teacher, and that was looked at outside of the classroom. Then, when

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42 It should be noted that Konza (2014) has since added the element of oral language to these five key areas (see Section 2.3)

43 https://cengage.com.au/primary/browse-series/pm/pm-benchmark

that teacher left, [other] teachers started taking more ownership of doing the benchmarking themselves. The PM benchmarking at this school is done twice a year and it's a checkpoint. For example, by the time they finish prep, we would want them to be up past level five benchmark. [PS-AST]

In the context of assessing reading, teachers also repeatedly referred to the running record, which one teacher described as 'the front door which opens up to all the other rooms' [PS-AP] (Clay, 2001). Developed originally as a way to assess a student's reading progress by systematically evaluating their oral reading and identifying error patterns, these ongoing assessments are intended to help teachers gauge students' strengths and weaknesses and inform their lesson planning. While various types of running records are in use, and the practice has been more frequent in some classrooms than in others, in general they have been conducted continuously throughout the year and have been regarded as 'a really good gauge of whether they've improved, or they haven't improved' [PS-LT].

> We do a running record. We hear them fluency read—we look at how fluent they are with that text before we ask them the comprehension questions. They need to basically get 96 per cent fluency before we test them on the comprehension of those texts. And then there's a series of questions that come with that particular text, basically, going through the higher order levelling to see their understanding of the text and what skills and strategies they don't have, to work out where our teaching point is for that particular child. [PS-AST]

Many teachers stressed the importance of doing the running records on an ongoing basis 'so you can map out where your teaching practice needs to go to help each child improve' [PS-LT] and to ensure that students were always 'working at their level' [PS-AST].

Some schools used the ACER Probe 2 structured interview assessment tool to gauge reading comprehension among upper primary and lower secondary school students. According to the Australian Council for Educational Research, Probe 2 is 'primarily designed to be a controlled in-depth interview to help teachers achieve a greater understanding of how [students aged eight to 15] engage with text and what specific teaching is required'.[44] It focuses on six questions related to comprehension, covering literal information, information reorganisation, inference, vocabulary, evaluation, and reaction. In this study, one AST described the tool in these terms:

> Probe 2 is similar to the running record. Basically, you've got your similar reading sample, and we look at errors and corrections. There are two parts of the assessment. There's the reading in terms of errors, but then there's a lot more detail that goes into the questioning. It extends … comprehension … so that we can ask what specifically do they need to work on? It's not just saying that they need to work on comprehension. Is it inferential? What sort of questioning do they need to be looking at? Is it author based or is it subject based that they struggle with? It just extends on the comprehension side of things. It's a really, really good gauge. [PS-AST]

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44 https://www.acer.org/probe2

Kohnen and colleagues (2009) have reviewed several current spelling tests assessing their relative strengths and weaknesses and 'fitness for purpose' and concluded that there are two tests that are excellent tools for assessing overall spelling ability and spelling progress in children (in a class context as well as in a remediation setting): the Single Word Spelling Test (Sacre & Masterson, 2000) and the British Spelling Test Series (Vincent & Crumpler, 1997). In our research, the SWST was among the most commonly used tests for assessing spelling and word knowledge in primary schools, followed by the Astronaut Invented Spelling Test, a phonological awareness program and assessment for specific intervention, and the Oxford Word List [OWL] (discussed in Section 2.3).

Ongoing informal monitoring

In addition to formal testing, many participants emphasised that 'watching and listening' [PS-CT] was integral to monitoring students' progress towards literacy. In particular, staff kept an eye out for whether and how students were using literacy strategies:

> You can see when they understand something. And the work that they deliver as well. You think, "Yes. They've understood that. They've got that". And if they don't, then we can go back over. We repeat it … So, for example, with our guided reading, I can see them starting to use the strategies that I teach them. [PS-CT]

> You can see that they're using the strategies that you've given them on their own. You don't need to prompt them. You can see that they're reading a paragraph, and they may stumble a few times, but they automatically go back and reread. And you just look at them and you're like, "do you see what you did there?" It's seeing them use what they've learned with you and running with it. That's my gauge of the progress. [PS-LT]

Participants stressed that this ongoing 'minute-by-minute checking in for understanding' [CS-P] was what many teachers do almost instinctively. Some teachers spoke about this practice as something that was 'just intuitive' [HS-CT] or explained 'it's the vibe in the classroom, and you listen' [PS-CT]. Such instinct or intuition is only possible when teachers have a deep knowledge both of the subject matter and of their own students:

> As a classroom teacher, you know when things are working or when they're not because you see the kids' work at the start and at the year end, you see if it's improved and you're watching it on an ongoing basis … I guess because you're constantly looking at the kids' work, you're constantly going, "Yeah, this is working. This is working." Or you go, after a couple weeks, "I'm still seeing the same mistakes," or "they still don't get this. I need to go back and revise it". There's a fair bit of that. [PS-AST]

Many teachers said that they could 'just see the progress happening' [PS-CT]. Although this kind of professional judgement needs to be underpinned by thorough expertise and understanding, participants frequently reflected that it may be seen as less valuable than test results because 'a lot of the evidence is up here, in my head … it's not something you can quantify all the time' [PS-LT]:

> I suppose testing is one measure of your success, but it's only one. That's the objective one, but I kind of like the subjective one too. I'm just so pleased

> when someone's gone and got that particular book off the shelf that I've recommended or has chosen to read the next short story in a series because we've read the first one together. That kind of thing. They're the kind of other measures that I have in my head about my success as a teacher and the effectiveness of the program. [PS-CT]

Such teacher judgement is based on a virtuous loop of providing teachers with information to get to know their students well, this knowledge in turn enabling teachers to notice more and develop their finely tuned intuition. Such noticing and responding is integral to good pedagogy (Roche, 2015) and consequently to good assessment practice.

To supplement their informal reflections, many teachers adopted the formative assessment practice of making 'unofficial' anecdotal notes about students' improvement:

> I do mark a lot of their writing even if it's not something official. I would take their book and have a bit of a look and see where they're at. Often, I will still put down a mark but it's not in their book, but in my own personal notebook. Just to see whether they have made any gains or where they're going. [HS-CT]

Maintaining portfolios of student work samples was key to assessing writing improvement in many schools, because 'the evidence is in their portfolio tasks, the evidence is there, day to day, and I can just see it in their written work' [PS-CT]. Comparing student writing samples from different points in time enabled teachers to track progress and assess growth. One school leader described how he modelled this practice:

> I actually personally track a student's writing as they go through the school: Not every student obviously, but a handful, and every now and again, I call those students back to show them their progress and we talk about it together. I can actually show them: "this is the writing you showed me at the start of the year, or this is the writing you showed me last year, or two years ago. This is your writing now. What's the difference?" And we sit down and look at it together, and we actually look at their growth. And that's been really valuable. [PS-P]

According to Afflerbach (2016, p.417), an important aspect of literacy assessment that is often overlooked is self-assessment. Consistent with the gradual release of responsibility model, assessment should help students to move towards independence, shifting them 'from an outward orientation, where there is dependence on the teacher for assessment feedback, to one that looks inward'. However, self-assessment in reading requires that students are taught specific mind-sets and strategies, and so teacher instruction needs to 'provide them with the tools' to do this work. Observing that this point is where many assessment programs fall short, Afflerbach (2016, p.417) notes that while they 'may do a decent, even outstanding job of evaluating student progress' it is most often assessment that is 'done *to* or *for* students, while exceptional assessment programs' help transform assessment so that it is done *with*, then *by* students'.

Reflecting the Department's own advice about the importance of developing students' self-assessment, many schools referred to the use of 'Bump it Up' walls to empower students to improve their own writing and to 'share samples of work, demonstrate progression of skills and set future learning goals' [PS OP17]. The Good Teaching Guide explains that:

A 'bump it up' wall is a dynamic display of annotated writing samples showing a continuum of gradual improvement in writing'. The teacher and students discuss the features of each text, highlighting how the focus element or feature improves or becomes more sophisticated across the continuum of writing samples. The observations are recorded as annotations on each writing sample. The series of texts demonstrate visually to the students the value of rereading their own texts with an eye to intentionally improving their message. The annotated writing samples highlight or map the 'where to next' for students. Making these elements of effective writing visible enables students to know what 'better' looks like. It empowers them to set personal goals for achievement (Department of Education, Tasmania & Derewianka 2016a, p.75).

Feedback from students, parents, and colleagues

A growing body of research documents a range of 'student voice' initiatives in assessment practice (Fielding, 2001; Mitra, 2008) with many of these studies showing that such initiatives have led to substantial improvements in teacher practice (Cushman, 2000; Daniels *et al.*, 2001; Kincheloe, 2007; Rudduck, 2007). Certainly, many participants spoke about the value of actively engaging students in dialogue to gauge the effectiveness of their literacy teaching, listening to the 'student voice', because 'the evidence is there in day-to-day conversations' [PS-CT].

Many schools regarded explicitly inviting student feedback on their learning as well as on teaching as a vital strategy for gaining valuable information. As one AST pointed out:

> We're doing a lot more work with student voice. So actually, talking to the students around, "Did you find that useful? What was helpful to you? Did you enjoy working that way?" And I think that's really important'. [PS-AST]

Many teachers regularly asked students to assess them, often using quick check-in strategies at various points in a lesson:

> So, after they've completed their own independent work, I nearly always ask them either to just indicate if it was helpful, or I get them to give me a mark out of five on their fingers for how much better they think they did than if I hadn't done it. I always ask the kids if it works. [HS-LS]

> As part of my formative feedback, I just do that quick thumbs-up, thumbs-down partway through a lesson, or at the end of the lesson. Do you think that helped with your formal writing? Up if yes. Sideways if not really or not worse, not better. Thumbs down if it really didn't help you. And that way you get a really quick gauge from the kids. If you see any thumbs down, it's like, "Okay, well, I'll go over to you and let's have some one-on-one time and make sure that, by the end of the lesson, you can stick your thumb up". [HS-TiC]

Some participants also spoke about their interaction with parents as another source of formative assessment data, particularly for students who may have difficulties with their literacy.

> I get a fair bit of feedback from parents. I interact a lot with parents because parents need to be aware that okay, this kid has a few learning issues. Can you support us at home? So yes, they can help in my assessment of whether what I'm doing is working. [PS-LT]

Seeking 'parental feedback about children being happy at school' [HS-P] was important to many teachers who valued 'the parent voice' as highly as 'the student voice' in assessing success (Daniel, 2015; Goodall & Montgomery, 2014).

> We do have a parent satisfaction survey so you can gauge by that. You can also tell by parents coming to see you personally about things that are going on in the classroom, or things that they perceive are going on or not going on. About whether their child's learning needs are being met, because their parents are very vocal and do have a good voice. [PS-AP]

Participants also spoke about the importance of feedback from their own peers and senior colleagues in the context of gauging effectiveness. Such engagement generally took the form of collegial conversations and feedback from other teachers, literacy specialists, and members of the leadership team. Participants in approximately one third of the schools spoke about 'learning walks' or 'walk-throughs' (Lemons & Helsing, 2009) in the context of providing feedback to teachers. This practice involved senior staff periodically walking into classrooms and talking with random samples of students to assess whether they could articulate their learning intentions and success criteria. In one school this practice was quite systematic, with senior staff doing 'walkthroughs' on a three-week cycle, and teachers being released for 90-minute sessions to undertake reflective conversations (PS AR16). That approach enabled school leaders to see at first hand 'what the students are doing and why they're doing it, and how they know when they're doing it right' [PS-P]:

> We have our leadership team also do walk-throughs of our classrooms checking that we're using our learning intentions and success criteria, and they're asking students about it … But it isn't stressful; it's not "I'm judging you". It's very relaxed … So, they would ask students, "Well, how do you know what you're learning?" They want to know that it's effective … and if it's not effective, I guess it's like, "Right, let's go back to the drawing board and go from there". [PS-CT]

In this research, the open classroom environment was most evident in schools where there was an embedded whole school approach to literacy (discussed in section 2.4). One participant described how the learning walk functioned as a formative assessment strategy in her school:

> So, for example, if we want to assess how kids are verbalising what strategy they're using for their spelling words … we might have a senior staff person and a teacher come in—we don't tell the kids that they're coming—and … they just pop in… And they'll sit down and say "What are you learning here? Tell me about the spelling strategy you're using". And they'll be recording whatever the kids say. They might target four or five kids in the class. One person might be asking the kids questions, while the other person takes notes about … incidental things. It might be where the posters are located in the room. Are any of the kids actually getting up and using the posters? … Little things like that. Then [the notes] are collated and we get copies. [PS-CT]

Part accountability practice and part assessment practice, this 'learning walks' strategy also connects to professional development, an issue taken up further in section 3.

5.3.3 Summative assessment

In contrast to formative assessments, summative assessments are used to review what a student has learned (Flint *et al.*, 2019), usually describing student learning, teacher ability, and school accountability at predetermined points in students' careers and in the academic year (Afflerbach, 2002). Summative assessments are generally linked to benchmarks and standards and provide information that can be used to group and compare students. Examples of summative assessments are standardised, high-stakes tests, end-of-unit tests, final exams, and reports.

While all participants recognised the importance of collecting summative data, the extent to which staff seemed to place emphasis on this method of assessment varied across schools. Indeed, for some participants, summative data were used as the ultimate gauge of literacy teaching effectiveness:

> Usually we gauge effectiveness just from student results from summative testing. I'll just say if something worked, then I'll assume all the practices I put in place worked, kind of thing, which I think is usually what most teachers would probably think, how they'd respond. If the students aren't getting the results, then what you did didn't work. [HS-CT]

For one school leader:

> the only thing that matters in this place is if you can measure student growth at the individual level, and if you can measure cohort growth using annual achievement testing, and then if you can use NAPLAN to test the trajectory of your school. The rest of it is irrelevant and anyone that tries to tell us otherwise is fooling themselves … We've got to measure outputs. Results matter; that's all that matters. [HS-P]

Participating schools used two primary sources of summative data about students' literacy development:

- in-school achievement assessment to evaluate progress against the Australian Curriculum Standards; and
- standardised testing (NAPLAN) to measure schools' overall results against similar schools.

Achievement testing

While some participants spoke about using PAT testing for diagnostic and formative assessment, in many schools PAT results were used as summative data to measure students' mastery of specific literacy skills and to assign years accordingly (Australian Council for Educational Research, 2018).

Despite some mixed feelings about summative testing, most participants agreed that 'the achievement standards are a really good guideline about what your students should be able to do by the end of the year' [PS-CT], and that learning intentions and success criteria need to be linked to the standards on assessment rubrics.

Policy in the Tasmanian Government Department of Education stipulates that principals consult with staff and establish transparent processes in support of regular feedback to students and parents that are appropriate, also, for system level reporting against the Australian Curriculum (Department of Education Tasmania,

2015a). A to E ratings are then to be recorded in the Student Assessment and Reporting Information System (SARIS), indicating the following levels of performance:

A   performing well above the standard expected;

B   performing above the standard expected;

C   performing at the standard expected;

D   approaching the standard expected; and

E   performing below the standard expected.

Several participants suggested that 'the A to E ratings on SARIS will be a measure of how we're doing' [PS-AP]:

> If we are marking kids on their ability to summarise, for example, there's A to E type stuff attached to that. I would be able to count up how many Cs I gave for summarising text at the start of the year, compared to now. We could measure it like that. [HS-LS]

However, as a way to gauge the effectiveness of literacy teaching, most agreed that the A to E scoring system was a blunt instrument not intended for the purpose of assessing incremental literacy growth, underscoring the importance of formative assessment:

> With the A to E system, I think a lot of us find that it's very broad, and it's quite difficult often to show kids their progress because they might have gone from here to here, but it's still a C. So, we've actually been recording their years as C1, C2, C3 … because lots of kids might have moved up one or two levels, if you like, even if it's within that same letter year. [HS-CT]

Moreover, there was considerable variation among participating schools as to how grading was used:

> We're not meant to be using the A to E [grading] here. We can use the "at, working towards, and advanced" system. But in my previous school, because we were so bottom of the ladder [laughter], our principal there was totally supportive [of us using A to E years] and said, "The kids want to know what they can do with rubrics". But it's a very different philosophy at this school. [PS-CT]

Documentation from many schools referred to the use of moderation in relation to A to E ratings together with other schools as well as within a school. Reflecting a desire in several schools to ensure that summative assessment results were reliable, one annual report noted its intention for 'Scrutiny of in-school moderation as the A-E ratings still do not consistently reflect NAPLAN scores' [HS AR16].

These comments reflect broader discussion about the best way to assess learning, including concerns about the unintended consequences of A to E testing. For example, Masters (2013, p.1) has argued that the ways in which students view themselves, their learning, and 'the nature of learning itself' are matters profoundly shaped by the assignment and assessment of tasks, and the formulation and communication of feedback. Parents and communities are also influenced by these practices. Having surveyed a range of approaches used to provide feedback, Masters (2013, p.4) makes the point that success at school:

usually is assessed not in terms of the progress that individuals make (for example, over the course of a school year), but by judging and grading performances against age/ year group expectations.

Masters also suggests that years now define success, and that reform is warranted, but will require both shifts in mindset and the development of 'credible and easily understood alternatives to current reporting practices' (p.4). Accordingly, reporting should provide both real time feedback on what students 'know, understand and can do' at any given time (p.4); and a sense of progress between two periods of time. These approaches decouple individual from comparative student performance and unsettle a range of implicit assumptions about the purpose of the latter kind of performance measure.

Standardised testing

Intended to increase accountability and ensure greater consistency in teaching and alignment with curriculum, standardised testing has both fervent advocates and staunch opponents. However, even those in favour of standardised testing agree that it has had unintended consequences in Australia and elsewhere (Jones *et al.*, 2003; Lobascher, 2011; Masters, 2010). Those opposed to standardised testing argue that such consequences include a narrowing of the curriculum ('teaching to the test'), leading to ineffective pedagogical practices that emphasise teaching non-contextualised, non-critical literacy skills, effectively ignoring the multimodality of literacy in the 21st century (Mills, 2008; Williams, 2009). There is substantial research evidencing these unintended consequences (see Anagnostopoulos, 2003; Au, 2007; Jones & Egley, 2004), but Lobascher (2011, p.18) suggests that the primary problem with the implementation of standardised tests such as NAPLAN is that teachers have not been sufficiently involved with the designing, implementing and evaluating of the tests and 'for this involvement to be productive, teachers will require professional development in designing and evaluating assessment'. Teacher learning and professional development are consdered in section 3.

As noted, excessive reliance on summative assessment, especially in the form of standardised high-stakes tests, has been the subject of much criticism among educators and education researchers. Pearson (2007, p.145) for example, argues passionately that:

> in our rush to accountability, we have created such a tight link between instruction and assessment that … if an assessment does not look just like the instruction that prepared kids to take it, we question its validity, and, even more pernicious, we operate in exactly the other direction by adjusting our instruction to mimic the high-stakes accountability assessments.

Propelled by high-stakes assessment in which 'teachers' and students' futures are on the line if a failing score is achieved … teachers 'scurry to find materials and activities that [they] think will help students do better on the test' (Pearson, 2007, p.147). Given the persistence of negative effects and the frequent misuse of standardised test results, many commentators working in Australia and internationally advocate for a shift in the status quo away from the current emphasis on high-stakes standardised tests that 'consume massive amounts of school resources' and 'offer precious little data that can help teachers understand students' individual differences and needs' (Afflerbach, 2016, p.419) towards more focus on formative assessment.

However, for some participants in the present research NAPLAN results were the litmus test of overall school performance: 'How do I know we've been successful? Well, we get pretty good NAPLAN results' [PS-CT]. Another teacher explained why NAPLAN was valuable:

> I think NAPLAN's a really good test because it's a national test. It shows you where your children are pegging compared to the rest of Australia when you're working in a little backwater, in a place like this, right? It gives parents that feedback and it gives us a chance to backward map what's happening. It just pegs a standard and I just think it's really good test. [CS-CT]

Indeed, several participating schools described themselves as 'fully NAPLAN driven' [PS-P], using their NAPLAN results as the ultimate gauge of the effectiveness of their literacy programs:

> We look at our NAPLAN results to ascertain whether certain programs are useful. For example, our literacy program is running beautifully, so that's become quite evident now in our NAPLAN results. The percentage of students at risk, in relation to the NAPLAN testing is showing that these programs are actually reducing it. So, this is a method of finding out whether we're being successful. [PS-AST]

It was also quite common for school documentation to refer to NAPLAN results to describe student achievement across the school and to set targets for improvement or identify a specific whole school literacy focus. For some individual teachers, NAPLAN results also functioned as a key indicator of their own effectiveness in literacy teaching:

> In the years that I've been here, our year 3s came from being on the bottom of the rung to moving up significantly and getting those results evident in their Year 5 over the two years as well. So, I know I did make a difference because the results were in the NAPLAN data. [PS-CT]

However, other participants were less enthusiastic about NAPLAN and a few were unequivocally 'anti-NAPLAN', because 'there are just too many variables around it' [HS-LS]:

> Well, I just see NAPLAN as a waste of time. We're testing kids and we're looking at those results and thinking "Oh, well, they're not here yet, so we need to do this". But I just think we need to support kids as much as we can in these early years so that they're confident and willing to have a go and they can have as much practice with things as they need, rather than forcing them to fit into a little box. [PS-CT]

> NAPLAN … may be objectively reliable, [but] you're still marking a multiple-choice test, so you don't actually know what the kid's brain process is to get to their answer. You know if they've got it right or wrong, but you don't know, you know, did they understand the text at all? Was there a vocab word that was just too tricky in the questions? [PS-CT]

While recognising NAPLAN as part of the educational landscape, many participants were ambivalent, 'in two frames of mind' [PS-CT], about the emphasis that it was accorded and willing to voice significant concerns about the limitations of standardised testing in general:

> Some of our planning or focus at the whole school level is tied a little more to NAPLAN than it perhaps should be, and that's just a reality of how things work, it seems. But for example, when I'm teaching my kids essay writing, I don't use the NAPLAN essay writing strategy or the NAPLAN rubric because that's too simple for what I want my kids writing. I want them to write better than that. So, a lot of my kids will actually write stuff that basically doesn't actually enable them to score things particularly well on that test, but I'm happier for it. I'd hate to see things get any more prescriptive and really slavishly focusing on improving NAPLAN results above anything else. [PS-AST]

Most participants, however, fell somewhere in the middle of the continuum of attitudes towards NAPLAN, some undoubtedly feeling caught between the discursive clashes described by Johnston and Costello (2005), and others simply accepting this standardised testing regime as 'just one part of the bigger picture' [PS-AST] of gauging effectiveness:

> NAPLAN is NAPLAN. We all have to do it. That's fine … I know it's awful but it's also important. What is in NAPLAN is the essentials of what we need to be teaching. [PS-CT]

One school leader raised the important point that much of the contention informing debates about NAPLAN stems from how the results are used (see also Ragusa & Bousfield, 2015).

> I suppose the frustration for me is that the whole testing agenda and NAPLAN was set up so schools that are similar could compare themselves to each other, hence the ICSEA value. And the idea that if one school's doing really well, you could then contact that school and say "Hey, what are you guys doing?" So, for me, it depends what lens you use when you look at NAPLAN data. And that's where there's a bit of contention … So, we purely use the data to evaluate value-add. And if we're seeing progress that's similar to similar schools or better, then we're satisfied because change takes time, improvement takes time, and we came from a bit of a deficit so we're having to catch up. [HS-AP]

Raising the issue of discrepancies between test results, one participant's comments underscore the point that 'data collection needs to be much broader than simply NAPLAN' [HS-P] to gauge the effectiveness of literacy teaching practices:

> Well, you have to ask yourself, why has the child achieved so well on NAPLAN, but so poorly on PAT? And vice versa. Because you'd expect them to be fairly similar, a similar trajectory, but sometimes there are discrepancies. So that allows you to ask the question, well how good is the data to start with? I guess it really just opens up conversations. Is that NAPLAN test or that PAT test a good representation of where they are, or do we need to look further? [PS-AP]

As noted by Johnston and Costello (2005, p.261), such discrepancies in test results can serve a useful purpose in that they 'can open up an important learning space by inviting discussions that lead to improvements in instruction and assessment itself'. In the present research, there was substantial evidence of such learning spaces being created in many schools.

While most participating schools were heavily engaged in a schedule of ongoing literacy assessment, there was also a healthy scepticism about what some participants perceived as an increasingly onerous testing regime and an ambivalence about the value of NAPLAN especially. Nonetheless, it was found that schools collected a range of quantitative and qualitative data generated from formative and summative assessment processes. Overall, however, quantitative data and summative testing occupied privileged positions in the assessment sphere. The consequent emphasis on outputs led participants in some schools to place less value on their processes of formative assessment. This finding is concerning because formative assessment arguably enables teachers to make the important daily decisions about how to adapt their teaching to meet students' learning needs. As Fisher *et al*. (2016, p.167) note, 'the risk to our students in failing to examine our impact is significant and damaging' and 'what teachers do matters when they monitor their impact and use that information to inform instruction and intervention'. In the next section, attention turns to how teachers learn to do what they do, and how literacy teaching practice is best developed over the course of a teacher's career.

Part 2: Teacher learning for teaching literacy

Section 6. Overview of initial teacher education

Having focused in Part 1 on what constitutes good literacy teaching *practice*, in Part 2 we turn attention to the sphere of *practice development*. On the understanding that practice is always evolving and that good teachers are continually learning, we examine evidence about good practice for capacity building through both initial teacher education and continuing professional learning and development (CPLD). This section provides an overview of research on initial teacher education.

Teacher education has been the subject of a substantial amount of research for several decades. Much of that research in recent years has focused on 'effectiveness' because evidence suggests that an important way to raise educational quality is to modify initial teacher education and recruitment, and to provide ongoing professional development for practising teachers (Musset, 2010, p.3). Teacher quality is thus increasingly linked to educational outcomes (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2005), making teacher education a highly scrutinised domain in Australia and internationally. Since the mid-2000s there have been no fewer than 40 reports on various aspects of teacher education in Australia and, in the last four decades, more than 100 reviews have been conducted (see, for example, Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2013; Caldwell & Sutton, 2010; Committee for the Review of Teaching and Teacher Education, 2003; House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Vocational Training, 2007; Productivity Commission, 2012; Ramsay, 2000). As Rowan and colleagues (2015, p.273) point out, many such reviews have positioned teacher education as a policy problem, concluding that it is 'flawed and in need of reform'.

Musset's (2010, p.4) review of initial teacher education and continuing professional learning and development in member countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) notes that in most systems, initial teacher education represents the entry point to the profession and 'plays a key role in determining both the quality and the quantity of teachers.' In terms of scope, the most common mix among the OECD countries includes courses in subject-matter (content knowledge), in teaching techniques (pedagogical knowledge), and in practical experience in schools.

The purpose of continuing professional learning and development is seen as being to 'update, develop and broaden the knowledge teachers acquire during their initial teacher education and/or provide them with new skills and professional understanding' (Musset, 2010, p.7; OECD, 2005). The scope of continuing professional learning and development activities is wide and includes dissemination conferences, external workshops, school-based activities (study groups, courses, seminars), and personal teacher development (individual activities outside of schools). However, repeated and ongoing calls to 'fix' teaching in Australia have most often trained the spotlight on initial teacher education, effectively obscuring the fact that teachers' practice development occurs in both preservice and in-service learning.

6.1 The field of initial teacher education research

Describing the landscape of initial teacher education research as 'sprawling and uneven', Cochran-Smith and colleagues (2015, p.109) note that the field is characterised by two relatively segregated research spaces that are:

> the result of profound differences in researchers' purposes and disciplines, the ways they position themselves as insiders or outsiders to the professional teacher education community, the larger agendas to which they align their work, and the extent of available resources and infrastructure that support their research.

The smaller space, they suggest, is the province primarily of social scientists studying the effects of policy on practice, while the larger space is occupied mainly by teacher education practitioners whose primary purpose is to generate knowledge about how preservice teachers learn to teach. Most of the studies in this second body of work are small-scale and single-site. Individually and in combination, they contribute valuable insights to the field by theorising complex aspects of teacher preparation practice. In addition, the studies reviewed by Cochran-Smith *et al.* emphasised the beliefs, attitudes, and understandings held by preservice teachers about their preparation. Relatively few studies investigated how preservice teacher preparation influenced their practice once in the classroom.

Interestingly, given the persistent links made in public discourse between teacher education and student outcomes, Cochran-Smith *et al.'s* (2015, p.117) review also found that relatively few studies made connections between teacher preparation and student learning, and most of the research 'simply ignore[s] school students' learning'. The absence of school students' perspectives in research about preservice teacher preparation is also noted by Lawson and colleagues (2015) in their systematic review of research into the teaching practicum. The formal evaluation of an employment-based initial teacher education pathway known as the Teach for Australia (TFA) program explicitly asked about the impact of TFA students (called 'Associates') on student performance in the schools. Despite including this question as one of only six, the report concluded that it 'is a difficult question and has only been possible to address in partial, anecdotal ways' (Weldon *et al.*, 2013, p.87).

Finally, in agreement with other reviews (see Cochran-Smith & Zeichner 2005; Sleeter 2001; Wilson *et al.*, 2001), Cochran-Smith *et al.* (2015, p.117) also argue that the field of initial teacher education is in need of 'large-scale research studies … that use national and other data bases, genuinely longitudinal studies, studies that use established instruments, and multi-site studies'.

6.2 Promising strategies for teacher education

Notwithstanding the 'lacunae [or gaps] in the literature' noted by Cochran-Smith *et al.* (2015, p.109), several reports have synthesised good practice and research on the broad characteristics of initial teacher education programs that enable graduate teachers to meet professional standards (Council for Accreditation of Educator Preparation, 2013; Feuer *et al.*, 2013; National Research Council, 2010). Darling-Hammond (2005 cited in Ingvarson *et al.*, 2014, p.x) provides a synthesis of

principles, concluding that well-designed teacher education programs have:

- *coherence*, based on a common, clear vision of good teaching grounded in an understanding of learning that permeates all coursework and clinical experiences;

- a *strong core curriculum*, taught in the context of practice, grounded in knowledge of child and adolescent development, learning in social and cultural contexts, curriculum, assessment, and subject-matter pedagogy;

- *extensive, connected clinical experiences* that are carefully developed to support the ideas and practices presented in simultaneous, closely interwoven course work;

- *well-defined standards of professional knowledge and practice* are used to guide and evaluate course work and clinical work;

- *explicit strategies* that help students (1) confront their own deep-seated beliefs and assumptions about learning and students and (2) learn about the experiences of people different from themselves;

- *an inquiry approach that connects theory and practice*, including regular use of case methods, analyses of teaching and learning, and teacher research applying learning to real problems of practice and developing teachers as reflective practitioners;

- *strong school-university partnerships* that develop common knowledge and shared beliefs among school-and university-based faculty, allowing candidates to learn to teach in professional communities modelling state-of-the-art practice for diverse learners and collegial learning for adults; and

- *assessment based on professional standards* that evaluates teaching through demonstration of critical skills and abilities using performance assessments and portfolios that support the development of 'adaptive expertise'.

The Phase 3 research in this study focused specifically on preservice teacher preparation for teaching literacy. For that reason, it is not possible to make a judgement about whether, in their entirety, the initial teacher education programs offered by the University of Tasmania reflect these good practice principles. However, the literacy-focused units within the BEd and the MTeach programs evidence the principles to the extent possible, within the current system.

In their work, Mayer *et al*. (2015) also note that research about teacher education is informed by multiple discourses and perspectives. There is, however, emerging consensus about its parameters and increasing agreement about the features of effective teacher education systems.

In her recent extensive review of teacher education in jurisdictions around the world, Darling-Hammond (2017, p.306) has extended the scope of teacher learning from undergraduate studies through to career-long professional development, and outlined the following promising strategies for improving teacher education:

- *[recruiting]* highly able candidates into high-quality programmes;

- *connecting theory and practice* through both the design of thoughtful coursework and the integration of high-quality clinical work in settings where good practice is supported;

- *using professional teaching standards* to focus attention on the learning and evaluation of critical knowledge, skills and dispositions;

- *[creating] teacher performance assessments*, based on professional standards, that connect student learning to classroom teaching;

- *establishing induction model*s **that support** beginning teachers through skilful mentoring; collaborative planning and reduced teaching loads that allow time for in-service seminars and careful building of a repertoire of practice;

- s*upporting thoughtful professional development* that routinely enables teachers to learn with and from one another; and

- *[ensuring] profession-wide capacity building*.

In the remainder of this report, these principles will be considered in relation to teacher development for literacy teaching in the context of the present study.

6.3 The spaces of teacher education

Rowan *et al*. (2015, p.276) noted that the 'crisis discourse' permeating much discussion about teacher education often fails to acknowledge that 'the key terms at the heart of the debate—teacher education, effectiveness, quality—can all be understood in multiple ways'. Proceeding from the understanding that 'there is no essential, eternal "truth" about what teacher education "is" but rather that there are multiple discourses and performances of teacher education', Rowan *et al*. (2015, p.281) propose:

> a trialectical way of understanding teacher education that involves the interplay of three spaces—the imagined space of representing teacher education through policy making, planning and 'mapping', the real space of teacher education as enactment of professional education, and the lived space of teaching practice that contains the elements of the previous two spaces but exceeds their determination.

Referring to these spaces of teacher education in ways indebted to Soja (1996), the authors describe *conceived*, *perceived*, and *lived space*, respectively. They suggest that this approach helps to move the debate beyond simplistic and often contested understandings of 'quality' and 'effectiveness' towards relational and nuanced understandings of teacher education. The approach is also useful for discussing the evidence relating to good practice in teacher education because it highlights how notions of preparedness and effectiveness are 'constructed, coded, appropriated and used through a range of teacher workplaces and across their professional practices' (Rowan *et al.*, 2015, p.294).

The remainder of Part 2 of this report deploys Soja's (1996) 'three spaces' as the organising framework. The aim is to avoid reducing analysis to an unhelpful dialectic that, in the case of teacher education, frequently pits 'the university' against 'the school' as vying for the status of pre-eminent context for teacher learning.

Section 7. 'Conceived space': the policy context

Rowan *et al*. (2015, p.281) describe the first space of teacher education in terms of Soja's (1996) 'conceived space' and as the 'imagined' domain of policy:

> a political 'ideal' about what teacher education can and should be. It is in the conceived, abstract, normative space of policy that essential knowledges, skills and attributes are articulated, negotiated and monitored; it is thus a space of performance review, management and surveillance.

Arguing that lack of knowledge about the characteristics of effective teacher education programs is not the problem, Ingvarson *et al.* (2014, p. xvi) suggest instead that 'the challenge is to identify policies and systems that need to be in place to ensure best practice becomes common practice in Australian teacher education programs.' Benchmarking Australia's own initial teacher education programs against world's 'best practice' programs for a report to the Australian federal government's Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group (TEMAG), they state that the evidence gathered for their review 'indicates that best practice in Australian teacher education is consistent with best practice internationally' (p.xvi). Articulating the features of initial teacher education programs that most effectively support preservice teachers' successful transition to effective practice, they also that 'high-achieving countries' are characterised by rigorous quality assurance arrangements and strong policies in three key areas:

1. recruitment of preservice teachers and entry standards;

2. accreditation of teacher education programs; and

3. transition and full entry to the profession.

These three points serve to structure this section on the conceived space of the policy context.

7.1 Recruitment of preservice teachers and entry standards

High-achieving countries have clear policies in place to assure the quality of entrants to teacher education (Ingvarson *et al*., 2014). These policies address:

• making teaching an attractive career option for high academic achievers;

• matching supply and demand; and

• setting high standards for admission to teacher education programs.

The benchmarking exercise undertaken by Ingvarson *et al*. (2014, p. xvi) confirmed findings made by the OECD (2011) that 'unlike high-achieving countries, Australia does not appear to have policies specifically directed at building the status of teaching and providing professional conditions of work'. Perhaps the closest attempt is the Teach for Australia (TFA) program, which recruits people with a degree and experience outside teaching and trains them to become teachers through an

employment-based approach.[45] An evaluation of the initial implementation found that stakeholders considered TFA 'to be attracting high quality applicants and to have set rigorous standards for applicants' academic achievement and personal attributes' (Weldon *et al.*, 2013, p.33). In Tasmania, the Action Plan by the Education Workforce Roundtable (a collaboration across key stakeholder agencies) includes two relevant actions.[46]

> Celebrate teaching with an innovative and connected public campaign to attract and retain quality educators and strengthen our teaching practices, schools and communities.

> Design recruitment processes that will attract and retain a top-quality education workforce ready to rise to the challenge of making a real difference to Tasmania's learning outcomes.

The Grattan Institute has recently released a report outlining a package of reforms designed to attract high achievers to teaching, thereby helping to lift the status of teaching as a profession in Australia.[47] The report's suggestions focus largely on financial incentives, including scholarships and higher salaries.

In relation to matching supply and demand, no independent body in Australia is tasked with the responsibility for 'gathering reliable data on a regular basis about the extent to which the number of entrants into teacher education programs matches the present demand for new teachers or into the future' (Ingvarson *et al.*, 2014, p.xiii). The Tasmanian Education Workforce Roundtable includes in its Action Plan:[48]

> Identify skills and specialisations we need for an outstanding education workforce ready for the future to deliver great student outcomes.

> Establish ways into teaching for people already in the workforce to increase our supply of teachers and subject matter experts in an agile workforce that meets Tasmania's education needs.

In relation to the third policy area, admission standards, Ingvarson *et al.* (2014, p.xiv) found that high achieving countries select applicants from the top 30 per cent of the age cohort, or higher, to ensure that all prospective teachers can manage the academic demands of high-quality initial teacher education programs. Academic entry requirements are discussed in more detail below.

7.1.1 Academic entry requirements

In recent years, there has been much debate about Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) scores for entry to teaching degrees and about the extent to which students' scores predict their academic performance at university (see for example, Diamond & O'Brien-Malone, 2018; Morgan & Apsland, 2018). However, the relationship between university performance and ATAR scores is not a simple one, and 'there are diverse views regarding selection of initial teacher education students' based on ATAR scores (Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group, 2014, p.xviii).

45 https://teachforaustralia.org/join-tfa/ldp/
46 https://documentcentre.education.tas.gov.au/Documents/Workforce%20Roundtable%20Action%20 Plan.pdf
47 https://grattan.edu.au/report/attracting-high-achievers-to-teaching/
48 https://documentcentre.education.tas.gov.au/Documents/Workforce%20Roundtable%20Action%20 Plan.pdf

Moreover, while 'rankings are clearly a very good predictor of performance in engineering, agriculture and science, the relationship is low for education' (Dobson & Skuja 2005, cited in Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group, 2014, p.16).

Reflecting current and wider debates about the value of ATAR,[49] among participants in the present research opinion was divided about whether it should be harder for prospective teachers to be accepted into an education degree program at the University of Tasmania.

A pragmatic concern for some University of Tasmania education staff was that relatively low ATAR scores for entry into initial teacher education courses could ensure that enough preservice teachers enrol, both to underwrite the viability of those courses and to meet the anticipated needs of the education workforce.50 Voicing a commonly expressed sense of ambivalence, one academic admitted to having:

> flip-flopped a lot on this one because there's a practical [challenge] of attracting sufficient [numbers of] teachers versus sending out students who we don't think have got a realistic chance of getting there'. [A7]

Other concerns about raising the ATAR entry requirements centred around potentially reducing the diversity of applicants. On this, Ingvarson *et al.* (2014, p.xiv) note:

> There is no evidence indicating whether or not setting higher academic standards would reduce the diversity of students entering teacher education programs in Australia. However, there is evidence that programs with high admissions criteria are more likely to attract more academically capable students.

Among participants in this research, those who advocated for higher entry level scores to education courses were unwavering in their view, as evident from the following comments:

> Well, entry-level scores have gone up recently this year ... but I'd still like to see them be as high as [the University of] Melbourne. [A4][51]

> I don't know if I'm allowed to say this, but I do think the entrance scores need to be higher. Sorry, but I do. If you're going to teach literacy in your first year out, you have to be literate. [EP1-PS]

While there was agreement that preservice teachers need to demonstrate that they meet the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers* on graduation, 'not everyone has a traditional entry into university and [we need] to make sure that we have different pathways for different people' [A5]:

> So, we're saying we'll maintain a high standard but not be inflexible about what that standard is or how that can be achieved. So not everyone will have the same ATAR score. [A5]

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49 See for example: https://theconversation.com/should-we-scrap-the-atar-what-are-the-alternative-options-experts-comment-55501)

50 http://www.utas.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0016/1055005/Insight-Two.pdf

51 The ATAR entry level for ITE at the University of Tasmania is currently set at 65. The recent Grattan Institute report about attracting top students to teaching as a career proposes lifting 'the average ATAR of teaching graduates from 74 to 85'. See https://theconversation.com/better-pay-and-more-challenge-heres-how-to-get-our-top-students-to-become-teachers-122271

University of Tasmania enrolment data suggest that around half of students enrol into the BEd on a basis other than the ATAR, such as mature age special entry, a VET award, or via prior enrolment in a different university course. The ATAR is not used for postgraduate degrees such as the MTeach.

Finally, apart from academic capabilities, prospective teachers also need to have certain personal characteristics and dispositions. At the University of Tasmania, the Non-Academic Capability Assessment Tool (NACAT) has been compulsory since January 2017 for all prospective teachers when they apply to enrol in an initial teacher education course. That tool focuses on personal traits and capabilities as well as respondents' understanding of what it means to become a (preservice) teacher. The NACAT has been highly valued by staff working in University of Tasmania initial teacher education courses as 'something they have to do before they can even come to a class' [A2]. Although one participant described the NACAT as 'a hurdle rather than a tool to exclude' [A1], another academic said it has had the effect of reducing the number of applicants who seemed ambivalent about teaching as a career choice and, as a result, 'the standard and quality … is a little bit better now'[A2].

7.1.2 Literacy levels among preservice teachers

Related to overall academic admission requirements for initial teacher education, and of central concern to the present report, the issue of prospective teachers' personal literacy levels has been the focus of substantial scrutiny in recent years (Stephenson, 2018). The Australian Government's response to calls to ensure that all teachers have adequate literacy levels has been to introduce the Literacy and Numeracy Test for Initial Teacher Education (LANTITE).

The LANTITE is a national test introduced as part of Standard 3.5 the *AITSL Accreditation Standards and Procedures*, which stipulates that 'Entrants to initial teacher education will possess levels of personal literacy and numeracy broadly equivalent to the top 30 percent of the population' (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership Limited, 2018, Standard 3.5). This expectation aligns with Ingvarson *et al.*'s (2014) finding regarding admission criteria used in high-achieving countries. Designed to assess 'those aspects of initial teacher education students' personal literacy and numeracy skills that can be measured through an online assessment tool', the LANTITE is intended to 'assist higher education providers, teacher employers and the general public to have increased confidence in the skills of graduating teachers'.[52]

At the University of Tasmania, the implementation of LANTITE is explained to preservice teachers as follows:

> From the first of July 2016, all Initial Teacher Education students beginning an Initial Teacher Education Course are required to complete the Literacy and Numeracy Test for Initial Teacher Education (LANTITE) (National) prior to undertaking their final Professional Experience placement. To prepare students for LANTITE, the School of Education made the Faculty-based Literacy and Numeracy Competency Tests compulsory for all students studying a Bachelor of Education (including Early Childhood, Primary, Health and Physical Education and Applied Learning) and Master of Teaching (including Primary and Secondary) course [ESH 112_UO].

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52 https://teacheredtest.acer.edu.au/

In 2018, the literacy pass percentage for the University of Tasmania students was 93.9 per cent (Reaburn, personal communication, 14 October 2019), which was above the national average of 90.4 per cent. This result compares to 97 per cent in the previous year, which was also above the national average of 92 per cent for that year. Some participants referred to limitations in the LANTITE test—for example, highlighting that 'you can't always assess people in one form. So, an assessment might not necessarily reflect their true ability' (A9). Nevertheless, there was general agreement that LANTITE usefully gauges a minimum standard of literacy among preservice teachers that educators seem to value. As one academic said:

> I don't think we should be producing teachers [who] aren't [working at] a certain level. If I was a parent, I wouldn't want my children being taught by somebody whose literacy and numeracy wasn't the level of LANTITE [A7].

Participants agreed that the LANTITE sets a modest standard, as it is pitched at Year 9 level and modelled on the Year 9 NAPLAN test.[53] One academic strongly expressed the view that 'if you can't get perfect on LANTITE—perfect—you shouldn't be a teacher' [A4].[54] Other concerns existed, not least in relation to the test's administration, one participant describing how 'we don't know if they've done it by themselves or if they've done it with someone watching and helping them' [A9].

Higher education providers have discretion about when they require preservice teachers to sit the LANTITE test, with some requiring prospective preservice teachers to do so as part of course entry requirements. At the University of Tasmania, LANTITE is implemented and must be passed prior to the final professional experience (PE) placement. In addition, the internal Literacy and Numeracy Competency Tests have been compulsory for all BEd and MTeach students at the University of Tasmania since 2015.

In the first semester of first year, all students in every education degree take the internal tests and must pass at a level of mastery—that is, with score of at least 80 per cent—before they are permitted to undertake their first professional experience placement. A staff member in the Faculty explained that 'the majority would pass first go. Now, when I say majority, [I mean about] 80 per cent' [A2]. Students who do not pass 'first go' can take the test again, until they pass. One academic noted that some colleagues do not think preservice teachers should be allowed to 'practise [doing the test] as much as they like' [A8]. In contrast, another participant argued strongly against that view, emphasising that the tests should regarded as low stakes:

> … they quite like practising, and we know if it's a real test, and they're worried about it, they're likely to not do so well … Some of my best [graduating] teachers have been students who found it hard … They can put themselves in the shoes of children who find it hard [A8].

This observation raises questions about how to understand the relationship between preservice teachers' levels of personal literacy at the start of an initial teacher education course and their capacities to become high-quality teachers after they have graduated. Engaged in thinking about such questions, Honan *et al*. (2013,

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53 https://theconversation.com/why-we-need-to-review-how-we-test-for-teacher-quality-95074

54 The LANTITE web page notes that 'it is not possible to provide the number of questions or a percentage figure needed to meet the standard' https://teacheredtest.acer.edu.au/faq/after-the-test.

p.48) suggest that many studies on literacy capabilities among preservice primary teachers are based on a 'discourse of deficit' constituting both preservice and beginning teachers as lacking competencies fundamental to the work of teaching. In response, Honan and her colleagues caution against a too-ready acceptance of such diagnoses and emphasise both the need to have expansive ideas about literacy and the importance of embracing multiliteracies. They also refer to work by Louden (2008), which established that there is little in the way of empirical data effectively separating out the diverse factors influencing literacy development in initial teacher education programs, despite the production of over 100 reviews over a 40-year period.

7.1.3 Perceptions of literacy levels

Overall, preservice teachers at the University of Tasmania appear to be performing relatively well in the literacy stakes, on both the external and internal tests. Participants' perceptions nevertheless varied, with some expressing concerns about the personal literacy skills of some prospective and new teachers. As an academic usefully pointed out: 'the ones who are bad tend to stick out [so] you tend to focus on those, which might be a bit unfair' [A3]. Moreover, the timing of data collection in 2017 and 2018 means participants may have reflected on student teachers or new graduates who had moved into schools prior to the compulsory introduction of the internal test (in 2015) and LANTITE (in 2016).

Some participants expressed the view that most students who performed poorly probably left before they got to the final year. One participant attributed the failure rate among first year preservice teachers as largely due to poor literacy skills:

> There's quite a large percentage of students who don't pass in first year, and it's basically because their literacy skills are so poor. So, by the time they get to me [in third or fourth year], the students who struggled the most are the ones who have dropped out. [A6]

Another academic confirmed that 'there are more people struggling with their literacy skills in the first year than there are in the final year', noting that 'what we see at the end of the course is dramatically different [from] what we see at the start' [A5].

Even with such attrition, some participants continued to have concerns. Parallel examples given by an academic in the Phase 3 research and an experienced practitioner in the Phase 2 research related to written reports for parents, where, for some preservice teachers, 'I wouldn't be confident that they could recognise where they were spelling things incorrectly' [A3] and for some graduates the reports are 'grammatically at a very low level' [EP37_PS].

Another academic in the Faculty of Education noted that preservice teacher literacy levels at the University of Tasmania 'have been a concern for us for a number of years' [A9], and observed that students themselves also 'were quite concerned about their own skills, in terms of whether they're feeling equipped to help [school] students who are struggling' [A9]. Some academic staff noted that the personal literacy skills of the postgraduate MTeach students were 'higher than the Bachelor of Education students' [A9]. Other participants were, however, less inclined to make distinctions between the overall literacy levels exhibited by BEd and MTeach preservice teachers.

Several participants noted the challenges faced in addressing low levels of personal literacy among some preservice teachers once they are enrolled in initial teacher education courses. Putting it bluntly, one academic argued that 'Our job here is helping you to become a teacher … if you don't have literacy skills, thank you, you should not be in this program' [A4]. There was widespread support for the administration of an entry level literacy test *before enrolment in the degrees*.

7.2 Accreditation of teacher education institutions

In educational terms, high-achieving OECD countries are characterised by regulated teacher education systems and rigorous procedures for the accreditation of teacher education programs (Ingvarson *et al.*, 2014). In Australia, there have been significant moves in that direction in recent years, and since 2015 it has been a requirement of initial teacher education accreditation that providers show evidence that they have prepared preservice teachers to meet the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers*.

Noting that Australia has an accreditation system in place, and assuming that 'if a program has gained accreditation … it meets these standards', Ingvarson *et al.* (2014, p.xii) make the point that a weakness of this approach to benchmarking is that it relies on 'the *content* of the Australian Program Standards, rather than *evidence* of implementation and outcomes.' While there is scope to improve in terms of reliable implementation of the Standards, they concede that 'the fundamental dimensions of effective teacher education programs are reflected in the Australian Program Standards' and that 'that the seven Australian Program Standards (APS) and the best practice principles for the design, delivery and assessment of teacher education programs have much in common' (Ingvarson *et al.*, 2014, p.xii).

As an accredited initial teacher education provider,[55] the University of Tasmania is fully compliant with the *Accreditation of initial teacher education programs in Australia – Standards and Procedures* (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2018), which stipulate that providers base their program development, design, and delivery on 'a coherent and sequenced delivery of program content' which includes 'professional experience that facilitates achievement of the Graduate Teacher Standards' 56 (Standard 2.1). The Graduate Teacher Standards consist of seven elements in three clusters:

Professional knowledge:

1. Know students and how they learn

2. Know the content and how to teach it

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55 Accreditation Stage 1 applies to new initial teacher education programs entering the accreditation system for the first time and focuses on a provider's plan to demonstrate impact. Programs must achieve accreditation Stage 2 within five years of having achieved Stage 1. The focus in Stage 2 is on the provider's interpretation of the evidence they have collected about impact. At the University of Tasmania, three programs have achieved Stage 2 accreditation: BEd (HPE); MTeach (Primary); MTeach (Secondary). The remaining programs (BEd EC; BEd Primary) will go through the process for Stage 2 accreditation in 2020.

56 https://www.aitsl.edu.au/teach/standards

Professional practice:

3. Plan for and implement effective teaching and learning

4. Create and maintain supportive and safe learning environments

5. Assess, provide feedback and report on student learning

Professional engagement:

6. Engage in professional learning

7. Engage professionally with colleagues, parents/carers and the community.

Explaining the impact of the rigorous AITSL accreditation requirements, one academic emphasised the point that:

> There are rules and regs around the content that we have to have in our units that has been approved by the [Teachers] Registration Board that we have to show every student has done … Every single thing, every single standard—and there are 37 of them—has to be taught, practised and assessed. [A2]

Program Standard 5 articulates specific requirements for accreditation pertaining to the relationship between professional experience and coursework, including the minimum hours required for professional experience placements. The University of Tasmania meets the standards, thereby fulfilling its requirements as follows:

• Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood) involves 90 days of professional experience over four placements: 10 days in Year 1 (child care setting), 15 days in Year 2 (child care setting), 30 days in Year 3 (Kinder), and 35 days in Year 4 (Prep–Year 2).

• Bachelor of Education (Primary) and Bachelor of Education (Secondary – Science & Mathematics, Health & Physical Education) involve 80 days of professional experience over three placements: 20 days in Year 2, 30 days in Year 3, and 30 days in Year 4.

• Master of Teaching involves 60 days of professional experience over four placements: 5 days in semester 1 Year 1, 10 days in semester 2 Year 1, 20 days in semester 1 Year 2, and 25 days in Semester 2 Year 2.

7.3 Transition and entry to the teaching profession

The third key policy area noted by Ingvarson *et al.* (2014) in their report to TEMAG relates to preservice teachers' transition from initial teacher education into the teaching profession. In high-achieving countries, preservice teachers typically undergo rigorous assessments of readiness for full entry to the profession, coupled with a period of mentored induction. These two points are examined below.

7.3.1 Assessment of preservice teachers' readiness to teach literacy

Ensuring that 'underperforming students [do not] become underperforming teachers' [EP39_PS] is a core principle for assuring teacher quality. However, even with the increasing sophistication of assessment, it remains an imperfect art and science.

VIGNETTE 8 – Assessment of preservice teacher capabilities

The preparation of preservice teachers for their professional work has long been the subject of substantial debate and scrutiny. As the entry point to the profession, initial teacher education is widely regarded as key to determining 'teacher quality' and has been persistently linked to educational outcomes (Musset, 2010). Research suggest, however, that the influence of classroom factors—such as teacher effects—may be overstated in debates about student outcomes (see Grasby *et al.*, 2019) and that few studies have established clear connections between initial teacher preparation and school student learning (Cochran-Smith *et al.*, 2015).[59]

Overall—and despite discernible gaps in research on initial teacher education—literature points to the value of attending to entry requirements for initial teacher education; to personal literacy levels among preservice teachers; and to assessment of their teaching ability on graduation (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005; Cochran-Smith *et al.*, 2015; OECD, 2005; Sleeter, 2001; Wilson *et al.*, 2001).

Recruitment and entry requirements

Extensive international studies, comparing countries around the world, point to the importance of recruiting 'highly able candidates into high-quality programmes' (Darling-Hammond, 2017, p.306), with so-called 'high-achieving countries' tending to recruit preservice teachers from the top 30 per cent of achievement in an age cohort (Ingvarson *et al.*, 2014).

In Australia, there is substantial debate about the extent to which students' Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) score predicts their academic performance at university (Diamond & O'Brien-Malone, 2018; Morgan & Apsland, 2018).

However, the links between university performance and ATAR scores are complex and the relationship seems to vary across disciplines—while 'rankings are clearly a very good predictor of performance in engineering, agriculture and science, the relationship is low for education' (Dobson & Skuja, 2005, cited in Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group, 2014, p.16).

The minimum ATAR entry score for initial teacher education at the University of Tasmania is currently set at 65. Some academics considered this too low. Others, however, argued that:

> if you set the bar too high, you're denying access to some who would otherwise be really enthusiastic teachers [and] who might grow into the job over four years (A7).

University of Tasmania enrolment data show that around half of students enrol in initial teacher education courses on a basis other than the ATAR, such as mature age special entry, a VET award, or via prior enrolment in a different university course. This is consistent with a national trend, and not limited to only some courses or universities.[60]

In addition to academic capabilities, initial teacher education applicants need to show they have the requisite personal characteristics and dispositions for teaching. At the University of Tasmania, the Non-Academic Capability Assessment Tool (NACAT) has been compulsory since January 2017 for all prospective teachers and is 'something they have to do before they can even come to a class' [A2].

Literacy levels among preservice teachers

The Australian Government has responded to calls to ensure all teachers have adequate literacy

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59 Also see: https://theconversation.com/dont-blame-the-teacher-student-results-are-mostly-out-of-their-hands-124177
60 https://www.lifehacker.com.au/2019/10/how-to-get-into-uni-with-a-low-atar-score/

levels by introducing the Literacy and Numeracy Test for Initial Teacher Education (LANTITE). At the University of Tasmania, all preservice teachers must pass LANTITE before their final professional experience placement. Prior to that point, they must pass an internal, faculty-based, Literacy and Numeracy Competency Test with a score of at least 80 per cent, before they may undertake their first professional experience placement. A staff member in the Faculty explained that 'the majority—approximately 80 per cent—would pass first go' [A2].

In 2018, 94 per cent of University of Tasmania students passed the LANTITE (Reaburn, 2019), a result above the national average of 90 per cent. Most participants agreed that the LANTITE represents a minimum standard, one academic arguing 'if you can't get perfect on LANTITE—perfect—you shouldn't be a teacher' [A4].[61]

Preservice teachers' readiness to teach literacy

In the words of an experienced practitioner in this research, it is incumbent on those providing initial teacher education to ensure 'underperforming students [do not] become underperforming teachers' [EP39_PS]. The Graduate Teacher Performance Assessment (GTPA)—developed by a consortium of 17 universities including University of Tasmania—is a key response to the challenges involved in assessing whether students in initial teacher education courses are ready to become teachers.

From 2019, all preservice teachers in Australia must pass the GTPA before they can be registered

to teach in their state or territory. Intended as a culminating assessment, the GTPA demands significant demonstration by preservice teachers that they are personally and professionally ready to teach. According to University of Tasmania academics involved in crafting the tool and assessing the first round of submissions:

> So far, the GTPA submissions are confirming what we already knew: graduates from the University of Tasmania are ready to impact student learning and make a difference in the lives of young people.[62]

Most participating academic staff also were positive about the GTPA, sensing it was 'heading in the right direction' [A1] of authentic preservice teacher assessment; providing 'an extra layer of rigour' [A5]; and was bringing preservice teacher assessment in Australia into line with valid assessments that incorporate 'real world' tasks (see Darling-Hammond & Snyder, 2000).

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61 The LANTITE web page notes that 'it is not possible to provide the number of questions or a percentage figure needed to meet the standard' https://teacheredtest.acer.edu.au/faq/after-the-test.

62 http://www.utas.edu.au/latest-news/utas-homepage-news/new-tool-for-assessing-new-teachers

At the University of Tasmania, preservice teachers are assessed in various ways, both in relation to general teaching capabilities and in relation specifically to literacy. They undergo two checks in relation to their personal literacy: an internal Faculty-based literacy competency test (administered early in their degree) as well as the external LANTITE, which must be passed prior to the final professional experience. In this way, LANTITE functions as a gatekeeper to graduation as a teacher. As one academic put it:

> They're not going to get a teaching degree from us [if they don't pass LANTITE]. They will end up exiting with another degree, but it won't allow them to teach. [A2]

In addition to levels of personal literacy that put them in the top 30 per cent of the Australian population (as measured by LANTITE), in order to become proficient teachers, preservice teachers also need teaching ability grounded in sound pedagogical content knowledge and skills. As part of a national agenda to improve teacher quality, the Graduate Teacher Performance Assessment (GTPA) was developed by a consortium of 17 universities, including the University of Tasmania.

As of 2019, all preservice teachers in Australia must pass the GTPA before they can be registered to teach in their state or territory. In this way, the GTPA may be regarded as a key response to the challenges of preservice teacher assessment described above. Intended as a culminating assessment, the GTPA demands significant demonstration by preservice teachers that they are personally and professionally ready to teach. Submissions require them to show that:

- they can use student data appropriately;

- employ a range of challenging and engaging teaching and learning strategies;

- use a variety of assessment practices exercising professional judgement;

- reflect on their teaching; and

- appraise its impact on students.

Importantly, the GTPA is intended to enable 'a closer connection between the theory and practice of the teaching profession'.[57]

Most of the academics participating in this research were generally positive about the GTPA, perceiving it as a step in the direction of more authentic preservice teacher assessment, providing 'an extra layer of rigour' (A5) and bringing preservice teacher assessment in Australia into line with what is regarded as more valid assessment that incorporates 'real world' tasks (see Darling-Hammond & Snyder, 2000). Noting that 'it's tough to provide an assessment that is clear enough to be helpful, but generic enough to be applicable to a range of contexts' [A5], one academic offered the following opinion:

> I think the GTPA is going to be really helpful. I think it's going to prompt preservice teachers to really be rigorous around the kind of evidence [they provide] and the way that they assess it. That'll be the big thing … there's more requirement to document and evidence diagnostic, formative, and summative assessment, to have the artefacts and evidence to show the decisions they've made and also to document and think about impact. [A5]

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57 http://www.utas.edu.au/latest-news/utas-homepage-news/new-tool-for-assessing-new-teachers

Despite the anticipated advantages of the GTPA, its limitations were also noted, tempering optimism with caution. Observing that 'there are a lot of critics of competency-based assessment', one academic emphasised the point that 'just because you can [show you can] do something doesn't mean that that's your day to day behaviour going forward' [A1]. Bringing the conversation back to assessment for teaching literacy specifically, and voicing a perennial quandary, another academic had this to say:

> The GTPA is supposed to show that they're classroom-ready … So theoretically, if they can demonstrate the GTPA, then they've demonstrated a certain level of ability to teach literacy and numeracy. [But] how we make clear the links between [their] own personal literacy and [their] ability to teach it … I'm not sure how we do it … it's not an easy question. [A7]

Notwithstanding a few misgivings, participants thought overall that the GTPA was a welcome move towards more authentic and rigorous assessment of preservice teachers' teaching ability. Whether it is seen as 'an exit assessment for students exiting a course such as ours' or 'an entry assessment for students entering the profession' [A1], the GTPA portfolio was generally perceived to be 'heading in the right direction. It's just going to take time to bed in, in the way that it needs to' [A1].

7.3.2 Mentored induction

Ingvarson *et al*. (2014, p.xv) note that while more attention has been paid in recent years to mentored induction processes, 'there is a shortage of reliable data about the current quality of transition and induction in Australian schools.' Given the continuing high rates of attrition of beginning teachers (Johnson *et al*., 2014; Weldon, 2018) and comparing induction and registration practices in high-achieving countries, Ingvarson *et al*. (2014, p.xv) conclude that current arrangements in Australia are 'less than optimal.' This national situation is reflected in Tasmania, with many participants acknowledging that there is currently inadequate support for novice teachers. The Tasmanian Education Workforce Roundtable has noted as one of its first two priorities:

> Tasmanian education leaders will co-design an early career teaching training package for early career teachers, from their entry into initial teacher education courses through to the end of their third year of teaching. Multiple education partners will be involved, and the program will be supported by a strong mentor program, professional learning and individualised support.[58]

In this context, it is useful to note that in Australia teaching is one of the few professions in which graduates are expected to assume full responsibility upon entry to the profession. A national policy shift in the last two decades has put increased pressure on beginning teachers to be 'classroom ready' from the first day on the job. In *Action Now: Classroom Ready Teachers*, the Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group (2014, p.29) states that:

> Beginning teachers have responsibility for student learning from their first day in the classroom. This means they must be classroom ready upon entry to the profession.

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58 https://documentcentre.education.tas.gov.au/Documents/Education-Workforce-Roundtable-Declaration.pdf#search=Education%20Workforce%20Roundtable%20Declaration

While on the one hand, the TEMAG report acknowledges the importance of effective induction for beginning teachers (which occurs in the school context), on the other it emphasises the responsibilities that rest with those providing initial teacher education (that is, university-based providers). As Mockler's (2017) thorough analysis shows, this position by the ministerial group is in stark contrast to an earlier, equally high profile, report: *A Class Act: Inquiry into the Status of the Teaching Profession* (Commonwealth of Australia, 1998, p.204). That report states that:

> It is generally acknowledged by all those involved—university educators, practising teachers, education departments and beginning teachers themselves—that no preservice training can fully prepare new teachers to perform at their full capacity from their first day at work. This is not a reflection on the quality of new teachers nor on the standard of preservice training. It is a recognition of the complexity of teaching and of the large number of variables (such as type of school, socio-economic and cultural background of students, school 'ethos', extent of support from colleagues and principal etc) affecting a teacher's performance. This being the case, induction programs have a vital role in ensuring a smooth transition for beginning teachers from university trainees to competent practitioners.

Participants' experiences of mentored induction are discussed in Section 9.

Section 8. 'Perceived space': the university context

In Rowan *et al.*'s (2015, p.283) analysis, the second space of teacher education aligns with Soja's (1996) 'perceived space', referring to teacher education:

> as it is understood within the domains of teacher education itself, particularly by those who design and deliver teacher preparation programs. As such, this is the space where teacher educators (not policy makers, education ministers, educational bureaucrats, accreditation or registration bodies, public commentators or even teachers necessarily) make judgments about the knowledge, skills and dispositions required of future teachers.

8.1 University-based coursework for teaching literacy

In terms of coursework content to prepare preservice teachers to teach literacy, the research on which to base pronouncements of 'good practice' is suggestive rather than conclusive, and reflective of silences and absences rather than clear evidence of agreement.

Maloch and Davila (2019) note that, in the last two decades, there has been a dramatic rise in research about preservice teacher education in relation specifically to literacy—a trend reflected in scholarship around the world. However, despite this burgeoning of research interest, there remains a lack of clarity about what constitutes good practice in this sphere. Bomer and Maloch (2019, p.263) concur, observing that the nature of the knowledge produced by most of this research 'does not "prove" an approach or a curriculum, though at times there are signals toward things that are helpful', including tutoring. Rather, much of the research 'is designed to open up the complexity of an issue, to produce more nuanced understandings'. As a result, reviews of the literature about teacher preparation for teaching literacy do not produce answers to questions about:

> how many courses are needed in literacy, or how much fieldwork should be done in what kind of context, or how much early literacy should be emphasized versus intermediate, or what materials should be purchased, or even what kind of faculty development has actually helped teacher educators become more effective at appropriately shaping students' understandings and dispositions. (Bomer & Maloch, 2019, p.263).

Consequently, they conclude that, with respect to good practice in teacher preparation for teaching literacy, 'there is no final word on what, how much, what sequence' (p.263).

In a comprehensive review of the literature about what preservice teachers learn about the component processes of reading Hikida *et al*. (2019), for example, found 38 articles published from 2000 to 2018 and listed in the CITE-ITEL database[63] that reported findings related to reading processes and initial teacher preparation. Their analysis revealed several insights:

- preservice teachers believe that knowledge of reading processes is important;

- measures identify that there are 'gaps' in preservice teachers' foundational knowledge;

- when taught about reading processes and methods for meeting the needs of students, including those with disabilities, preservice teachers make knowledge gains, although questions remain about the quality and quantity of the coursework and instruction required to support their growth; and

- some evidence supports the use of tutorial and classroom-based practice to facilitate that learning.

Notably, the majority of the studies reviewed by Hikida *et al*. (2019, p.190) 'operationalized reading in ways that heavily favour word-recognition processes', rendering 'the complexity of reading, as a process that requires readers to integrate literacy knowledge, skills, and practices to make sense of text for a variety of purposes and contexts' virtually invisible in the work they reviewed. In turn, Castles and her colleagues (2018, p.6) note that this word-level focus highlights one of the 'major limitations in the presentations of the scientific evidence' around the teaching and learning of reading—namely that 'there has not been a full presentation of evidence in a public forum about reading instruction that goes *beyond* the use of phonics'. Indeed, 'with only a handful of studies taking an integrated perspective when defining reading', Hikida *et al*. (2019, p.190) conclude that 'much remains to be addressed that would consider how to best prepare reading teachers in ways that encompass the complexity of what it means to read'. What also emerges clearly from that review, however, is that preservice teachers benefit from instruction about reading processes and, importantly, opportunities to practise teaching in both tutorial and classroom contexts.

Noting that the content of critiques from outside teacher education is by now familiar and dominated by narratives about universities 'failing to instruct new teachers in the true science of reading', Bomer and Maloch (2019, p.262) suggest that good practice in this space includes initial teacher education providers 'managing external reputation'. This requirement to manage involves correcting misinformation about the necessary scope and organisation of initial teacher education courses and the learning of students in university classrooms. The important point lost in much of the popular debate, Bomer and Maloch (2019, p.263) argue, is that issues related to teacher preparation for literacy teaching are complex and not yet settled by research, among them 'whether it makes a difference for preservice teachers to learn letter–sound relationships first in relationship to teaching reading or teaching writing'. Noting that while:

> it is clear that alphabetic reading is processed (for hearing and sighted readers) in a relationship between visual signs and the sound of speech, the learning processes are not delimited in research, and preservice teachers' learning of phonics as content knowledge and the related pedagogical content knowledge are not even researched, much less finalized (Bomer & Maloch, 2019, p.263).

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63 https://cite.edb.utexas.edu

Similarly, a review of studies about how preservice teachers learn to teach writing by Bomer *et al.* (2019) found that evidence about good practice was largely inconclusive. With a few exceptions (Benko, 2016; Grossman *et al.*, 2000; McQuitty, 2012; Morgan *et al.*, 2011; Smagorinsky *et al.*, 2011), most studies in this corpus were focused on single courses or course experiences and, significantly, very few studies considered how preservice teachers might be prepared to enact critical writing or sustaining writing instruction for culturally and linguistically diverse students. Recent studies (see Bacon, 2017; Sherry, 2017) 'may help us begin conversations about writing as sociopolitical by encouraging [preservice teachers] to consider how power and privilege play into' their students' language and teachers' responses to that language (Bomer *et al.*, 2019, p.208). A few other studies focused on helping preservice teachers to recognize and value students' writing, languages, and experiences (see Athanases *et al.*, 2013; Roser *et al.*, 2014; Simon, 2013). Bomer *et al.* (2019, p.208) conclude that as the field continues to grow, they hope that there may be 'more studies that look across contexts—for example, university and field placement teaching, university preparation and early career—and provide more insight into the ways that ideas are taken from coursework into preservice teachers' future teaching'.

Despite this lack of clarity or consensus about what constitutes good practice in preparing teachers to teach literacy, initial teacher education providers are, nevertheless, expected to produce competent new teachers who emerge 'classroom-ready' (Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group, 2014) on the completion of a teaching degree.

As an accredited initial teacher education provider, the University of Tasmania offers two main pathways to obtaining a teaching degree:

- the Bachelor of Education (BEd) is completed within a minimum four years at undergraduate level and may be undertaken with a focus on early childhood or primary teaching or secondary teaching in the areas of health and physical education (HPE), science and mathematics, or applied learning; and

- the Master of Teaching (MTeach) is completed within a minimum of two years at postgraduate level and may be undertaken with either a primary teaching focus or with a secondary teaching focus.

Aspects of those degrees that are relevant to the teaching of literacy are discussed below.

8.2 Content, structure, and delivery

The Bachelor of Education at the University of Tasmania comprises 32 units, of which five are particularly relevant to preparing preservice teachers for teaching literacy:

- *ESH 106 Academic Literacies* is a first-year unit, compulsory for all BEd courses (Early Childhood, Primary, and Secondary), focused on academic writing and digital literacy;

- *ESH 112 Foundations of Literacy: Processes and Practice* is also a first-year unit, compulsory for BEd (Secondary: HPE, science and mathematics, and applied learning), focused on literacy as a general capability across the Australian Curriculum; and

- *ESH 110 Foundations of English*, *ESH 210 Developing Understandings of English* and *ESH 310 Critical Approaches to English* are consecutive first, second, and third year units, compulsory for BEd (Early Childhood, and Primary), focused on addressing the three strands of English as a specific learning area in the Australian Curriculum (Language, Literacy, Literature).

The Master of Teaching has 18 units, of which five are particularly relevant to preparing preservice teachers for teaching literacy:

- *EMT 510 Foundations of Literacy: Processes and Practice* is a first-year unit, compulsory for MTeach (Secondary), focused on literacy as a general capability across the Australian Curriculum;

- *EMT 511 Foundations of English* and *EMT 611 English Curriculum and Pedagogy* are consecutive first and second year units, compulsory for MTeach (Primary), focused on English as a specific learning area in the Australian Curriculum; and

- *EMT 515 Approaches to English Teaching* and *EMT 610 Teaching, Literature, Culture* are consecutive first and second year units, compulsory for MTeach (Secondary: English), focused on English as a specific learning area in the Australian Curriculum.

Content analysis of the outlines for these units suggests a strong core curriculum on which preparation for teaching literacy is based. Moreover, as required by accreditation guidelines, each of these units (indeed *all* units) in the BEd and the MTeach degrees are mapped to the *Teacher Professional Standards*. Assessment tasks for each unit are aligned with intended learning outcomes and, as previously noted, as part of the GTPA, graduating preservice teachers must also produce a portfolio of evidence demonstrating their ability to teach.

8.2.1 Content

Overwhelmingly, the predominant comment from academics regarding course and unit content was that the sheer volume of literacy-related material meant that many teacher educators felt they were 'just scratching the surface' [A9] of the necessary content:

> There are three strands in the English curriculum: Language, Literature and Literacy. They barely get a taste of it … because there is so much to cover. [A2]

Teaching into such a 'crowded curriculum', the teacher educators we spoke with indicated that they felt their only option was to pack their units densely with content, so that:

> our preservice teachers in both the Bachelor of Education and the Master of Teaching are able to graduate, hand on heart, with as much preparation as we can squeeze in. [A4]

However, preparation for teaching does not necessarily equate to 'packing in content', as one experienced classroom practitioner emphasised:

> [They need to know both] what to teach [and] how to teach and how to develop students to be thinkers, and problem solvers, and inquirers and—unless we do that at a training level with preservice teachers—we'll keep [getting] teachers who come out thinking content is the ultimate aim of teaching. They become some purveyors of encyclopaedic knowledge to students. That's not what teachers should be. [EP39_PS]

Highlighting a key tension inherent in balancing the demands of the strands in the Australian Curriculum, one academic said:

> I would probably have a whole unit just on reading and a whole unit just on writing … But if we did that and didn't have any literature, we'd be missing a third of the curriculum. [A6]

8.2.2 Structure

The sequential nature of the literacy and English units in both degrees suggests strong vertical cohesion in terms of the structure of these units. However, some participants noted there was limited linkage of literacy as a general capability across units that were not oriented to literacy or English, suggesting weaker integration within courses as a whole.

One academic said that 'nearly all our units identify language … and [disciplinary] discourse as a very important component of that', noting that quizzes are frequently used to test comprehension:

> But if you don't then link that explicitly to literacy and show them that's actually what you're trying to do here, that that's the underlying nature of what you're doing, then the students mightn't realise it. [A7]

By way of further explanation about course structure, one academic observed that 'it's very culturally embedded that [course coordinators] manage their own units … I mean, we all get on very well … but there's no formal arrangement where we're connecting' [A8]. This lack of connection across units is typical within most degrees in most universities. In the initial teacher education degrees at the University of Tasmania, it may contribute to a lack of coherent development of literacy teaching skills. In the words of one participant:

> The consistent development of literacy across the course is not clear. It's there. It's just not clear and it's not consistent. [A7]

8.2.3 Delivery

In relation to delivery of course content, two matters emerged from the data as significant. The first relates to *how* unit content is delivered to preservice teachers and the second to *who* delivers it.

Regarding delivery mode, most participants expressed concerns about the increasing use of *online* teaching and learning. Academics recognised that students 'want flexibility because they have to earn money to study' [A4] and many online students are mature-aged. While understanding that preservice teachers often choose to study online in order to fit their university work in around a range of life commitments, academics were concerned about the effect this had on their learning. One academic emphasised the point that 'their academic abilities are quite similar' but 'for the students who I do fail, more of them are online than they are face-to-face' [A9]. Overall, academic staff preferred 'to see greater face-to-face delivery or expectation that [preservice teachers] actually attend on campus' because:

> from the perspective of the lecturer, you've got the opportunity to have that interaction happening in real time and so you can actually pick up on their

errors or their beliefs or whatever they do, whereas you've got less chance of changing beliefs online because you don't have that interaction with them. [A3]

However, not all teacher educators shared the view that online teaching and learning were inferior to face-to-face interaction:

That's interesting because that's often the assumption, that if you want students to engage, they have to come face-to-face, but I have students in class who check their phones and Facebook and may or may not turn up to class. [A8]

Perhaps the most important argument for more face-to-face contact time was that teaching is ultimately an inter-personal and social profession. Noting the irony, one academic commented: 'I do find it interesting that you can teach such a social profession through a computer [laughter]' [A9]. An experienced practitioner echoed this view:

One thing I really struggle with is the fact that, these days, you can learn to be a teacher over the Internet … I have to deal with little human beings every day. I have to learn how to speak to them. I have to learn how to speak to my colleagues. I have to know how to speak and communicate to parents on a daily basis. And I can't do my job on a laptop or on a computer or on a screen, and I just don't know how you learn how to communicate, how you learn how to speak, how you learn how to put it all into practice over the Internet. And I really have grave concerns about that. [EP1_PS]

A full discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of virtual learning environments (VLEs) in higher education is beyond the scope of this report.[64] However, it is worth noting that some of the challenges associated with online teaching and learning in initial teacher education may be attributable to a digital divide between teacher educators and preservice teachers (Clarke, 2009).

Some participants also expressed clear views about who is best equipped to deliver initial teacher education for teaching literacy. Posing a rhetorical question, one experienced practitioner said:

The people who are teaching the literacy at university, don't they have to be great teachers of literacy themselves to teach the students? And if that's a problem, get people in who are great teachers of literacy to teach the students. That would make sense to me. [EP1_PS]

Reminiscing about their own initial teacher education, another experienced practitioner from Phase 2 remarked that in the past, practising teachers were seconded to the university as teacher educators:

I know when I was at college, as it was then, TCAE [Tasmanian College of Advanced Education], we had seconded teachers [as lecturers]. You had teachers coming in from schools for two years, and it would be current, and it would be relevant, and it would be great. Whereas sometimes lecturers that are at uni, it's a long time since they've taught in a classroom … the

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64 For a comprehensive review of the literature relating to VLE in higher education see Islam *et al*. (2015).

seconded lecturers were always the ones that you really felt were really onboard with current stuff and they gave you a good perspective on reality [in the classroom]. [EP40_PS]

It is worth noting that while all the academics who were interviewed reported that they did have experience of teaching at the pre-tertiary level of schooling, some conceded that this experience was not recent. However, in response to criticisms that teacher educators at the University of Tasmania did not have current classroom experience, the researchers were informed that:

We do have staff who are fairly recent from the classroom [and] we try to capitalise on those experiences, particularly when we're employing casual tutors. So, we do try to make sure that people do have classroom experience. [A3]

In this context, Bomer and Maloch (2019, p.261) highlight the importance of professional development for faculty staff, noting that teacher educators:

need substantive opportunities to learn and grow in their knowledge and practice—toward a more professionalized and richer understanding of all the different aspects and knowledge that play into preservice teacher learning.

Staff who teach into initial teacher education at the University of Tasmania are expected to make every effort to integrate theory with practice in their coursework offerings, thereby contributing to a positive professional experience for preservice teachers. On this point, however, it was acknowledged that:

Some lecturers do it better than others. And you will get that response from the students who say, "Oh my gosh, I love person X's lectures. He really makes them live. It's authentic. I go on prac, and I can see everything that's been said in my classes played out here." Another person, will go, "Oh, it's got nothing to do with what I see in schools." So, we try to have professional learning in our own [Faculty of] Education amongst staff to try and make them understand that. Most of them have come from a teaching background, so it's not like they haven't got that experience. [A2]

On this point, the literature suggests that involving practising teachers in the delivery of initial teacher education may serve two useful purposes: the first, to address concerns regarding teacher educators' currency of classroom experience; the second, to help preservice teachers negotiate the cultures of the university and the school, as they move between coursework and fieldwork experiences (see Cope & Stephen, 2001).

Section 9. 'Lived space': the classroom context

The third 'lived space' of teacher education is, according to Rowan *et al* (2015, p.285),

> teacher education as it is understood by preservice and in-service teachers *during* and *after* they have completed their teacher preparation program. It is here that the official codes of practice (standards) and the diverse forms of disciplinary and academic knowledge acquired through teacher education become part of 'practical consciousness' developed by beginning teachers in their particular workplaces.

In this section, preservice teachers' professional field experience/practicum placements during their initial teacher education are discussed first. Next, the focus turns to novice teachers' learning as part of their first employment experiences as they transition into the teaching profession. Finally, continuing professional learning for practising teachers is addressed.

9.1 Field experience during initial teacher education

Perry and Power (2004, p.125) note that conventional initial teacher education 'reflects a view of learning to teach as a two-step process of knowledge acquisition and application or transfer' in which 'the university provides theory, skills and knowledge through coursework, and the school provides the field setting where knowledge is applied'. In their review of 97 empirical studies focusing on learning to teach, most of the beginning teachers studied were enrolled in initial teacher education programs based on this conventional model, suggesting that it dominates despite substantial critique of the transfer of learning construct this model relies on (see Carraher & Schliemann, 2002; Lobato, 2006; Packer, 2001; Tuomi-Gröhn & Engeström, 2003).

In the conventional model, the purpose of field experiences is to provide opportunities for preservice teachers to 'put theory into practice'. Practicum placements are regarded as 'the bridge between theory, knowledge and skills gained at the university and their application in the school' (Britzman, 1991 as cited in Wideen *et al.*, 1998), thereby preparing them 'for everyday realities and complexities of schools and classrooms' (Sleeter, 2008, p.1948). The implication is that preservice teachers will be able to integrate the knowledge gained in their university coursework with the practical experiences they have in the classroom as student teachers. However, as Wideen *et al.* (1998, p.151) note:

> the notion that coursework should provide teaching skills and information about teaching—and that beginning teachers can integrate and effectively implement that information—receives very little support from the research.

While professional experience is meant to be a site in which preservice teachers deepen and apply learning from coursework studies, field experience is often favoured as *the* paramount context for preservice

learning, especially by student teachers themselves. This insight is evident in the following comments from beginning teachers in the present research:

> I believe that my practical experiences in a variety of classrooms were *the* most useful in preparing me to teach literacy. [BT47_BE_P]

> My practical experiences were the key contributors to my literacy knowledge and understanding. [BT23_BE_P]

> The pracs were definitely the most useful—I was able to work alongside teachers and see how they operate, and what is best practice. [BT65_MT_S]

Such statements have become commonplace in research with preservice teachers and new graduates (see Lawson *et al.*, 2015; Reynolds *et al.*, 2016). They frequently elevate the status of professional education relative to coursework in initial teacher education and ignore the possibility that what preservice teachers observe on professional experience may, in fact, not always reflect 'best practice'.

With regard to learning how to teach literacy, the International Literacy Association (ILA, 2019, pp.3–4) stresses that preservice teachers need to gain experience through 'real teaching' that is 'meaningful and powerful' to students. However, clear guidelines for *how* teacher preparation programs should incorporate field experiences to ensure that preservice teachers engage with 'quality experiences in learning to teach literacy' (p.7) are generally lacking. On that point, it is worth noting that while accredited initial teacher education providers in Australia all need to meet the AITSL Accreditation Standards for professional experience, this does not mean that such experience has the same structure and nature across all providers. As Ingvarson *et al.* (2014) note, accreditation standards leave significant room for difference in the implementation of professional experience programs.

Suggesting that the relationship between professional experience and coursework is the subject of 'an ongoing and important conversation in unit and course design' [A5], participants in this research generally agreed that there was room for improvement in terms of connecting the learning contexts of university-based coursework and school-based professional experience.

9.1.1 Optimising field experiences

Sharp and colleagues (2019, p.2) note that the literature advocates that preservice teachers explore teaching and learning through field experiences that are 'judiciously aligned with coursework' and that optimal field experiences occur in an extended, deliberate and supported manner throughout literacy teacher preparation (see Ball & Cohen, 1999; Clift & Brady, 2005; Darling-Hammond, 2006a, 2006b; Hammerness *et al.*, 2005; Zeichner, 1996, 2010; Zeichner & Conklin, 2008).

Despite inherent challenges, evidence does suggest that preservice teachers' field experiences can be optimised by:

- ensuring alignment with coursework over extended time;
- mediated support by experienced practitioners; and
- experience in a range of instructional settings.

These three elements are addressed on the following pages.

Alignment and timing

At the University of Tasmania, some participants said that the relationship between professional experience and coursework was not working optimally in terms of 'getting that theory-practice nexus happening' [A2]. One academic characterised the relationship as 'remote' because 'students are not actually within a unit when they're in practice primarily' [A1]. Another academic suggested the structure at another university worked well; there, 'the placement was the hub and the units connected into it' [A8]. This structure was endorsed by another teacher educator who agreed that it would be useful for professional experience to be 'returned to a more central focus which we build around' [A7].

Noting that the relationship between coursework and professional experience is 'never going to be perfect because you've got disparate units that don't always fit next to a prac' [A6], there was overall agreement among participants that there needs to be tighter alignment between the two learning contexts.

Criticisms of the current model, especially in the BEd, generally related to lack of integration between coursework and professional experience. Overwhelmingly, this sentiment was reflected in the comments made by the beginning teachers who participated in the survey. Like academic staff, several beginning teachers referred to the structure and timing of professional experience:

> Our pracs were few and far between, and knowledge of strategies was lost in the interim … [for example] learning how to teach specific spelling strategies was right at the beginning of the course, which wasn't useful by the time I reached working with a class. [BT38_BE_P]

Beginning teachers consistently referred to the need for better alignment between coursework and professional experience, as the following comments testify.

> It would have been great to align the literacy unit with the practicals in order to build on my understanding of literacy and how to teach it. [BT24_MT_P]

> A lack of classroom experience made the knowledge gained hard to relate to and it was difficult to often see how topics discussed fitted into the broader picture of teaching and its importance. [BT66_BE_P]

In general, participants considered the structure of the professional experience component in the MTeach to work better than in the BEd (Primary/Secondary), as the MTeach includes one placement per semester enabling unit coordinators to link their units with forthcoming practical placements. This timing facilitates a more immediate application of coursework to classroom, whereas the use of a single, long professional experience in each of Years 2, 3, and 4 in the BEd (Primary/Secondary) was seen as hampering such integration.

Mediated support

As Reynolds and colleagues (2016) point out, optimal field experiences are not achieved by simply 'adding hours' to professional experience programs. Revisiting a finding in reviews of teacher preparation more broadly, not just in literacy, Bomer and Maloch (2019, p.260) note that high-quality field placements are about more than providing opportunities for observation and practice teaching but also about 'the opportunity to engage in face-to-face interactions with children or adolescents as a part of their learning about literacy methods and approaches'. Emphasising the

point that 'literacy teaching is not (just) about building up a set of pedagogical skills or accruing certain knowledge about the reading and writing process' but is also about engaging in a social practice with children, Bomer and Maloch (2019, p.261) argue that 'these practices should be supported, mediated, and interrupted by knowledgeable and experienced others.' Mentoring is the most widely recognised way of providing this mediated support and there is now a substantial evidence base on mentoring during the practicum (see Allen *et al.*, 2017; Ambrosetti *et al.*, 2017).

Central to this mediated experience in the Tasmanian context is the colleague teacher allocated in schools to supervise and support preservice teachers. With little time available to visit preservice teachers in schools, university-based teacher educators in this research relied heavily on school-based supervising teachers' professional experience reports. However, as one academic noted, this reliance:

> can be problematic as well because, of course, there's so much variance in terms of what one [colleague] teacher will think is acceptable in comparison to another … We do give them quite firm guidelines on what students should be doing, but as with anything, that can be interpreted in different ways and we do know that some students sneak through who shouldn't necessarily. [A9]

Similarly, an experienced school-based practitioner suggested that at times they have 'failed a student only to know that they go back, and they redo it' [EP39_PS] and another supervising teacher ends up giving the student a pass for their professional experience.

Consistent with the literature (Burns *et al.*, 2016; Talbot *et al.*, 2018), the need for supervising or colleague teachers to be exemplary experienced classroom practitioners was undisputed among participants. One academic strongly argued that:

> these should be lead AITSL teachers: this should be a well-earned position … These should be our most experienced lead teachers. Only they [should be able to] take on teacher education students because this is a critical opportunity [A4].

Another teacher educator noted 'the main thing that we want is for [preservice teachers on placement] to see really great practice' [A5]. Supervising teachers also need to 'be able to provide the kind of clear, objective feedback to preservice teachers about their development that's going to help them with that process' [A5].

Illustrating this sort of positive interaction between preservice teacher and supervising colleague teacher, one experienced practitioner explained how they mentored preservice teachers under their supervision, firstly by reassuring them that 'it comes with practice' [EP13_PS].

> That's certainly what I'm saying to my prac student at the moment. It comes with practice. "This works for me, how I plan for my groups and where I pull all the information from, but you might want to tweak it and you might want to plan a different way… I show them our overviews as well and I think it has assisted them—particularly our literacy overviews and how we compile them. I've been going right back to scratch with that person really. It's been like, "How do I teach that? Where do I start? How do I put that together?" [EP13_PS]

Significantly, similar comments were made in the Phase 2 research by experienced classroom practitioners who reiterated the need 'to make sure that our students coming out have been exposed to best practice' and that:

> We need to make sure that those people who are modelling are the best people for the job … I think there needs to be something, a screening process, put in place because I think sometimes some of the teachers that are chosen may not necessarily be the best teachers. Because we've had nearly graduating teachers coming through without any exposure to explicit teaching of literacy reading strategies. [EP7_PS]

A pervasive theme in interviews was that the role of colleague teacher needs to be taken more seriously than it is currently. One academic participant suggested colleague teachers need to be supported by the Department by being 'freed up to spend time' [A4]. That participant also suggested that 'colleague teachers need mentoring just as much as the students need mentoring'. The Declaration by the Tasmanian Education Workforce Roundtable states a commitment to 'support our experienced teaching workforce to provide mentoring and support to those who are less experienced'.[65]

Range of settings

During optimal experiences, preservice teachers can engage with practice-based work in a range of formats and instructional settings (Sharp *et al.*, 2019). These experiences may be gained through one-on-one interactions with students (Hoffman *et al.*, 2016), in small groups (Lipp & Helfrich, 2016), and in whole groups (Rosaen *et al.*, 2016). In addition, research suggests that field experiences should provide preservice teachers with opportunities to engage in practice-based work located in rural (Ajayi, 2014), suburban (Johnson, 2010), and urban (Lazar, 2018) school settings. They may also take place in contexts beyond schools, such as community-based organisations (Brayko, 2013). Furthermore, high-quality field experiences expose preservice teachers to a wide-range of student diversity, including students who have cultural and linguistic differences (Xu, 2000) and exceptionalities (Peebles & Mendaglio, 2014).

In their review of research into preservice teachers' experiences of literacy tutoring in schools, outside formal practicum placements, Hoffman and colleagues (2019) discuss the challenges and promises for transforming teacher preparation through the attention to what they call 'hybrid' spaces for in-class field opportunities. Overall, these studies revealed a breadth of learning associated with experiences that provided preservice teachers with ongoing opportunities to put understandings from their coursework into practice (Zeichner, 2010). A review by Hoffman *et al.* (2019, p.244) also found that preservice teachers who had the opportunity to work with school students in one-to-one or small-group literacy activities commonly:

- improved their knowledge of literacy, language, and word structure;

- strengthened their pedagogical and instructional abilities, including their ability to use a variety of literacy strategies, their ability to use assessment data to individualize instruction, and their behaviour management skills;

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65 https://documentcentre.education.tas.gov.au/Documents/Education-Workforce-Roundtable-Declaration.pdf#search=Education%20Workforce%20Roundtable%20Declaration

- learned to build and value relationships with students, families, and colleagues, and to draw on these relationships to enhance students' literacy development; and

- developed an understanding of culturally-responsive teaching and rejected deficit ideas about students who were participating in the experiences because of their status as "struggling" or "at-risk" readers.

At the University of Tasmania, the professional experience program:

> aims to help prepare students for the multitude of roles in primary and secondary schools and early childhood environments and provides opportunities to develop professional communication skills and exposure to a variety of educational environments and workplaces to prepare for the profession.[66]

Preservice teachers may be placed in a school in any sector in Tasmania: government, Catholic, and independent. In general, student teachers indicate their regional preferences for educational sites, but are allocated to specific schools and may be expected to travel. While preservice teachers may express their interest in a particular setting, such as a special school, alternative school, or faith-based school, first preferences cannot always be accommodated, as placements depend on availability. Preservice teachers who specifically request a rural or remote setting may be eligible for support through the Professional Experience in Rural and Isolated Schools (PEIRS) program.[67] In some cases, it is possible for preservice teachers at the University of Tasmania to undertake professional experience interstate or internationally. To gain experience in broad range of instructional settings, preservice teachers are strongly encouraged to engage in an ongoing volunteering arrangement in a classroom setting with which they have already had contact.

9.1.2 Integration of coursework and field experience

An overriding theme evident in the comments made by both beginning teachers and their experienced colleagues in the 'lived space' of the classroom, was the perception that initial teacher education suffers from a surfeit of theoretical input in coursework at the expense of knowing how to implement knowledge in practice. There was a strong inclination to position theory in opposition to practice which establishes a false and unhelpful dichotomy (Barrow, 1990; Fenwick *et al*., 2014; Yeigh & Lynch, 2017). This distinction was exacerbated when novice teachers experienced a lack of synergy between professional experience placements and university coursework, as this beginning teacher explains:

> [At uni] it was more sort of ideas up in the air and theories … but not about how to implement it in the classroom. Not about what it necessarily looked like when you've got 28 kids in front of you. [BT80_MT_P]

Emphasising the point that 'learnings at uni feel completely separate and abstract [from] what I am now expected to be teaching in the classroom', another beginning teacher said:

> There was nowhere near enough practical knowledge and understanding within the four-year Bachelor course. There was far too much time focused on teaching theories and correct assignment procedures.[68]

66 https://www.utas.edu.au/education/professional-experience
67 https://www.utas.edu.au/education/professional-experience/rural-and-remote-placements-tasmania
68 This reference to a focus on 'assignment procedures' may speak to the heavy emphasis on preservice

However, such experiences may not be a matter of 'too much theory and too little practice', but rather point to the need for better integration between coursework and professional experience. Two promising examples for such integration—internships and clinical practice models—are discussed below.

Internships

Teaching internships offer considerable potential for integrating the 'perceived' and the 'lived' spaces of teacher preparation. The (limited) evidence about teaching internships suggests that well-designed and well-supported programs help produce teaching graduates who are more 'classroom ready' than those who do not undertake internships (Foxall, 2014; Ledger & Vidovich, 2018).

In Tasmania, the Teacher Intern Placement Program (TIPP) was established in 2016 as part of a Department of Education workforce development strategy. The program provides opportunities for 40 University of Tasmania preservice teachers per year to do their final year of study online while based full-time in a government school, working alongside experienced teachers. TIPP interns spend 35 hours per week at the school, with up to 15 hours of time allocated for study in order to complete their course requirements. The selection criteria for entry into the program focus on:

- progress to date (being on schedule to graduate);
- commitment to teach in the TIPP location determined by DoE and in a government school after graduation; and
- overall 'aptitude to becoming a highly accomplished teacher'.[69]

The program's main attraction for TIPP interns is having access to substantial in-school experience in their final year, and thus to mentoring and guidance from experienced teachers, as well as having the chance to gain a permanent position in a Tasmanian Government school upon successful completion of their degree. In addition, TIPP interns receive a $15,000 financial scholarship, use of a teacher laptop, access to the Department's network and, if relevant, support with accommodation and/or travel.

Observing that, as a relatively new program, TIPP has had some 'teething problems' [A2], one academic noted that the University and the Department of Education have worked together, learning from the first iteration to adapt and improve. As a result, the program is:

> getting better and better every year … every year, we've improved it, and I think it's indicative this year [2018 for the 2019 TIPP] because 90 applicants have put their hand up'. [A2]

According to one experienced practitioner whose school had employed several interns:

> The internship program is brilliant in giving them the opportunity to be out at a school in their last year. [EP7_ PS]

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teacher assessment and initial teacher education providers' obligations under accreditation guidelines to provide evidence of the achievement of *the graduate level of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers.*

69 http://www.utas.edu.au/education/study-with-us/teacher-interim-placement-program

However, the exigencies of internship ought not to under-estimated. Final year preservice teachers typically have assessment tasks attached to multiple units of study that they are required to complete concurrently with their in-school demands. These competing demands are likely to have an impact on the novice teacher's developing professional identity (Ledger & Vidovich, 2018). While the school environment can offer exceptional opportunities for interns, it also may present challenges. For one beginning teacher who had been a TIPP intern, the pressures of study took priority over becoming familiar with the school environment such that:

> It took me a while to get settled [in my first year out after the TIPP] … [During my last year] I was so busy studying … we had a certain [number] of hours off to do our uni work and we just had to meet all of our UTAS expectations … I guess the uni couldn't let us have any less time doing the subjects that we're doing because [the course] was already so stripped back as it was, so they had no wriggle room … [That] makes total sense, but we still had to do the same course [as other preservice teachers]. [BT74_MT_S]

This comment suggests that while coursework and in-school work compete for preservice teachers' time in TIPP, there is still some way to go to make teaching internships more integrated learning experiences.

Another beginning teacher related that she was happy to endure a year of financial hardship because 'the fantastic thing about [an internship] is you get your permanency with the Department straight away [and] you are … with that school for a six-year contract' [BT71_BE_P]. Not all preservice teachers are in a position to take on a full-time TIPP, for example due to family commitments, which means that it is not a suitable choice for everyone. It is, however, valuable, as one option of a suite of alternatives.

A small proportion of the beginning teachers in this research (10 out of 70 survey respondents = 14 per cent) had been interns and their experiences were variable. However, on balance there were more positive than negative experiences and constructive internships were invariably associated with effective mentoring, while 'learning on the job':

> I found my internship process with an experienced teacher the BEST learning I have had in preparing me for my own class this year … [Learning to teach children how to read] isn't something that happens overnight and fortunately I was one of the lucky ones … given the opportunity to observe my mentor model these skills and receive feedback and assistance … Learning on the job is the best way to learn! … The biggest booster [to my learning] was my mentor and internship … when preservice teachers and mentors are well matched it works really well and prepares us better for the real deal! [BT33_BE_EC]

Another key advantage of internship noted by beginning teachers who had been interns was that the experience afforded them valuable opportunities to become familiar with whole school literacy programs and practices in place in their school:

> During my internship last year, I was able to participate in a classroom (and school wide) phonics program, which means I was basically familiar with the phonics program this year. [BT14_MT_P]

VIGNETTE 9: Integrating university coursework and professional experience

Preservice and beginning teachers commonly perceive a gap between what they learn at university through coursework and what they learn on professional experience placements in schools. This is often explained in terms of a theory/practice divide. However, this perpetuates a false and unhelpful dichotomy (Barrow, 1990; Fenwick *et al.*, 2014; Yeigh & Lynch, 2017). Simply reducing 'theory' (coursework) and increasing 'practice' (time in classrooms) does not necessarily help novice teachers to effectively integrate forms of knowledge that are based on scholarly evidence and on professional practice (Burn & Mutton, 2015; Grossman, 2010).

Integration of coursework and professional experience

The experiences of preservice and beginning teachers confirm the 'necessity of bringing research-based understandings of teaching and learning into dialogue with the professional understandings of experienced teachers' (Burn & Mutton, 2015, p. 219). Graduates of programs which have extended practicum experiences in which school-based practice is 'interlaced' with university coursework have 'increased confidence, are more effective teachers and are increasingly committed to teaching as a long-term career' (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005, p. 411). To achieve successful integration requires strong school-university partnerships that develop common knowledge and shared beliefs among school and university-based faculty (Darling-Hammond, 2006a), based on a willingness to listen and address any potential disjunctions (Burn & Mutton, 2015; Furlong *et al.*, 2000).

Participants in this research recognised the importance of aligning the learning contexts of university-based coursework and school-based professional experience. Many beginning teachers highlighted their wish for stronger integration in their survey comments, such as:

> I feel I learnt more and made connections between theory and practice when I was able to learn concepts and strategies at university and then put them into practice concurrently. [BT29_BE_P].

> While the theory is a crucial aspect, I believe it would have had more merit if I could have used what I was learning in practical contexts that supported my understanding of the content. [BT10_BE_P].

Academic staff said that the relationship between professional experience and coursework is the subject of 'an ongoing and important conversation in unit and course design' [A5].

Clinical practice models

In an extensive review of teacher education in jurisdictions around the world, Darling-Hammond (2017, p. 306) notes the importance of 'connecting theory and practice through both the design of thoughtful coursework and the integration of high-quality clinical work in settings where good practice is supported'.

Clinical experience appears to have a positive effect on beginning teachers' learning, enabling them to better integrate theoretical and practical knowledge, resulting in greater confidence in that learning (Hammerness *et al.*, 2005). Such positive outcomes rely, however, on the quality of the clinical experience (Clift & Brady, 2005). In Australia, the University of Melbourne's two-year Master of Teaching is widely perceived as a leading instance of the model (see, for example, McLean Davies *et al.*, 2013; Ure, 2010). In its approach, not only do preservice teachers spend time in schools

from the start of the program but, importantly, school-based and university-based experts work together to make connections between preservice teachers' learning in professional experience and in academic coursework (Kriewaldt & Turnidge, 2013).

Several academics at the University of Tasmania indicated that they strongly favoured the adoption of a clinical or 'preceptorship' model—'similar to the medical or the nursing schools' [A2]—for professional experience:

> In the ideal world, if I could wave my magic wand, I'd love to see students not on these block placements. I'd love to see an integrated, one day a week … I'd love that sustained relationship with children and teachers in a school across a year. [A4]

In general, participants thought the structure of the professional experience component in the Master of Teaching program worked better than that in the Bachelor of Education, primarily because the master's degree includes one placement per semester. This system enables unit coordinators to better link course content with practicum placements and facilitates a more immediate application of coursework to classroom.

Teacher Intern Placement Program

Well-designed and well-supported teaching internship programs also offer potential as a way for preservice teachers to integrate pedagogical knowledge and practical classroom skills, enhancing their 'classroom readiness' (Foxall, 2014; Ledger & Vidovich, 2018). In Tasmania, the Teacher Intern Placement Program (TIPP) was established in 2016 as part of a Department of Education workforce development strategy. The TIPP provides opportunities for University of Tasmania preservice

teachers to complete their final year of study online while based full-time in a government school working alongside experienced teachers.

A small number of the beginning teachers in this research (10 out of 70 survey respondents = 14 per cent) had participated in the TIPP. While some interns reported in their survey responses that they had experienced difficulties balancing the demands of study and classroom responsibilities, most comments suggested resounding endorsement of the benefits of learning 'on the job'.

> I found my internship process with an experienced teacher the BEST learning I have had in preparing me for my own class this year … [Learning to teach children how to read] isn't something that happens overnight and fortunately I was one of the lucky ones … given the opportunity to observe my mentor model these skills and receive feedback and assistance … Learning on the job is the best way to learn! [BT33_BE_EC]

According to one experienced practitioner whose school had employed several TIPP interns:

> The internship program is brilliant in giving them the opportunity to be out at a school in their last year [EP7_ PS].

> [Being an intern] enabled me to look at the practices of the school, really understand the way things were taught, and become really, really familiar with the school before I was then teaching on my own. [BT71_ BE_P]

A recurrent theme in the narratives provided by interns who had had positive experiences of their internships was the importance of school leadership in establishing supportive conditions for preservice teachers to thrive. One principal explained how she optimised the learning experience for one of the school's most recent interns:

> I put her in two different classes, so she saw one teacher for the first half of the year and another teacher for the second half of the year. So, she was basically room-ready for this year... That's a really healthy way to get people job ready. [EP8_PS]

Clinical practice models – an alternative for integrating theory and practice

Burn and Mutton (2015, p.219) note that recent discussions about 'clinical practice' in initial teacher education convey the 'necessity of bringing research-based understandings of teaching and learning into dialogue with the professional understandings of experienced teachers' (see Kriewaldt & Turnidge, 2013). Noting that in many countries initial teacher education has taken a 'practicum turn' (Mattsson *et al.*, 2012), Burn and Mutton (2015) stress the point that neither a simple increase in classroom 'field experiences' such as that provided by internships or extended professional experience placements, nor even claims to be operating 'partnership' models are sufficient in themselves to warrant calling an initial teacher education program a 'clinical practice' model. Indeed, the turn towards school-based initial teacher education (such as Teach for Australia) has often been inspired by a wish to reduce or eliminate the role of universities which, as we have previously noted, are blamed for actual or perceived problems with the quality of graduating teachers (Grimmett *et al.*, 2009).

Simply increasing the time that novice teachers spend in classrooms does not necessarily reflect a concern to integrate research-based knowledge more effectively with professional knowledge. Moreover, in many cases, the introduction of university/school 'partnerships' has resulted in little change to understandings of professional learning, 'merely preserving the dominance of one perspective or the other and failing to address potential disjunctions between them' (Furlong *et al.*, 2000, p.220). In contrast, Burn and Mutton's (2015, p.225) thorough review of clinical practice models describes integrated initial teacher education programs that have 'essentially been initiated by university-based advocates who acknowledge their own sector's failings' (see for example Darling-Hammond, 2006b; Hagger & McIntyre, 2000).

Among those programs thought to represent good practice in this sphere is the recently developed University of Melbourne's two-year Master of Teaching, which is cited by most studies of clinical practice in Australia (see, for example, McLean Davies *et al.*, 2013; Ure, 2010). The underlying rationale for the Melbourne MTeach program is summarised by Kriewaldt and Turnidge (2013, p.104) as one enabling preservice teachers to 'make connections between school field experiences and academic coursework' and develop 'the skills of clinical reasoning in graduates'.

While academics in the present research supported the need for multiple models for different cohorts of preservice teachers to gain professional experience, the adoption of a 'preceptorship model … similar to the medical or nursing schools' [A2] was generally favoured. In this context, the clinical practice approach to the practicum was specifically noted as a preferable alternative to 'block placements', with one academic expressing the following opinion:

> I'd love to see an integrated, one day a week … I'd love that sustained relationship with children and teachers in a school across a year. [A4]

While the Melbourne MTeach approach has yet to generate significant evidence for its impact, Burn and Mutton (2015, p.227) note that 'the American research that informed its development allows some large-scale, but relatively limited conclusions to be drawn'. The evidence that has been assembled can be summarised in the following claims:

1. Clinical experience has a positive effect on beginning teachers' learning since they are better able to integrate theoretical and practical knowledge, resulting in greater confidence in that learning (Hammerness *et al.*, 2005).

2. While research into the relationship between initial teacher education and pupil outcomes is both limited and problematic (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005; Kirby *et al.*, 2006), there is some evidence that clinical preparation is a factor in determining teacher effectiveness (Boyd *et al.*, 2009; Darling-Hammond *et al.*, 2002).

3. Graduates of programs with a greater emphasis on clinical practice are better prepared for their first teaching post (Clift & Brady, 2005), but it is the quality of the clinical experience that matters. While an overall lack of school-based practice has a negative effect on pupil outcomes (Boyd *et al.*, 2009), more time in schools does not necessarily lead to better outcomes (Grossman, 2010).

4. Graduates of programs with an extended practicum experience in which school-based practice is 'interlaced' with university coursework have 'increased confidence, are more effective teachers and are increasingly committed to teaching as a long-term career' (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005, p.411).

9.2 Learning in transition to employment

Teacher development does not cease on graduation from initial teacher education. Ongoing professional learning is especially vital for early career teachers, as they make the critical transition from new graduate to fully-qualified classroom teacher. However, as participants in this research noted, 'even more experienced teachers have to make sure they stay up to date with current best practice' [PS- AST] and recognise that they 'need refreshers from time to time' [PS-P] (see 3.3.3).

As noted by Ingvarson *et al*. (2014), the transition from 'student teacher' to 'teacher of students' is a critical time. If not managed carefully and supportively, 'transition traumas' (Johnson *et al.*, 2014, p. 531) can lead to high levels of individual stress and burnout (Goddard & O'Brien, 2004; Howard & Johnson, 2004; Noble & Macfarlane, 2005), and subsequent attrition from the profession within the first few years after graduation (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Vocational Training, 2007; Johnson *et al.*, 2014; Weldon, 2018).

9.2.1 Classroom readiness?

Consistent with existing literature, most of the beginning teachers participating in this research described their first year of teaching as a struggle (Abbott-Chapman, 2005; Day & Gu, 2010; Johnson *et al.*, 2014; McCormack & Thomas, 2003; Ramsay, 2000; Roehrig & Luft, 2006; Sullivan & Morrison, 2014). Indeed, while graduation from initial teacher education programs is a significant milestone for preservice teachers, their first employment as a teacher marks the beginning of a whole new chapter of learning. As one academic pointed out, 'That's why we call it initial teacher education … It's initial' [A4]. Underscoring this point, another academic said:

> We can't teach our preservice teachers everything … and we shouldn't try to … We've got to treat the degree as the starting point, [and recognise] that they are not [immediately] going to be the absolute[ly] brilliant English literacy teachers [they] can be… It's going to be an ongoing thing'. [A2]

In the light of these comments, and the large body of research cited above, the policy expectation that graduate teachers be 'classroom-ready' upon entry to the profession (noted in Section 3.1) appears to run counter to the evidence that strongly supports the need for mentored induction. This disjuncture between the conceived/policy space and the lived/classroom space begs the question: what does 'classroom-ready' mean?

As Mockler (2017, p.335) points out, 'classroom readiness … is both slippery to define and hard to argue against'. Indeed, in much of the literature, classroom readiness remains undefined—as though it is self-evident—or it is defined superficially, for example as a capacity among beginning teachers' 'to use their professional knowledge' (Strangeways & Papatraianou, 2016, p.117). In relation to the 2014 TEMAG report, Mockler (2017, p.268) points out that 'nowhere in either the report itself nor [in] the government response is an attempt made to define the concept of "classroom readiness"'.

In the absence of a clear definition of the concept of 'classroom readiness', the AITSL *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers* provide a nationally agreed catalogue of the knowledge and skills that are useful for clarifying expectations of beginning teachers. However, they also raise questions about the feasibility, or indeed reasonableness, of expecting new graduates to be capable immediately on graduation. In other words, is it fair, reasonable, or practicable to expect them to deploy the full array of content and pedagogical knowledge gained during their initial teacher education studies from day one in a classroom, which—for most—is a new environment?

Certainly, many participants in this research did not think so. To the contrary, there was a strong sense of unrealistic and unfair expectations being placed on early career teachers, contributing towards a general feeling of being overwhelmed among this important cohort:

> I feel young teachers now feel like [they have to be] … almost up and running straight away in classrooms and working to the same level as much more experienced teachers and [they are] not necessarily getting the support and grounding that they might need in schools. [PS_CT]

On this point, Reid (2019, p.715) makes a case for reconceptualising the goal of initial teacher education, proposing a provocative shift in thinking from producing 'classroom-ready' graduates to 'good enough' graduates. A 'Good Enough' new teacher, in Reid's terms, is not someone who demonstrates mediocrity, but rather someone who has been prepared *enough* (or: sufficiently):

> someone who knows she is not 'classroom-ready' when she starts her career; but who is well-prepared for her struggle every day, in and through her practice, to know and meet the needs of her students.

9.2.2 The need for intensive support, induction, and mentoring

The adaptive expertise that characterises Reid's (2019) 'Good Enough' new teacher is currently rare among graduates. Finding themselves plunged headlong into a 'sink-or-swim kind of profession' [BT78_PS], novice teachers notoriously have difficulty navigating the turbulent waters of their first year in the classroom (also see Howe, 2006). Research has established the significance of support on early career teachers' attitudes and resilience (Flores & Day, 2006; Gu & Day, 2007; Johnson *et al.*, 2014; Le Cornu, 2013; Manuel, 2003), and the important role of high-quality mentorship in this period of transition is well-recognised (Gonski *et al.*, 2018; Hudson, 2012).

However, it appears that too few early career teachers experience the intensive support that characterises comprehensive and extended induction (Algozzine *et al.*, 2007). Indeed, as Howe (2006) notes, most are left to learn by 'trial and error' in their first year of teaching. Those who do not survive the first-year rite of passage, seem invariably to have suffered from lack of, or limited, support from more experienced colleagues (Lunenberg, 2011; Rubinstein, 2010). A process of informal mentorship for new teachers was evident in many of the schools in this research:

> We have mentor teachers for new teachers. It's not generally going "this is your mentor" but it's the teacher next door to you that has been teaching that class. And I think senior staff are very clever here, because wherever there's new teaching staff, there's always been somebody that's been in that area for a while to mentor them … New teachers get time to either go and sit in on other people's classes, or time to go and have a look at the resources that we've got … It's highly encouraged to go and sit with expert teachers, to have a look at their lessons, especially if you're a new teacher or a teacher new to this school. [PS-CT].

For those who manage to avoid 'sinking' during their first year in the classroom, experiences of teaching in subsequent years tend to become easier, as these comments from beginning teachers indicate:

> Second year in, I feel much better about my literacy program. First year, I really struggled … I feel I was very lucky to have a great teaching partner during my first year, who helped me develop a great literacy program. Without her help, I would have really struggled. [BT19].

> Now I'm in my third year of teaching, I feel like things are falling into place a lot better, and I have a stronger, a better-rounded understanding of my role. [BT80]

> I have become more confident since I started working as a teacher … It has been a period of trial and error. [BT37]

VIGNETTE 10: Induction and mentoring for beginning teachers

Drawing on a growing international evidence base, Ingvarson *et al*. (2014, p. xi) note that best practice transition and induction programs are guided by professional standards and involve expert mentoring, classroom-based learning opportunities, continuing professional development, and access to appropriate resources. Effective induction also involves 'collaborative planning and reduced teaching loads that allow time for in-service seminars and careful building of a repertoire of practice' (Darling-Hammond 2017, p.306). As one of the earliest stages of teacher professional learning:

> Induction plays a critical role in building on the knowledge and skills developed through initial teacher education as well as providing the support needed for beginning teachers as they embark on a new phase of their career. (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2016)[70]

Few early career teachers, however, experience the intensive support that characterises comprehensive and extended induction (Algozzine *et al*., 2007). In the context of continuing high rates of attrition from the profession among beginning teachers (Johnson *et al*., 2014; Weldon, 2018), and comparing induction and registration practices in high-achieving countries, Ingvarson *et al*. (2014, p. xv) conclude that current arrangements in Australia are 'less than optimal'.

The national situation is reflected in Tasmania, where many participants in this study considered more support is needed for novice teachers. The State's Education Workforce Roundtable, established in 2018, aims to address such concerns, noting as one of its first two priorities:

Tasmanian education leaders will co-design an early career teaching training package for early career teachers, from their entry into initial teacher education (ITE) courses through to the end of their third year of teaching. Multiple education partners will be involved, and the program will be supported by a strong mentor program, professional learning and individualised support.[71]

Several strategies are already in place in Tasmanian schools to support beginning teachers with a positive transition into their first employment. With the support of their principal, beginning teachers can participate in the Department of Education's course *Meeting the Standards: Induction for Early Career Teachers*,[72] delivered by staff from the Professional Learning Institute (PLI). In this study, schools providing helpful support for their new teachers were characterised by welcoming and supportive environments, and collaborative cultures focused on practice-oriented in-service professional learning. More specifically, they also ensured ready access to in-school literacy expertise.

Mentoring

The important role of high-quality mentorship in this period of transition is well-recognised (Darling-Hammond, 2017; Gonski *et al*., 2018; Hudson, 2012). Mentors need to be carefully selected for their expertise (Hobson *et al*., 2009) and themselves be provided with ongoing training and support (Allen *et al*., 2017). Novice teachers who struggle most in their first year of teaching usually have had inadequate mentoring and support from more experienced colleagues (Lunenberg, 2011; Rubinstein, 2010). Consistent with those findings,

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70 https://www.aitsl.edu.au/deliver-ite-programs/learn-about-ite-accreditation-reform/improved-beginning-teacher-induction
71 https://documentcentre.education.tas.gov.au/Documents/Education-Workforce-Roundtable-Declaration.pdf#search=Education%20 Workforce%20Roundtable%20Declaration
72 https://pli.education.tas.gov.au/program/meeting-standards-induction-early-career-teachers/

beginning teachers in this study who managed comparatively well in their first year reported having excellent mentoring and support from colleagues.

In some schools, every new teacher, 'whether they're first year or not' was allocated a mentor, someone they could 'touch base with' [PS-CT] or just have 'a bit of a whinge or something at the end of the day' [CS-CT]. In other schools, it was 'highly encouraged to go and sit in with expert teachers, to have a look at their lessons, especially if you're a new teacher or a teacher new to this school' [PS-CT] and new teachers were allocated time to do so.

A process of informal mentorship for new teachers was evident in many schools in the study. One school leader described this as 'a fairly solid process … whereby the scope of my time is targeted to graduate teachers', going on to explain:

> So, if you're new, I work more with you than if you're experienced … It's not a formalized mentoring program *per se*, but it's acknowledging that beginning teachers need mentors. And we have these documents to support their understanding of processes. [HS-AP]

Where beginning teachers were 'heavily mentored' under 'an umbrella kind of mentoring', they were 'set up beside somebody else' whose role was 'to monitor and make sure you have those conversations about how you're doing', to ask:

> "Hey, do you need help with this one? How's your behavioural management going with this particular person?" The informal discussions … it's that valuable conversation you have with your colleague to [make you] think, "Oh, somebody's doing something fabulous, I want to know a little bit more about that. [PS-CT]

One lead teacher explained the importance of this aspect of mentoring for beginning teachers, especially in the early stages of their transition to full classroom responsibility:

> That first six months is tricky. As a lead teacher, I want to try and improve their practices quickly as possible, but they're not necessarily in a space to want that at that time. They just need to have those debriefing conversations at the end of the day with their mentor [before] we start to load them up… I think we're actually reasonably good at finding that balance within the school. [CS-CT]

Whether mentoring is formal or informal, its importance for beginning teachers was undisputed among participants. Crucially, it was the quality of the relationship that mattered, having 'an experienced teacher to bounce ideas off … and be supported to make more informed decisions for my teaching'. [PS-CT]

However, induction ought not be a process of 'trial and error', a case of 'survival of the fittest'. There is now enough research evidence pointing to what good practice in this sphere looks like. According to the international literature, (Ingvarson *et al.*, 2014, p. xi), note that transition and induction programs that reflect good practice:

- are guided by professional standards;

- involve mentoring where mentors are carefully selected for their expertise and receive ongoing training;

- include classroom-based learning opportunities for new teachers;

- provide continuing professional development; and

- are supported through the provision of resources.

Under such supportive conditions, novice teachers can steadily grow in skill and confidence as they forge their own path in their chosen profession and accept that much of what they will do is 'learning on the go' [BT5_MT_P].

Whether and to what extent new graduates thrive in teaching depends on a complex combination of factors (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2016). These factors fall into two categories: one relating to what new graduates *bring to* their first teaching job (already discussed in relation to recruitment for entry to initial teacher education in Section 3.1); the other to what they *receive from* the context of their first employment.

This second cluster of factors highlights what schools can do to facilitate the challenging transition. For example, the evidence strongly suggests that school principals play a crucial role in developing school cultures that are supportive of new teachers (see Flores & Day, 2006; Johnson *et al.*, 2014; McCormack *et al.*, 2012; Wood, 2005). However, school leaders in many schools are often too busy or lack the skills to effectively support early career teachers (Andrews *et al.*, 2007; Quinn & Andrews, 2004).

In many participating schools, principals and other senior staff played key roles as instructional leaders, often through modelling practice:

> It might be that if someone—if one of the beginning teachers—needs some more understanding or skill in a particular area, then we'll say "We're going and go and observe this teacher taking a lesson on that" ... We try to do a lot of that and a lot of modelling and a lot of allowing them to shadow, to see other people in action and to see how things work in practice. [PS-AST]

The following strategies supported a positive transition into first employment for new teachers in Tasmanian schools:

- the Department *Meeting the standards: induction for early career teachers* course,[73] delivered by the professional learning institute (PLI), which was considered useful and necessary but insufficient on its own;

- quality mentoring for beginning teachers, whether formal or informal;

- supportive school environments, including a culture of collaboration with senior staff playing a pivotal role in actively modelling collaboration within and between schools;

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73 https://pli.education.tas.gov.au/program/meeting-standards-induction-early-career-teachers/

- in-service learning with a focus on practice, such as through participation in professional learning teams (PLTs) and professional learning communities (PLCs); and

- in-school literacy expertise, especially in the form of coaching.

9.3 Continuing professional learning and development

Continuing professional learning throughout all career stages is important for various reasons. Key to the sustainability of the profession (McIlveen *et al*., 2019), in-service learning is needed for teachers to deepen their understandings, refine their skills, and update their knowledge (Parr *et al*. 2006), and to implement educational reform (Ng, 2017). Moreover, as Parr *et al*. (2006) note, the challenges of teaching do not remain static, making it 'a continuous learning profession' (Gonski *et al*., 2018, p.157). As one participant in our research said:

> If you're not a lifelong learner, and you're just in your little box in your classroom, then I don't really believe that you are pushing yourself to actually learn anything or to go further in your understanding of literacy. [PS-C]

Changes in student demographics and an ever-expanding knowledge base require teachers to maintain their currency regarding evidence about good practice, as they navigate their way through the changing, and often competing, discourses in the 'three spaces' of teacher education (Rowan *et al*., 2015). Recognising the call for ongoing professional learning, the Education Workforce RoundTable Action Plan[74] in Tasmania includes as an action to:

> Develop tailored and targeted professional learning opportunities for every stage of a teacher's career to build teacher capability aligned directly to the Australian Professional Standards.

9.3.1 Barriers to continuing professional learning

Given its importance, continuing professional development needs to be valued and supported, resourced as 'an indispensable dimension of teachers' work lives … not conceived as an optional extra to the everyday work of teachers' (Allen *et al*., 2017). However, for many practising teachers, in-service professional learning is frequently experienced as an 'add-on', as evidenced in a report by the OECD (2014) that found that conflict with work schedules was one of the most commonly cited reasons for teachers not participating in professional development activities.

Participants in this research reported that requests to attend professional learning (PL) opportunities had often been rejected based on cost, or difficulties in finding relief teachers to back-fill teacher absences.

> Professional learning here in Tasmania, a lot of the times when I ask to attend a PL it is often denied, and the reason given is lack of money. [PS-P]

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74 https://documentcentre.education.tas.gov.au/Documents/Workforce%20Roundtable%20Action%20Plan.pdf

Similarly, Freeman *et al.*'s (2014) analysis of Australian teachers' response to the OECD's Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) in 2013, found that 39 per cent of Australian lower secondary education teachers perceived cost to be a barrier to their participation in professional development.

However, inadequate access to continuing professional development is only part of the problem. The current evidence-base for effective professional development is quite thin (Gersten *et al.*, 2014; Yoon *et al.*, 2007). In the United States, a large-scale research study conducted by The New Teacher Project to identify 'what works' in teacher development found that, despite their assumptions to the contrary, results of evaluations of professional development interventions are mixed (Jacob & McGovern, 2015). Many studies also show those interventions did not result in long-term lasting change to teacher practice or impact on student outcomes (Arens *et al.*, 2012; Bos *et al.*, 2012; Garet *et al.*, 2008). Moreover, even where evidence of practice improvement was found, researchers were unable to link teacher growth to any specific development strategy.

Musset's (2010, p.7) review of teacher development systems in OECD countries found that despite the *potential of continuing professional learning to effect positive change—and an assumption that it does, among practising teachers* 'there seems to be a general discontent' about in-service professional learning, with comments suggesting that it is frequently 'too fragmented, lacking in intensity, and unrelated to teaching practices'. Providing insight into the possible source of this dissatisfaction, Musset's review also found that the most commonly-used approach to continuing professional development is the one-off workshop, despite evidence that this form of professional learning is ineffective and inefficient.

A significant theme that emerged from the present research was the need for new professional learning models to build capacity sustainably, because 'if we just keep doing professional learning like we always have done we'll get minimal improvement' [HS-P] (also see Polly & Hannafin, 2011). On this point, many participants reported that their schools were 'moving away from the traditional style of professional learning … towards more of an in-house inquiry-style process [HS-CT]. Jensen and colleagues (2016) note that high-performing teacher education systems are characterised by a strategic approach developed in schools around an improvement cycle that is always connected to student learning. In stark contrast to systems that rely on 'piecemeal' and 'one-off' approaches to teacher professional development, the improvement cycle approach in evidence in many of the participating schools generates 'a culture of continuous professional learning that, in time, turns schools into true learning organisations' (Jensen *et al.*, 2016, p.4).

Therefore, Brown (2015) argues, rather than understanding 'classroom readiness' as an endpoint achieved on graduation, a more constructive understanding is that it is an ongoing process that *begins* when preservice teachers complete their formal initial teacher education studies; then gains momentum when they take up their first employment; and continues throughout their teaching careers. As Brown (2015, p.17) also suggests, the knowledge, skills, and disposition needed for classroom readiness 'require collaborative and continuing attention throughout these three distinct phases of a teacher's professional career'. Conceptualising teacher learning as occurring on 'a *recursive* continuum', Reid (2019, p.728) argues, 'acknowledges and builds on the codified linear progression in the AITSL Standards' but also destabilises its certainty, 'recognising that teachers can never know all they need' (original emphasis).

9.3.2 Features of effective continuing professional learning and development systems

As noted earlier, a top priority in the Declaration by the Tasmanian Education Workforce Roundtable[75] is the development of early career teaching support that commences on entry into initial teacher education and continues through to the end of their third year as a teacher.

Participants spoke at length about continuing professional learning and development as 'the way to go' [PS-LS], the key to build staff capacity to teach literacy (on which, see, for example Kose & Lim, 2011; Sangster, Stone, & Anderson, 2013; Timperley, 2011). A significant enabler:

> is having those professional discussions and professional learning *together* to actually build teachers' capacity and upskill our teachers because, without that, our kids aren't going to move. We can throw around as much data and do as much testing as we want, but if we haven't upskilled the teachers in good literacy practice, then it's not going to make any difference. [PS-AST]

Addressing a gap in the research about what constitutes good practice in terms of upskilling teachers, work by Cordingley *et al*. (2015) in an ongoing 'umbrella review' of evidence on effective continuing professional learning for practising teachers, drawing on Timperley *et al*.'s (2007) review, found a range of factors suggestive of positive impact. These factors relate to content and focus, duration and frequency, facilitation, and overall pedagogical approach.

Content and focus – what subject matter should professional learning and development cover?

Taken together, the meta-reviews by Cordingley *et al*. (2015) indicate that student achievement is significantly affected by carefully designed continuing professional learning and development aligned with a strong focus on student outcomes. An essential feature of effective programs is that content was perceived as relevant to participants' aspirations for their students. Professional learning goals were specifically linked to achievements in the subject area, shown to be especially pertinent to literacy-focused professional learning.

One area that research strongly suggests should be the focus of continuing professional learning and development is teachers' use of student data to inform their literacy teaching (Lai & Schildkamp, 2016; Mandinach & Jimerson, 2016). Importantly, teachers need to be able to integrate data skills with literacy content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge (Staman *et al.*, 2014).

However, as noted by Mandinach and Gummer (2016), many existing professional development programs fail to do this integrative work. Noting that 'providing teachers with student data is only helpful when teachers know how to effectively interpret and use these data for their instructional practice', Ter Beek *et al*. (2019, p.28) designed a digital learning environment to support teachers in their use of student data to inform reading instruction. Their results showed that teachers in the group that was provided with professional development and a guidance manual on how to translate data into explicit reading strategies, 'improved the variation of

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75 https://documentcentre.education.tas.gov.au/Documents/Education-Workforce-Roundtable-Declaration.pdf#search=Education%20Workforce%20Roundtable%20Declaration.

their strategy instruction and used modelling behaviour more often after the PD training' (ter Beek *et al.*, 2019, p.26).

The need for teachers to be data literate was noted by school leaders in this research, with many acknowledging that, for some staff in schools, learning how to accurately interpret and effectively use data 'is a quite a big learning situation' [PS-P]. Noting that 'there's more PL about data now … because it's becoming a big focus within the Department' [PS-AP], participants spoke about how valuable they found these learning opportunities. Most commonly, participants conveyed how literacy coaches and senior staff in schools supported teachers in engaging in data analysis, to 'make sure they really understand the data they're getting from students' [PS-AST]. Another important point made by participants in the context of learning how to maximise use of their school's 'data wall' was about the value of 'doing professional enquiry together' [PS-AST] in professional learning teams.

Cordingley *et al.'s* (2015) review also showed that effective continuing professional learning and development programs emphasise formative assessment, learning processes and outcomes. Moreover, understanding the underpinning theory was pivotal, as was discussion about how to translate continuing professional learning and development content to classroom practice. New information was carefully introduced, taking account of prior knowledge and existing theories (see also Parr *et al.*, 2006), thereby fostering a meta-cognitive approach to in-service learning. On this point, Lillige (2019, p.340) notes that providing support for 'framework conflict negotiation' in the design and facilitation of continuing professional learning and development is a feature of effective in-service learning that is often overlooked.

Duration and frequency – how often and how long should professional learning sessions be?

Evidence suggests that extended continuing professional learning and development interventions (that is, at least two terms in duration) are likely to be more effective than shorter ones (see Aubusson *et al.*, 2012; Timperley *et al.*, 2007). Fortnightly to monthly sessions were regarded as more likely to trigger substantive and sustained practice change than less frequent sessions. These findings were echoed by participants in this research, many of whom felt that 'external people coming in for one-off things just doesn't work and neither does sending people out for one-off things' [HS-AP], 'because it's so busy when you come back, you might not have an opportunity to share what you've learned with the other staff' [HS-CT]. Emphasising that the learning gained through professional learning and development was especially useful when it was intensive and sustained over a period, one participant recalled:

> A couple of us went to Misty's [Adoniou] workshop, which was over two terms—or maybe over 12 months. There were six or eight sessions that we were invited to attend, and then after that, coming back and sharing that practice with other teachers. So, I was supported in that way to do it, but unfortunately, I haven't received any support since that program finished. [PS-CT]

The final comment from this participant also highlights the need for subsequent follow-up and periodic check-ins with teachers, after they have completed professional learning and development.

Timperley and Phillips' (2003) study of teachers' expectations of students' literacy achievement in low income communities investigated the impact of a six-month professional development program in literacy teaching. Their research found that the program raised teachers' expectations of their students and, significantly, that those changed expectations were sustained over the following year. This example of effective in-service learning highlights not only the importance of continuing professional learning and development addressing teachers' existing beliefs, while simultaneously working to improve practice, but also the need for professional learning programs to extend over a period of time.

Facilitation – who should deliver continuing professional learning and development?

While external input was a common success factor identified by both Timperley *et al*. (2007) and Cordingley *et al*. (2015), sometimes in conjunction with internal specialists, 'providing multiple and perspectives and challenging orthodoxies' (Cordingley *et al*., 2015, p.6) was also considered essential. Effective facilitators were therefore those who were able to balance support and challenge, while building relationships with participants.

Many participants in this research were convinced that 'some of the best professional learning happens in situ rather than externally' [HS-LS] because then 'the PL is embedded in classroom practice' [PS-P]. Learning from colleagues and 'on the job' is commonly considered relevant and meaningful by school staff (Plows & Te Riele, 2016). Moreover, a 'wealth of expertise' in some schools required only the time to 'tap into those people's resources' [PS-AST]

> It comes back to building teacher capacity. We know that's the most important thing. We don't need to go off site to learn how to do that. In a school like this, between the leadership team and the excellent teachers, we've got that expertise. [PS-P]

Despite mentioning an observable trend towards in-house professional learning, many participants also made the point that the ideal situation is 'a nice balance between in-school PL and external PL people to draw on' [PS-AST]:

> Individuals and small groups going out for professional development is brilliant, but if you really want to change the school culture, it needs to involve the whole staff … so having a mixture of going out and having experts come into the school. An external person coming in and talking to a whole staff I think can be really quite powerful. [HS-TiC]

Participants who had had the opportunity to participate in professional learning sessions conducted by external experts told us that they valued this experience enormously:

> Access to these experts or leaders in the field is really important because you can sometimes get bogged down in your own little bubble, in your own little world. I think that being able to talk to these people and learn from them is crucial. [PS-CT]

> A few years ago, when Bev Derewianka had those [grammar and punctuation] sessions, we funded three teachers at a time to go and over the course of two years, most of our staff went and we're now seeing the benefits … Look

at the gain in our school, we went up to 501 compared to like schools at 448, 488, and Australia 499. So that gave teachers heart, too, that we're on the right track. That by unpacking what grammar looks like, and doing the course, and then implementing it back in the school, you can make a difference. So, when we look at our mini-inquiry about why those two areas came out better this year than those three, we'll be saying that it's because we had some intensive training. [PS-P]

An important aspect of making such expert professional learning useful was ensuring there are opportunities for applying the new knowledge:

> We've had a range of speakers in from the mainland or from wherever when we find someone [who] we think is going to meet our needs. And that's usually about information sharing, but it's also about the practical application. So, we're not just going to sort of dump all this information on teachers; we try to make it … relevant to their own planning and so on. [PS-AST]

Overall pedagogical approach – how should continuing professional learning happen?

While no single specific type of activity was found to be universally effective in Cordingley *et al.*'s (2015) review, and learning activities needed to be varied, in terms of general approach it emerged as important that there was a 'logical thread between the various components' (Cordingley *et al.*, 2015, p.8; see also Poulson & Avramidis, 2003). Importantly, a recurrent theme across the reviews was that a didactic approach was ineffective. In contrast, participants in this research clearly favoured an approach that may be broadly characterised as participatory:

> It's actually [about] teachers working with each other to get better at what they're doing … What we need is more time to allow teachers to see other teachers teaching in practice and to have those discussions around what's really effective and what isn't effective. No question. That's where the money's got to be spent. On-the-job training, on-the-job learning, not in professional development and not in resources and all that sort of stuff. [PS-AP]

Notably, a finding across the reviews discussed by Cordingley *et al.* (2015) was that whether participation was deemed voluntary or mandatory was less important than whether the learning environment fostered a sense of shared purpose—peer support was central to effective continuing professional learning. While Timperley *et al.*'s (2007) review established that collaboration was necessary, and participant access to collegial support was important, it also found that collaboration was insufficient to effect practice change and that links between collaboration and learning were complex. According to McLaughlin (1997, p.84), professional learning communities enable teachers to provide support and challenge for each other to 'learn new practices and to unlearn old assumptions, beliefs and practices' and 'actively shape their own professional growth through reflective participation' (Johnson *et al.*, 2014, p.539). Johnson and colleagues' (2014) study on promoting early career teacher resilience also found that schools that operated as professional learning communities provided conditions that promoted teachers' sense of belongingness and connectedness.

Participants in this research also spoke volubly about professional learning communities (PLCs) and professional learning teams (PLTs) (Hairon *et al.*, 2015; Harris *et al.*, 2017). Clarifying the difference between PLCs and PLTs, DuFour and

Reason (2016) note that PLTs tend to be short-term and issues-based, whereas PLCs are generally more sustained over time:

> The work we do is really heavily based on the work of DuFour for professional learning communities, but we also have PLTs, which is the Patrick Griffin model of disciplined dialogue around student work. So, at the start of every year, each team for each year selects, based on their data, a high flyer, a middle-of-the-run, and a lower student for literacy and numeracy as their PLT student that they monitor throughout the year. Then there are regular meetings where a portfolio of work for that student is brought to the table, and it's 'PLTed'. [CS-P]

While some participants referred more to PLTs and others to PLCs, in essence they were speaking about the process of 'doing professional inquiry together, making the time to actually sit down and unpack what our data actually means, and having those discussions' [PS-AST]. In school documentation, the collaborative work of PLTs was frequently tied specifically to analysing data and '*critically interrogating the evidence of student learning*' [HS OP-Lit]. Based on the inquiry cycle (Jensen *et al.*, 2016), the PLC / PLT structure 'is about giving people time to collaborate' [HS-AST], 'challenging thinking, but also offering learning opportunities for teachers by taking them out of their comfort zone sometimes' [HS-P].

In this research, the PLC/PLT structure was noted as a particularly effective capacity-building strategy for upskilling teachers in how to use data to inform their literacy teaching 'because it provides accountability within the group, is data driven, and has facilitated teachers in becoming more data literate' [PS-P]:

> We start with data, we look at the student needs, we then look at teacher needs. What do I need to know if I'm going to teach that? We implement, we review and assess and we're constantly doing that cycle ... and what that means is that—because they're working together in a group—they're not confined by their own knowledge. There's collective knowledge being shared in that group. [PS-P]

One school leader articulated the inherent value of PLTs, saying that 'if we didn't allocate meetings towards PLTs, teachers would find a way to do them anyway because they are such a great source of professional learning' [CS-P]. This view is substantiated by research showing that 'regular informal conversations with colleagues to aid professional development' and 'collaborative learning activities with other colleagues at my school' were the most highly valued formats of professional learning (Plows & Te Riele, 2016, p.56).

With respect to collaborative learning, Parr and colleagues' (2006) review of effective professional development practices identified that negotiation and co-construction with teachers was a key principle. Promoting teachers' self-regulation to engage at a deeper level with learning, resulted in more positive responses and increased the likelihood of sustained practice change. Noting that historically, professional learning has been undertaken individually by teachers in isolation, dependent on input from external 'experts', Burbank and Kauchak (2003) suggest that collaborative action research offers an alternative way of approaching professional development. In their intervention, pairs of new and experienced teachers were taught how to use action research to examine, analyse and reflect on their practice. The results indicated that participants gained from the experience in three ways:

- they were actively involved in professional reflection;

- they felt validated as producers of knowledge; and

- they were acknowledged for their role in professional development and decision-making.

The value of inexperienced and experienced teachers learning together was also reflected in the present study, with one school principal commenting:

> We've got a mixed bag of teachers … About 35 per cent of our teachers are in their early years of teaching and then we've also got some experienced teachers. What I say is to have them [learning] together; it makes for a good blend of experience. [PS-P]

9.3.3 Good practice in continuing professional learning and development for literacy teaching

While there is an emerging body of evidence about what broadly constitutes good practice in the sphere of in-service teacher learning and development, there is a relative paucity of evidence about effective professional learning specifically for literacy teaching practice. However, the available research suggests that attention to three key areas is likely to produce promising results:

- school leadership;

- in-school coaching by literacy specialists; and

- collegial observation.

School leadership

School leadership has been shown to be particularly important in literacy-focused CPD (Cordingley *et al.*, 2015; Timperley *et al.*, 2007). Indeed, such evidence foregrounds the key role played by school leaders in sustaining practice change by actively participating in literacy-related professional learning activities themselves, one of their core functions in this context being to analyse student assessment data and take oversight of its use in continuing professional learning. Timperley *et al.'s* (2007) best evidence synthesis of teacher professional learning and development (which focused in part on literacy), identified four key roles taken on by school leaders:

- developing vision;

- managing and organising;

- leading professional learning; and

- developing the leadership of others.

Significantly, they found that school leadership created the conditions for successful continuing professional learning.

Initiated by the Australian Primary Principals' Association and developed by Edith Cowan University and the Australian Catholic University, the *Principals as Literacy Leaders (PALL)* program was developed to strengthen the capabilities of Primary School Principals to be effective literacy leaders. Trialled and delivered to over 600 Principals around Australia, the program started in 2009 and has been well-received by participants. Konza's (2015, p.2) evaluation of PALL Plus (a development of the PALL pilot project) found major positive outcomes. For example,

- both content and delivery of the professional learning modules were regarded positively by the school leaders, and prompted changes in school practices relating to the teaching of reading;

- substantial growth occurred in the school leaders' knowledge of the reading process;

- there was some evidence of growth in teachers' knowledge of the reading process;

- more explicit teaching of reading skills was implemented across the schools;

- the mentor visits were important in maintaining project focus and momentum;

- statistically significant growth occurred in the phonological skills and alphabetic knowledge of most students;

- statistically significant growth occurred in the reading accuracy of students in Years 3–7, with moderate effect sizes for students in Years 3, 4, and 5; and

- statistically significant growth occurred in the reading rate of students in Years 4 and 5, but effect sizes were small.

Introduced in Tasmania in 2013 and 2014, the PALL program initially focused on offering professional learning for school leaders to develop their knowledge and skills in relation to literacy as well as instructional leadership. It was reintroduced for Tasmanian government school principals in 2017 under the auspices of the Tasmanian Professional Learning Institute, and 'extended so that principals are able to bring literacy leaders from their schools into the program' (Doyle *et al.*, 2017b, p.27).

An assistant principal who had attended the PALL program 'with a colleague from a different area within the school' noted that the program had generated 'great conversations between us which has facilitated a lot of our thinking [about our whole school approach]' [PS-AP]. The principal in another school was similarly enthusiastic about how the program had provided 'the framework around creating that whole school vision around literacy' and for this reason had made a commitment to ensuring that 'every school leader does it every four or five years [to embed] that best practice and that consistency' [PS-P]. Some participants were keen for involvement by the Department 'as to how we are implementing PALL' and to help with 'measures of effectiveness of the program in the schools' [HS-LS].

In-school literacy coaching

Literacy coaching has great potential as a professional learning strategy for improving teacher practice and student achievement in literacy, providing that several guiding principles are observed. L'Allier and colleagues (2010) note that literacy coaches need to:

- have specialised knowledge;

- spend at least half their time working directly with teachers;

- develop productive relationships with teachers;

- focus on research-based practices associated with student gains;

- balance intentional coaching with opportunistic coaching;

- view themselves and be viewed as literacy leaders; and

- be patient!

VIGNETTE 11 – Instructional leadership and coaching for professional learning

Instructional leadership and coaching involve working one-to-one with teachers, observing and modelling classroom practice and engaging in dialogue to 'support reflection and professional conversation'.[76] The intention is to 'both support accurate and continued implementation of new teaching approaches and reduce the sense of isolation teachers can feel when implementing new ideas and practices'.[77]

The role of school leaders

Instructional leadership contributes significantly to improved student outcomes (Brandon *et al.*, 2018; Farwell, 2016; Zepeda & Lanoue, 2017). School leadership also is important specifically for literacy outcomes (Cordingley *et al.*, 2015; Timperley *et al.*, 2007). Leaders' direct contact with teachers in classrooms, for the purposes of providing instructional feedback, is most effective when accompanied by praise and recognition of the goals that teachers have set for themselves (Pink, 2009). In schools with a coaching culture, feedback becomes natural and feedback intended to change teaching practice is blended with affirming feedback (Fredrickson, 2009).

The balance between supportive and transformative feedback was mentioned in this study. School leaders worked 'alongside people' [PS-P] and provided support to teachers so that they could 'feel more empowered about what they're doing in their classrooms' [PS-AP]. School leaders described their coaching role in terms of 'opening [people's] eyes to different ways of doing things' [PS-AST] and 'trying to get a balance between pushing our teams outside of their comfort zones a little bit and also making sure that they're safe, and happy as well' [CS-AST].

The *Principals as Literacy Leaders (PALL)* program in Australia was designed to develop the capabilities of Primary School Principals as effective literacy leaders. PALL is offered in recognition that if school leaders play a vital role for literacy, then these leaders ought to be supported to perform that role. PALL provides a range of supporting tools and practical strategies founded in relevant scholarship on leadership and literacy.[78] In Tasmania, PALL was first offered in 2013 and 2014 and then reintroduced in 2017. Participants spoke enthusiastically about the PALL program.

The role of literacy coaches

Literacy coaching also offers great promise as a professional learning strategy for improving teacher practice and student achievement in literacy. Fulfilling this promise requires literacy coaches to have specialised literacy knowledge; to focus on practices that have been demonstrated in research to be associated with student gains; to develop productive relationships with teachers; and to balance intentional coaching with opportunistic coaching (L'Allier *et al.*, 2010).

The Tasmanian Department of Education's Literacy Coaching Strategy has provided all government schools with access to literacy coaches from 2019).[79] These coaches are supported by lead instructional coaches 'to provide at-the-shoulder support for teachers to develop and maintain effective literacy practices' (Department of Education, Tasmania, 2019b, p.3) and to support the alignment of literacy instruction aligns with the 2019–2022 Literacy Framework.

Literacy coaches interviewed in 2017 for this study highlighted their role in supporting teachers and enhancing alignment with the whole school

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76 https://www.aitsl.edu.au/tools-resources/resource/instructional-coaching
77 https://tdtrust.org/what-is-instructional-coaching
78 https://www.pall.asn.au/
79 Some schools had access to a literacy coach prior to 2019, but this initiative has made that access universal

approach, indicating their role was predominantly about helping teachers 'feel confident in implementing our school improvement agenda' [PS-LS] and 'about sharing good practice across the school' [CS-LS]. By way of example, a literacy coach in a secondary school shared the following:

> What I've been doing is going to the curriculum meetings, and then I work one-on-one with the teachers. So, I've got a big picture idea because I've been in the meeting, and then I'll say to an individual teacher "You're starting such-and-such this week. What does it look like? Can I come in and watch?" And so that's how I'm working with individual teachers in that coaching role. [HS-LS]

Literacy coaches in schools in this study played a pivotal role. Staff in such roles were considered the 'go-to' people 'to run ideas by' [HS-CT]. Colleagues praised literacy coaches as exemplary practitioners with 'a wealth of knowledge' [PS-CT], indispensable to schools' capacity-building generally, as well as to their literacy achievement specifically.

Collegial peer support

Instructional leaders are often school principals or other senior staff, including those with designated instructional coach positions. In schools with a 'coaching culture', they are not the sole instructional leaders. Evidence suggests that highly effective schools have coaching partnerships between peers (Fink & Markholt, 2011). Hattie (2012) suggests that teachers can have a positive impact on practice by working together through a collaborative coaching approach and using data collected in peer observation and regular collegial conversations.

Participants also valued feedback from peers and senior colleagues in collegial conversations. Structured collegial feedback occurred in 'learning walks'—called 'walkthroughs' in some schools (Lemons & Helsing, 2009). These walks entail colleagues or senior staff visiting classrooms and approaching random samples of students to assess if they can articulate their learning intentions and success criteria. In one school, senior staff undertook regular walkthroughs on a three-week cycle, and teachers were released for ninety-minute sessions to engage in reflective conversations [PS AR16].

In relation to effective professional learning for literacy, previous research as well as the findings from this study suggest that promising results will flow from attention to all three practices: developing instructional school leadership; in-school coaching; and collegial observation and feedback.

Onchwari & Keengwe (2010) examined the effectiveness of a nation-wide mentor-coach initiative implemented as part of the *No Child Left Behind* educational reforms in the United States. Aimed at enhancing teacher pedagogy for improving children's literacy performance, the results of the evaluation indicated that the reading and writing scores of the students of teachers who participated in the mentoring initiative 'benefited significantly' (Onchwari & Keengwe, 2010, p.311), suggesting that literacy mentor/coach schemes, if implemented following L'Allier's (2010) guiding principles outlined above, are likely to be an effective PL strategy.

One participant described their role like this:

> Predominantly, we're working with individual teachers around doing the whole school support. My role is coaching, and I have done a lot of that. It is, in some instances, being a critical friend and a mentor, but predominantly being a coach and actually trying to move them from wherever they're at so that they can feel confident in implementing our school improvement agenda. [PS-LS]

Staff in these roles were considered indispensable to the school's capacity-building and school improvement endeavours generally, as well as to their literacy achievement specifically. Teachers who benefitted from their expertise were unstinting in their praise of them:

> If I am ever confused or don't know anything, I just ask her, and she's a wealth of knowledge. [PS-CT]

> She's a coach in general as well as a literacy coach. So sometimes, in my non-contact class times, she'll visit me and see if I need anything, and she'll work through things with me … She's fantastic and we're all really supported by her. [PS-CT]

> She's always an awesome go-to person to run ideas by: "I've thought about doing this" or "I've noticed that this is an area I'd like to support students with. What are some good ideas?" So, she's really good [to bounce] ideas around [with], and [at] coming and modelling different strategies so that you can actually see what it looks like. It's all very well to read something, and you understand it basically, but it's really good to see it in practice. [HS-CT]

Collegial observation

Many participants also spoke about collegial observation as an extremely valuable way to build teacher capacity in relation to literacy teaching practice. As a professional learning practice, collegial observations enable teachers to critique their own practice and hold professional conversations with peers about specific areas of interest or identified learning needs (Avalos, 2011). Based on the principle that 'teachers need to watch other really good teachers in action' [PS-CT] and 'watching how it works is more powerful than sitting in an English meeting and sharing units' [HS-TiC], one senior staff member explained how collegial observation worked in their school.

> We allow teachers to go in and observe their colleagues without it being threatening. It's about nonjudgmental fine-grained feedback … It's about watching someone and learning from them, and learning from each other, and getting feedback, and creating an environment where that's okay: Creating an

environment where people are allowed to experience and explore different ways of doing things without feeling they can't make a mistake. It's about fostering that in people. [PS-AST]

Another school had instituted collegial observations once a term 'where we go and specifically watch a spelling lesson with our collegial observation partner, for example, so that we're actually seeing it being implemented in the classroom' [PS-CT]. Some school's literacy plans also emphasised the importance of linking this form of professional learning to teachers evaluating the impact of their literacy teaching, stipulating that 'teachers will use collegial observations to evaluate their impact on student learning during a reading-to-learn lesson [PS OP-Lit15].

Noting that context is always an important mediator in the efficacy of any continuing professional learning intervention, and the locus if the school is particularly important, Poulson and Avramidis (2003) emphasise the challenges of ascertaining the effect of professional learning interventions on teacher practice. On that basis, they caution reliance on any specific training or in-service courses, regardless of how 'effective' they have been shown to be, arguing that teacher development is not only long-term but also non-linear, and learning to teach literacy effectively is the result of interweaving different kinds of experiences.

In the next and final section of this report, discussion focuses on the implications, for a range of different education stakeholders, of a dynamic conceptualisation of the complexity of teaching practice and its relationship with teacher education. This concluding discussion aims to make explicit the connections between literacy teaching practice (discussed in Part 1) and teacher learning for teaching literacy (discussed in Part 2) through key insights and implications that apply across both.

Section 10. Conclusions and implications

Both in general and specifically in relation to literacy, teaching in schools and preparing preservice teachers to teach are subject to much scrutiny through scholarly research, formal reviews, policy papers, and media commentary. Within this landscape of persistent and detailed inspection, the *Review of Literacy Teaching, Training, and Practice in Government School*s is unusual in three ways:

- it pays attention to all elements of the literacy continuum in the Australian Curriculum: 'Comprehending texts through listening, reading and viewing; and Composing texts through speaking, writing and creating';

- it covers all the school years from Foundation (Kindergarten) to Year 10; and

- it examines practice in schools as well as in pre- and in-service teacher learning.

This breadth in the *Review* has afforded high-level insights to emerge from the research. Within this report, and in the four other reports from the project, findings related to the aspects listed above mostly have been discussed in separate (sub) sections.

Here, in this last section of the final report the focus is on synthesising those more detailed findings to provide cross-cutting and overarching conclusions and to draw out a range of implications for various education stakeholders: policy-makers, classroom practitioners, instructional leaders, school communities, academics, teacher educators, professional learning providers, and researchers.

The key insights from this Review relate to:

1. collaboration and communication among key actors;

2. a toolkit of good literacy teaching strategies;

3. pedagogy that is 'fit for purpose';

4. consistency, but not conformity;

5. systematic and appropriate monitoring; and

6. commitment to and support for lifelong learning.

The research on which these conclusions are based was conducted in Tasmania. Nevertheless, they are likely to be applicable to other jurisdictions in Australia and beyond, pointing to areas for potential action or consolidation to improve literacy teaching as well as teacher education and professional development for teaching literacy—and ultimately literacy outcomes for children and young people.

Central to all key insights is the conceptualisation of literacy teaching and teacher learning as an ecosystem of interacting interdependencies, with literacy teaching and teacher learning occupying a shared space of professional practice, which both informs and is informed by policy and research (Figure 1).
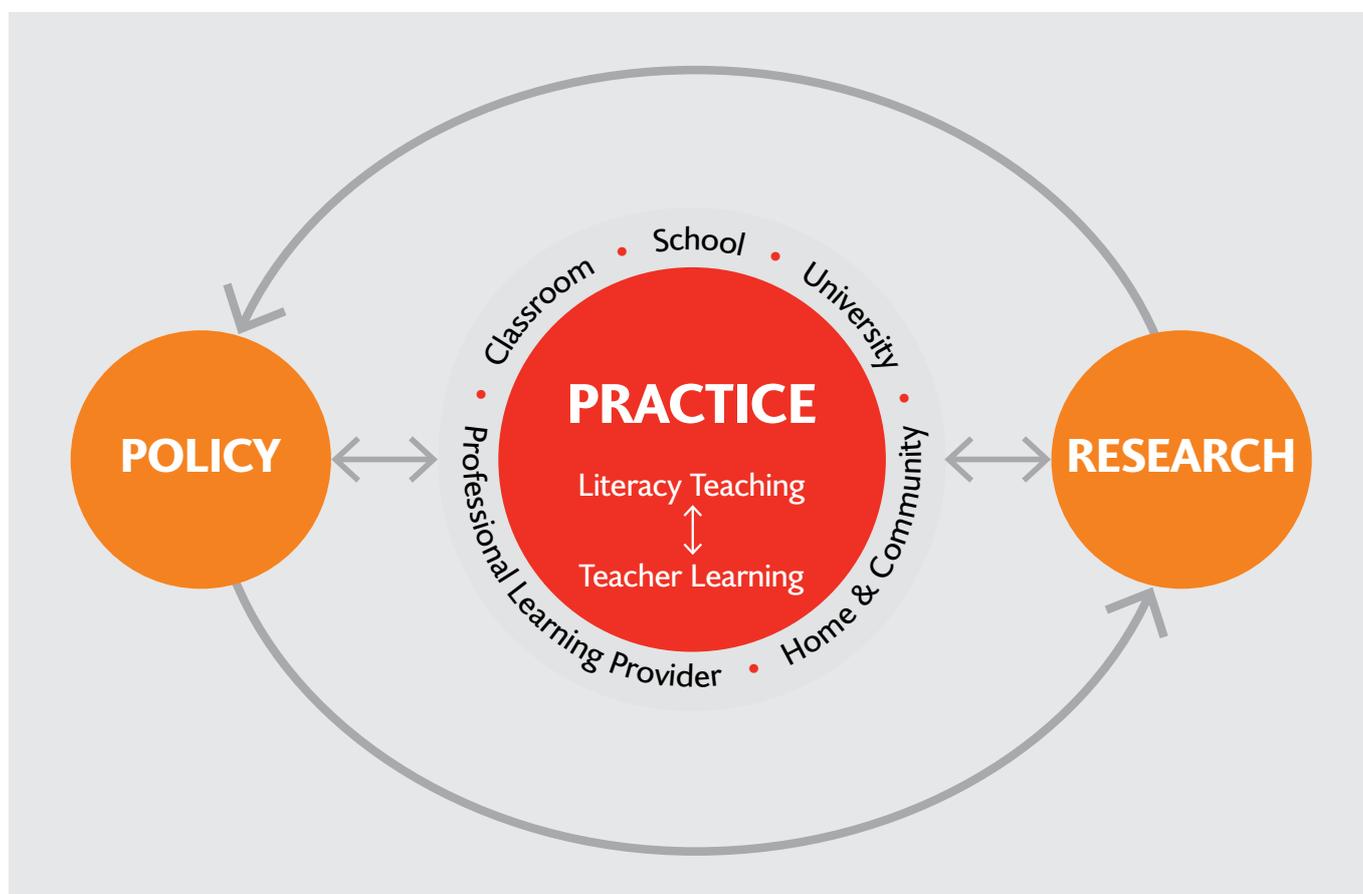
Figure 1.Literacy teaching and teacher learning: An ecosystem of interdependencies

10.1 Collaboration and communication among key actors

Literacy teaching and teacher learning for literacy are interconnected aspects of professional practice, part of an ecosystem of interdependencies. Knowledge about literacy teaching and learning is produced and translated by multiple and interconnected networks of classroom practitioners, school leaders, teacher educators, policy-makers, researchers, and community members. This multiplicity may inhibit integration across professional practice and learning contexts that constitute schools and the university, unless knowledge flows across the policy, practice and research spaces are managed smoothly.

During the fieldwork phase that underpins the findings in this report, it was evident that key groups—staff in schools, in business units in the Department, and in the University—share a deep commitment to ensure all young Tasmanians develop the literacy capabilities they need to flourish in modern society. At the same time, it also became clear that staff in one group often had limited understandings both of the contributions staff in other groups made to achieving their shared aim and of the conditions that enable or constrain those contributions. Related to this insight, people at times talked in terms of a false and unhelpful dichotomy between 'theoretical' university coursework and the perceived 'real world' of the classroom. This juxtaposition can result in learning contexts being set up in opposition to each

other, rather than as complementary dimensions of a shared practice space. Such views further highlight the need for connection across groups involved in literacy teaching and for the integration of the learning gained in each context.

There are already some sound examples of collaboration and communication in Tasmania including, in particular, the Education Workforce Roundtable, the Teacher Intern Placement Program, and the Faculty of Education 'Supervising Teachers of the Year' awards. There are also examples of strong, collaborative partnerships among schools, parents, and community.

Enhanced collaboration and communication between parties who contribute to literacy teaching and learning is likely to enhance synergies and integration, which will lead in turn to improved literacy outcomes for young Tasmanians.

Implications:

- Make time to find about the work of other parties. A simple first step could be for staff in schools to read the Phase 3 report from this project and for staff in the University to read the Phase 2 report. In addition, attending each other's seminars and events can provide useful insights as well as build connections for future collaborations.

- Establish clear communication channels and collaborative processes, especially between staff working 'on the ground' in relation to literacy such as literacy coaches in schools; staff in curriculum services; experts delivering literacy-related professional learning; and academics who teach the literacy units in initial teacher education. These channels and processes will enhance knowledge flows and shared understandings about current and emerging ideas for good practice in literacy teaching and teacher learning.

- Provide support for schools to involve parents and carers in their children's literacy development and to promote community engagement with literacy initiatives.

- Involve exemplary practising teachers and literacy coaches in planning and delivering initial teacher education for teaching literacy.

- Enhance collaboration between researchers and practitioners to ensure research is informed by practice and research findings are translated into usable guidance for evidence-informed literacy teaching practice.

10.2 A toolkit of good literacy teaching strategies

Literacy has been a core focus of the work of teachers, teacher educators, and educational researchers for a long time. As a result, there is a solid body of knowledge about good literacy teaching strategies that can be taught in initial teacher education and ongoing professional learning, and then implemented in schools. An invaluable resource used extensively in this report is the set of *Improving Literacy Guidance Reports* produced by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) in the United Kingdom. Based on extensive reviews of the available evidence, the EEF has formulated the key findings from international research on teaching literacy into a series of evidence-informed practical recommendations for educators across all stages of schooling, from the early foundation years to the primary years and through to the secondary years (see Appendices B, C, D). Thus, there is a wealth of knowledge that should be part of every teacher's, and teacher educator's, literacy teaching toolkit.

However, aspects of literacy teaching and learning are not yet settled; research, policy, and practice continue to develop and scholars, policy-makers, and educators continue to advocate for new strategies. As the demands of literacy in the 21st century change, knowledge continues to evolve about how best to teach students to become literate and how best to prepare teachers for the challenges of literacy teaching. Literacy is a socially-situated capability, not merely a set of skills to be mastered. Twenty-first century learners have access to, and need to be able to navigate, a wide range of communication media of varying trustworthiness. In addition to being orally and visually literate, as well as literate in print and digital media, they need to have 'critical literacy'.

In other words, there is much valuable content to place in the literacy teaching toolkit already—and this content needs to evolve to incorporate new knowledge and strategies as they are developed and demonstrated to be useful.

Implications:

- Ensure every teacher and teacher educator has evidence-informed practical literacy teaching strategies in their toolkit. This assurance relies in part on literacy experts in the Department and in the University assisting colleagues 'at the chalkface' to know which strategies are backed by strong evidence, and how to implement them.

- Actively find out about new ideas for literacy teaching; critically analyse these new ideas; and be open to adapt one's toolkit if those new ideas prove to be worthy.

- Inform policy and guidelines based on strong existing and emerging evidence.

- Develop more practice-based research, underpinned by a clear and coherent conceptualisation of teaching 'effectiveness', and involve practising teachers as co-researchers; this may help to refine understandings of 'good practice' in literacy teaching.

10.3 Pedagogy that is 'fit for purpose'

Once teachers and teacher-educators have a useful toolkit of good literacy teaching practices (see 10.2), those specific tools and strategies need to be embedded in a sound pedagogical framework. In both schools and initial teacher education this embedding work encompasses:

- teaching the key elements of literacy (reading and viewing, writing and creating, grammar and punctuation, spelling and vocabulary) in an integrated manner;

- developing strategies for integrating literacy teaching across the curriculum;

- explicit teaching, modelling, and scaffolding, gradually releasing responsibility from teacher to student;

- providing plentiful opportunities for practice and safe failure; and

- identifying struggling students early and providing high-quality targeted interventions, as soon as possible.

To ensure it is 'fit for purpose', the pedagogical framework needs to be adaptable to different contexts. For example, for school students, evidence suggests that a particular emphasis on some aspects of literacy is warranted at different developmental stages. In initial teacher education, it is likely to differentiate

pedagogies in the Bachelor of Education compared with the Master of Teaching, and for emerging primary and secondary school teachers.

Moreover, across both schools and the University, students bring different backgrounds, prior knowledge and experiences, and strengths and interests. Learning outcomes, including for literacy, continue to be affected by social, economic, and cultural disadvantage. Culturally responsive pedagogy is respectful of student diversity, values difference, and advocates for equity. Teachers cannot do this transformative work on their own. Fit-for-purpose pedagogy also means bringing in the expertise of relevant allied professional staff, such as speech pathologists and psychologists.

Implications:

- Support classroom practitioners to teach literacy in an explicit and integrated way, as part of an overall pedagogical approach that recognises literacy skills as both generic and subject-specific. In particular, the following should be highlighted in initial teacher education programs and be a focus of ongoing, in-service professional learning:

  – Integrating the teaching of code-based skills and meaning-based/comprehension skills in the foundation years (K–2);

  – Developing metacognitive skills and extending students literacy capabilities, as part of moving students towards increasing independence in the primary years (3–6);

  – Expanding literacy teaching in the secondary years (7–10) to focus on disciplinary literacy and strategies to encourage deep reading and critical literacy.

- Provide adequate resources and appropriately skilled practitioners (including allied professionals) for schools to meet the learning needs of all students and to provide targeted interventions to those learners with identified literacy difficulties.

- Understand the relationship between in-school/university and out-of-school/university factors that influence literacy learning.

- Broaden policy discussions and initiatives beyond 'quality teaching' to 'equality' of literacy outcomes. A focus on improving student growth, especially for those who start school behind their peers in literacy capability, is an important step in addressing educational inequity.

10.4 Consistency, but not conformity

Good literacy practice by individual staff is valuable—but its impact is amplified when there is a consistent whole-of-organisation approach: in schools, across the Department, and in initial teacher education. Consistency refers both to the practices used, and also to a shared language about literacy teaching and learning. The latter also benefits collaboration and communication among key actors (see 10.1). Examples of consistent practice in schools are the use of literacy blocks and the 'whole-small-whole' lesson structure.

Across Tasmania, teachers need time to embed practice change and schools need time to build sustainability. While adaptability is important (see 10.2 and 10.3), some

stability in Department policies and guidelines is also needed. Teachers and schools, and therefore students, benefit from a unified, consistent approach across the state. Collaboration between the Department and initial teacher education providers is relatively easy because there is only one university physically located in the state. This relationship offers a unique opportunity to extend consistent whole school approaches both to a 'whole of Department approach', and also to a 'whole of initial teacher education approach'.

Importantly, consistency does not mean conformity. The right balance is needed between a whole-of-organisation stance and staff members' autonomy to use their professional judgement for their specific students in their specific context. Thus, consistency is more like an overarching framework within which adaptation is possible to ensure suitability and provide scope for innovation.

Since the start of the Review in 2017, much work has been done in the Tasmanian Department of Education to enable such consistency, with the development of the 2019–2022 Literacy Framework, Plan for Action and associated Implementation Plan. The framework lists specifically as one of three system priorities: 'consistent and aligned practices that are informed by evidence', with actions focused on providing system-wide guidance of literacy learning, evidence-based and endorsed resources, and targeted professional learning.

Implications:

- Provide a relatively stable set of guidelines from the Department to schools and from school leadership to school staff to enable a fruitful balance between consistency and autonomy in the implementation of literacy teaching strategies.

- Provide support for school leaders so they can facilitate whole school consistency in literacy practices and approaches.

- Facilitate greater levels of interschool networking and sharing of good practice to support state-wide consistency.

- Enhance communication between the Department and the University, to ensure literacy teaching practice and teacher learning for literacy are broadly 'on the same page'.

10.5 Systematic and appropriate monitoring

Supporting learning by school and university students, and also by educators and policy-makers to improve literacy outcomes requires information as the basis of ongoing decision-making.

For school students, there is consensus about the importance of assessment, but debate continues about which measures are most appropriate and useful. Formative and summative assessment serve different purposes and have different strengths and limitations. These characteristics mean multiple types of data are needed to gauge student progress in literacy, both at individual and whole school levels. Some caution is needed, however, to guard against over-assessment. It is crucial to ensure that types of assessment are matched to purpose; so, too, it is vital to accurately interpret the resulting data and then act promptly and appropriately to support sustained literacy improvements for students.

For university students in initial teacher education, several assessment measures are now mandated: the Non-Academic Capabilities Assessment Tool, prior to enrolment; the Literacy and Numeracy Test for Initial Teacher Education (LANTITE), prior to the final professional experience placement; and the Graduate Teacher Performance Assessment, prior to registration as a teacher. In addition, appropriate assessment of preservice teachers' achievements during their professional experience has been highlighted as of central importance. Supervising teachers in particular play a key role in mediating preservice teachers' learning experiences.

At system level, international research suggests that the most effective teacher education systems (that is, those in countries that perform well on international measures) have rigorous quality assurance arrangements. First, the status of teaching must be sufficiently high to attract suitable candidates to what is undoubtedly a very demanding profession. Admission requirements to initial teacher education programs need to accommodate alternative pathways to university entrance, ensuring that the diversity of new teachers reflects the diversity of the students they will teach. Moreover, care must be taken that adherence to regulatory requirements for the accreditation of initial teacher education programs does not become a more dominant focus than the provision of sound, evidence-informed initial teacher education that suits the Tasmanian context.

The 2019–2022 Literacy Framework lists specifically, as one of three system priorities, 'valid and reliable measures of impact and learner growth', focused both on individual students and on quality assurance across the system.

Implications:

- Develop the data-literacy of all educators. This strategy means understanding the different purposes of different types of assessment as well as being able to analyse and act on assessment data to improve and effectively target literacy teaching. Both initial teacher education and continuing professional learning and development programs play a role in supporting educators to develop these capabilities.

- Enhance professional learning among supervising teachers in schools for the formative and summative assessment of the preservice teachers they supervise on professional experience. In addition, where possible ensure that supervising teachers are exemplary teachers who have demonstrated a high level of proficiency in teaching literacy.

- Reflect on and improve the implementation and use of mandated assessment measures, such as NAPLAN in schools and LANTITE in initial teacher education, and of processes for entry into teacher education and for the accreditation of teacher preparation programs. While these tests and processes are largely externally set and required, there is some scope to decide how they are enacted and used locally to enhance their value for supporting literacy teaching and learning and to minimise unintended negative consequences of standardised regimes.

10.6 Commitment to and support for lifelong learning

Literacy learning in school provides a foundation for lifelong learning. Sound literacy capabilities across all elements of literacy enable people to engage fruitfully in further education and training, in work, in social connections, and in civic life. Literacy enables people to make sense of the world and to take control of their lives, shape their own pathways, and contribute to society. The lifelong significance of literacy is recognised in the 2019–2022 Department of Education Literacy Framework, which includes a focus on literacy for life. For adults who wish to improve their literacy, the 26TEN program offers support in Tasmania.

Educators also continue to learn. Preservice teachers do not stop learning the day they graduate. Major reports that have synthesised international evidence regarding good practice highlight the point that initial teacher education and continuing professional learning are usefully conceptualised as occurring on a continuum of career-long learning. 'Classroom readiness' for teaching literacy is therefore an ongoing process that involves learning during initial teacher education through coursework and on professional experience placements and through professional learning afterwards, both in the transition period immediately post-graduation and in the years beyond.

Mediated support provided by exemplary mentors is useful for both preservice teachers in professional experience and for beginning teachers in the induction phase of their professional learning. A commitment to mentoring and induction has been made by members of the Education Workforce Roundtable in Tasmania.

Good practice in continuing professional learning and development for teaching literacy involves strong leadership to create the conditions for capacity-building. Coaching and collaborative learning within and between schools and initial teacher education providers support not only individual staff learning but also improvement across the organisation, whether within the Department of Education or the University.

Implications:

- Promote literacy as a key to opening opportunities for successful learning and life beyond the school gates.
- Recognise classroom readiness as an ongoing process relying on career-long learning.
- Provide comprehensive and extended induction and mentoring programs to support successful transition to the profession for newly graduated teachers, which has been identified as a key priority in the Education Workforce Roundtable Declaration.
- Ensure the quality of teacher mentors by supporting ongoing professional learning and mentoring for mentors, including literacy coaches.
- Develop professional learning communities within and between schools.
- Encourage and enable participation in relevant professional learning by all educators, regardless of the stage of their career.

Appendix A

2019–2022 Department of Education Literacy Framework

Connected, resilient, creative and curious learners

ASPIRATION | **GROWTH** | **COURAGE** | **RESPECT**

OUR GOAL

Our learners have the skills and confidence in literacy to successfully participate in learning, life and work

WHAT GUIDES US

- 2018–2021 Department of Education Strategic Plan
- Melbourne Declaration
- Tasmania's Strategy for Children — Pregnancy to Eight 2018 – 2021
- 26TEN Tasmania: Tasmania's Strategy for Adult Literacy and Numeracy 2016 – 2025

DOMAINS

WHAT WE AIM TO ACHIEVE

Language for literacy
Skilled and confident learners who use oral, augmentative and alternative communication effectively.

Learning to be literate
Skilled and confident learners who actively engage in creating and interpreting a variety of texts.

Literacy for learning
Engaged and confident learners who transfer and apply literacy skills across all areas of learning

Literacy for life
Confident and motivated learners who access ways to improve their literacy skills.

ACTIONS FOR IMPACT

1. Develop a public campaign to promote the importance of oral language.
2. Build on the collaborative culture between speech and language pathologists and educators for a more coherent approach to improve oral, augmentative and alternative communication.
3. Increase access and support for learners to improve oral, augmentative and alternative communication.
4. Provide system-wide guidance for literacy learning through the effective teaching of English for literacy learning across the curriculum.
5. Provide evidence-based and endorsed resources to support effective teaching of English for literacy learning across the curriculum.
6. Provide quality and targeted professional learning to build the capacity of leaders and educators to improve their teaching of English for literacy learning.
7. Develop clear expectations and guidelines to build system-wide understanding of the measurement of learner growth in literacy.
8. Implement the tools and supports for effective measurement of learner growth in literacy.
9. Implement the tools and supports to measure the impact of system-wide literacy actions on our learners.

SYSTEM PRIORITIES

- Attention to the importance of oral, augmentative and alternative communication for literacy learning
- Consistent and aligned practices that are informed by evidence
- Valid and reliable measures of impact and learner growth

CHILD AND FAMILY CENTRES | **EARLY LEARNING HUBS** | **SCHOOLS** | **LIBRARIES**

Tasmanian Government

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
learners first

Appendix B

Improving Literacy in Key Stage 1 – Recommendations Summary

1. Develop pupils' speaking and listening skills and wider understanding of language

A focus on developing oral language skills is especially important for the development of a range of reading and writing skills in this age group.

Useful speaking and listening activities include:
- pupils read books aloud and are encouraged to have conversations about them;
- a teacher models inference-making by asking relevant questions and answering them herself;
- pupils engage in paired or group work so they can share the thought processes that led them to make inferences;
- activities which extend pupils' spoken and receptive vocabulary; and
- a teacher encourages children to clearly articulate what they are going to say in their writing.

EVIDENCE STRENGTH: VERY EXTENSIVE / **EXTENSIVE** / MODERATE / LIMITED / VERY LIMITED

2. Use a balanced and engaging approach to developing reading, which integrates both decoding and comprehension skills

Both decoding (the ability to translate written words into the sounds of spoken language) and comprehension (the ability to understand the meaning of the language being read) skills are necessary for confident and competent reading, but neither is sufficient on its own.

It is also important to remember that progress in literacy requires motivation and engagement, which will help children to develop persistence and enjoyment in their reading.

Children will need a range of wider language and literacy experiences to develop their understanding of written texts in all their forms. This should include active engagement with different media and genres of texts and a wide range of content topics.

EVIDENCE STRENGTH: **VERY EXTENSIVE** / EXTENSIVE / MODERATE / LIMITED / VERY LIMITED

3. Effectively implement a systematic phonics programme

Systematic phonics approaches explicitly teach pupils a comprehensive set of letter-sound relationships through an organised sequence.

The following should be considered when teaching a phonics programme.
- A phonics programme will only be effective if it is delivered using effective pedagogy. How phonics is taught is important.
- Pupils' progress should be monitored to check whether it can be accelerated or extra support is required.
- Lessons should engage pupils, develop persistence and perseverance, and be enjoyable to teach.
- All staff involved in teaching the programme should have received training on how to deliver the programme.
- The programme should be implemented as intended by the developer.

EVIDENCE STRENGTH: **VERY EXTENSIVE** / EXTENSIVE / MODERATE / LIMITED / VERY LIMITED

4. Teach pupils to use strategies for developing and monitoring their reading comprehension

Reading comprehension can be improved by teaching pupils specific strategies that they can apply to both check how well they comprehend what they read, and overcome barriers to comprehension. These include:
- inference,
- questioning,
- clarifying,
- summarising, and
- predicting.

Teachers could introduce these strategies using modelling and structured support, which should be strategically reduced as a child progresses until the child is capable of completing the activity independently.

EVIDENCE STRENGTH: **VERY EXTENSIVE** / EXTENSIVE / MODERATE / LIMITED / VERY LIMITED

5. Teach pupils to use strategies for planning and monitoring their writing

Pupils writing can be improved by teaching them to effectively plan and monitor their writing. Teaching a number of different strategies is likely to help, depending on the current skills of the writer. These include:
- pre-writing activities;
- structuring text;
- sentence combination;
- summarising;
- drafting, editing and revising; and
- sharing.

Teachers could introduce these strategies using modelling and structured support, which should be strategically reduced as a child progresses until the child is capable of completing the activity independently.

EVIDENCE STRENGTH: VERY EXTENSIVE / EXTENSIVE / **MODERATE** / LIMITED / VERY LIMITED

6. Promote fluent written transcription skills by encouraging extensive and effective practice and explicitly teaching spelling

Transcription refers to the physical processes of handwriting or typing, and spelling.

Children must develop their fluency in these skills to the point that they have become automated. If children have to concentrate to ensure their transcription is accurate, they will be less able to think about the content of their writing.

A large amount of practice, supported by effective feedback, is required to develop fluency. Achieving the necessary quantity of practice requires that children are motivated and fully engaged in the process of improving their writing.

Spelling should be explicitly taught. Teaching should focus on spellings that are relevant to the topic or genre being studied.

EVIDENCE STRENGTH: VERY EXTENSIVE / EXTENSIVE / MODERATE / **LIMITED** / VERY LIMITED

7. Use high-quality information about pupils' current capabilities to select the best next steps for teaching

Collect high quality, up-to-date information about pupil's current capabilities, and adapt teaching accordingly to focus on exactly what the pupil needs to progress. This approach is more efficient because effort is spent on the best next step and not wasted by rehearsing skills or content that a child already knows well.

Teaching can be adapted by:
- *Changing the focus.* Models of typical literacy development can be used to diagnose pupils' capabilities and select a particular aspect of literacy to focus on next.
- *Changing the approach.* If a pupil is disengaged or is finding activities too easy or too hard, adopt a different approach at the same aspect of literacy.

EVIDENCE STRENGTH: VERY EXTENSIVE / EXTENSIVE / **MODERATE** / LIMITED / VERY LIMITED

8. Use high-quality structured interventions to help pupils who are struggling with their literacy

Schools should focus on core classroom teaching strategies, which improve literacy for the whole class. However, even when excellent classroom teaching is occurring, it is likely that a small number of children will also require more focused literacy instruction to make expected progress.

The first step should be to use accurate diagnosis of capabilities and difficulties to match pupils to appropriate interventions.

There is a strong and consistent body of evidence demonstrating the benefit of one-to-one or small-group tutoring using structured interventions for children who are struggling with literacy.

EVIDENCE STRENGTH: VERY EXTENSIVE / **EXTENSIVE** / MODERATE / LIMITED / VERY LIMITED

Education Endowment Foundation

- Recommendations related to speaking and listening
- Recommendations related to reading
- Recommendations related to writing
- Recommendations related to assessment and diagnosis
- Recommendations related to structured one to one/small group interventions

Appendix C

Improving Literacy in Key Stage 2 – Recommendations Summary

Education Endowment Foundation

Recommendations related to speaking and listening

Recommendations related to reading

Recommendations related to writing

Recommendations related to assessment and diagnosis

Recommendations related to targeted interventions.

1 — Develop pupils' language capability to support their reading and writing

Purposeful speaking and listening activities support the development of pupils' language capability and provides a foundation for thinking and communication.

Purposeful activities include:

- reading books aloud and discussing them;
- activities that extend pupils' expressive and receptive vocabulary;
- collaborative learning activities where pupils can share their thought processes;
- structured questioning to develop reading comprehension;
- teachers modelling inference-making by thinking aloud; and
- pupils articulating their ideas verbally before they start writing.

EVIDENCE STRENGTH
VERY EXTENSIVE
EXTENSIVE
MODERATE
LIMITED
VERY LIMITED

2 — Support pupils to develop fluent reading capabilities

Fluent readers can read quickly, accurately, and with appropriate stress and intonation.

Fluent reading supports comprehension because pupils' cognitive resources are freed from focusing on word recognition and can be redirected towards comprehending the text.

This can be developed through:

- guided oral reading instruction—teachers model fluent reading of a text, then pupils read the same text aloud with appropriate feedback; and
- repeated reading—pupils re-read a short and meaningful passage a set number of times or until they reach a suitable level of fluency.

It is important to understand pupils' current capabilities and teach accordingly. Most pupils will need an emphasis on developing reading fluency, but some pupils may need a focus on more basic skills, such as decoding and phonological awareness.

EVIDENCE STRENGTH
VERY EXTENSIVE
EXTENSIVE
MODERATE
LIMITED
VERY LIMITED

3 — Teach reading comprehension strategies through modelling and supported practice

Reading comprehension can be improved by teaching specific strategies that pupils can apply both to monitor and overcome barriers to comprehension. These include:

- prediction;
- questioning;
- clarifying;
- summarising;
- inference; and
- activating prior knowledge.

The potential impact of these strategies is very high, but can be hard to achieve, since pupils are required to take greater responsibility for their own learning.

The strategies should be described and modelled before pupils practise the strategies with feedback. Support should then be gradually reduced as pupils take increasing responsibility.

Texts should be carefully selected to support the teaching of these strategies.

EVIDENCE STRENGTH
VERY EXTENSIVE
EXTENSIVE
MODERATE
LIMITED
VERY LIMITED

4 — Teach writing composition strategies through modelling and supported practice

Purpose and audience are central to effective writing. Pupils need to have a reason to write and someone to write for.

Writing can be thought of as a process made up of seven components:

- planning;
- drafting;
- sharing;
- evaluating;
- revising;
- editing; and
- publishing.

Effective writers use a number of strategies to support each component of the writing process. Pupils should learn how, when, and why to use each strategy. For example, pupils' planning could be improved by teaching the strategies of goal setting and activating prior knowledge.

The strategies should be described and modelled before pupils practise them with feedback. Support should then be gradually reduced as pupils take increasing responsibility.

EVIDENCE STRENGTH
VERY EXTENSIVE
EXTENSIVE
MODERATE
LIMITED
VERY LIMITED

5 — Develop pupils' transcription and sentence construction skills through extensive practice

A fluent writing style supports composition because pupils' cognitive resources are freed from focusing on handwriting, spelling, and sentence construction and can be redirected towards writing composition.

Extensive practice, supported by effective feedback, is required to develop fluent transcription skills.

Spelling should be explicitly taught and diagnostic assessment should be used to focus effort on the spellings that pupils are finding difficult.

Pupils should practise sentence-combining and other sentence construction techniques.

EVIDENCE STRENGTH
VERY EXTENSIVE
EXTENSIVE
MODERATE
LIMITED
VERY LIMITED

6 — Target teaching and support by accurately assessing pupil needs

High-quality assessment and diagnosis should be used to target and adapt teaching to pupils' needs.

Rapid provision of support is important, but it is critical to ensure it is the right support. Diagnostic assessment can be used to inform professional judgement about the best next steps. Diagnostic assessment makes teaching more efficient by ensuring that effort is not wasted on rehearsing skills or content that a pupil already knows well.

A range of diagnostic assessments are available and staff should be trained to use and interpret these effectively.

This approach can be used for high- and low-attaining pupils and for whole-class and targeted interventions.

EVIDENCE STRENGTH
VERY EXTENSIVE
EXTENSIVE
MODERATE
LIMITED
VERY LIMITED

7 — Use high-quality structured interventions to help pupils who are struggling with their literacy

Schools should focus first on developing core classroom teaching strategies that improve the literacy capabilities of the whole class. With this in place, the need for additional support should decrease. Nevertheless, it is likely that a small number of pupils will require additional support.

There is a strong and consistent body of evidence demonstrating the benefit of structured interventions for pupils who are struggling with their literacy. The first step should be to use accurate diagnosis of capabilities and difficulties to match pupils to appropriate interventions.

EVIDENCE STRENGTH
VERY EXTENSIVE
EXTENSIVE
MODERATE
LIMITED
VERY LIMITED

Appendix D

Education
Endowment
Foundation

**IMPROVING LITERACY IN
SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

Summary of recommendations

1 Prioritise 'disciplinary literacy' across the curriculum

- Literacy is key to learning across all subjects in secondary school and a strong predictor of outcomes in later life.
- Disciplinary literacy is an approach to improving literacy across the curriculum that emphasises the importance of subject specific support.
- All teachers should be supported to understand how to teach students to read, write and communicate effectively in their subjects.
- School leaders can help teachers by ensuring training related to literacy priorities subject specificity over general approaches.

2 Provide targeted vocabulary instruction in every subject

- Teachers in every subject should provide explicit vocabulary instruction to help students access and use academic language.
- Effective approaches, including those related to etymology and morphology, will help students remember new words and make connections between words.
- Teachers should prioritise teaching Tier 2 and 3 vocabulary, which students are unlikely to encounter in everyday speech.
- Teachers and subject leaders should consider which words and phrases to teach as part of curriculum planning.

3 Develop students' ability to read complex academic texts

- Training focused on teaching reading is likely to help secondary school teachers teach their subject more effectively.
- To comprehend complex texts, students need to actively engage with what they are reading and use their existing subject knowledge.
- Reading strategies, such as activating prior knowledge, prediction and questioning, can improve students' comprehension.
- Strategies can be introduced through modelling and group work, before support is gradually removed to promote independence.

4 Break down complex writing tasks

- Writing is challenging and students in every subject will benefit from explicit instruction in how to improve.
- Teachers can break writing down into planning, monitoring and evaluation, and can support students by modelling each step.
- Targeted support should be provided to students who struggle to write fluently, as this may affect writing quality.
- Teachers can use a variety of approaches, including collaborative and paired writing, to motivate students to write.

5 Combine writing instruction with reading in every subject

- Combining reading activities and writing instruction is likely to improve students' skills in both, compared to a less balanced approach.
- Reading helps students gain knowledge, which leads to better writing, whilst writing can deepen students' understanding of ideas.
- Students should be taught to recognise features, aims and conventions of good writing within each subject.
- Teaching spelling, grammar and punctuation explicitly can improve students' writing, particularly when focused on meaning.

6 Provide opportunities for structured talk

- Talk matters: both in its own right and because of its impact on other aspects of learning.
- High quality talk is typically well-structured and guided by teachers.
- Accountable talk is a useful framework to ensure talk is high quality, and emphasises how talk can be subject specific.
- Teachers can support students by modelling high quality talk, for example including key vocabulary and metacognitive reflection.

7 Provide high quality literacy interventions for struggling students

- Schools should expect and proactively plan to support students with the weakest levels of literacy, particularly in Year 7.
- Developing a model of tiered support, which increases in intensity in line with need is a promising approach.
- Assessment should be used to match students to appropriate types of intervention, and to monitor the impact of interventions.
- Creating a co-ordinated system of support is a significant challenge requiring both specialist input and whole school leadership.

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