

Dr Noella M Mackenzie, Associate professor (adjunct) Charles Sturt University
Submission in response to the Literacy Advisory Panel's Community Consultation Paper
One

Attention: Literacy Advisory Panel policy@dpac.tas.gov.au

Answers and comments in response to the Advisory Panel questions:

1. What is currently working well to improve literacy?
 - I have chosen to highlight what is happening in **the two English speaking countries who scored highest on the 2016 PIRLS – Year 4 assessment**. This may bring a different perspective to the discussion in Tasmania. **The first is The Republic of Ireland and the second is Northern Ireland.**
 - **I am focusing on the early years of school** as that is my area of expertise and most recent experience.

 - **Ireland** expects its teachers to be: ‘familiar with the *various* strategies, approaches, methodologies and interventions that can be used to teach literacy’.
 - Approaches to education are *child-friendly and developmental*. Year 1 teachers are advised to be ‘developmentally appropriate and *avoid premature formalities... be child-centred*, broadly-based, prioritise *play* and reinforce the concept of the child as an *active learner*’.
 - Emphasis in Year 1 is on *spoken language* (Irish as well as English, to ensure that all children are bilingual).
 - Children learn to read on the foundation of spoken language and “recognizing some personal and familiar words and letters. Detailed letter-by-letter reading is preceded by activities such as identifying and generating rhyming words and distinguishing between two spoken sounds. After that, there is a gradual progression - recognises names and sounds some lower-case and upper-case letters and begins to blend phonemes, recognises a few high-frequency words in familiar contexts and uses one or two letters, often first and last, to identify other words. Uses pictorial cues to read some words.”
 - From Year 2, phonological awareness and phonics are treated as part of a bigger picture that includes word recognition, engagement, vocabulary building, a sense of genre, and skills of self-correction.
 - It is clear from Ireland’s Literacy and Numeracy Strategy and its National Curriculum that the aim is to empower teachers - **Teacher education** should enable teachers “to be familiar with *the various* strategies, approaches, methodologies and interventions that can be used to teach literacy and numeracy as *discrete areas and across the curriculum*.”
 - In **Northern Ireland** they oppose a one-size fits-all approach to the teaching of reading - ‘there is no one method, medium, approach, device or philosophy that holds the key ... to learning to read ...’
 - In Northern Ireland the Linguistic Phonics Approach is often utilized (but not enforced). LPA begins with the sounds and oral language skills children bring with them to school and progresses to a stage where they marry sounds with the written word.
 - Implicit is the notion that children can learn to make associations between their spoken language (native speech sounds which are embedded from around the age of one) and the written language.
 - “*Specifically, we believe that by starting with the language skills developed before the child starts formal schooling, the LPA provides a reading experience that scaffolds and develops the young child’s learning in a more naturalistic manner than is currently offered by other synthetic phonics approaches*” (Gray et al, 2007, p. 31).
2. Do you know a program or activity that supports literacy development in Tasmania that is not listed in this document?
 - My knowledge of what is happening in Tasmania is limited. I will leave those who have an insider’s understanding to answer this and will use the space to add some outsider comments at the end.

3. Considering the organisational map (p. 35):

- Of the Some statements from gathering of evidence to date (p.28) lack supporting evidence or research. This needs to be corrected.

What do you think the gaps are?

- The document begins with a literacy definition that is broad (p.4) and on page 7 there is further reference to new forms of literacy but then the document almost **ignores writing (and multimodality)** completely. This is a huge oversight and one that must be rectified if Tasmanian children are to develop the literacy skills they need to thrive in the future. While reading is important it only gives children to information created by others – by teaching children to write we teach them to create knowledge – and to think through the process of writing.
 - According to UNESCO - **Writing – is a key competence that children must master** (UNESCO, 2017).
 - Success in learning to write.... is critical, to success with literacy proficiency generally (Cutler & Graham, 2008), reading achievement specifically (Gerde, Bingham & Wasski, 2012) and accomplishment in school overall. (Clay 2001; Fang & Wang, 2011; Mackenzie, 2009)
 - According to the work of Deborah Brandt, writing has taken over from reading as the literacy skill of most consequence (2015)
 - Previous research in NSW found year 9 NAPLAN results across five areas – reading, numeracy, writing, spelling and grammar – are strong predictors of **HSC performance**. The new analysis by the NSW government’s Centre for Statistics and Evaluation (CESE). . . found that of those: **writing is the best predictor**.
 - Teachers need to teach both the secretarial (transcription) skills as well as the authorial skills of writing. These help students with reading as well as writing.
 - Reading and writing are reciprocal processes - “. . . reading and writing are connected and mutually supportive. Engagement and instruction in one result in improvement in the other” (Graham, 2020).
- There is Insufficient reference to **conversation and talk** (p. 12) - the importance of parents talking with their child – turn-taking conversation that promotes language and conceptual development and encourages storying and wondering (Hirsh-Pasek, 2014) and talking about shared experiences.
- **Context applies to learning at all ages** – not just adult learning (p. 14).
- The conditions for learning (p. 14) omit the crucial elements of **motivation and engagement**. Suggest [Debra Crouch and Brian Cambourne](#).
- **Reading is a complex process** where readers extract and construct meaning simultaneously.
- Teaching children how to read requires **deep knowledge about the reading process** and the ability to adapt our pedagogy to meet the needs of **diverse learners**. **There are no simple solutions.** ‘
- *. . . reading instruction **can and should be delivered in artful and authentic ways that engage students**. . . successful teaching of reading blends both science of reading and teacher art or craft.*’ (Paige et al 2021)
- While phonics is an essential component, it is not sufficient to make literate learners and citizens.
- There is no reference in the document to the need to inspire children to want to read and write. [N.B. The PIRLS 2016 ranked English children’s enjoyment of reading at 34th, the lowest of any English-speaking country (Solity 2018).]
- Multimodality is also missing from this document and yet most texts that our children are reading and hopefully writing in the future will be multimodal.
- More attention is needed on the literacy skills in different subjects – the genres and the vocabularies.

What opportunities are there?

- Endless – but this won’t be possible while literacy is simplified to reading and reading is then distilled to phonics. The complex nature of learning to be literate should be celebrated not feared.
- Connect reading, writing, listening, and speaking in all discussions of literacy.
- Prioritise the teaching and learning of writing.

- Raise the profile of literacy learning but also make it accessible to all.
- Always start instruction by recognising and valuing what students already know and can do and build.
- Support schools with support and resources so that they can avoid overreliance on commercial programs and testing regimes.
- Recognise and acknowledge the languages and dialects that children bring to preschool and school.

What supports need to be in place?

- Support for teachers – At the school level teachers make the most difference – not the school – or the syllabus – or the program. (Hattie, 2009).
 - Support for high quality, ongoing teacher professional learning - building pedagogical content knowledge – understanding of how children learn, how to support diverse needs, how to articulate what they are doing and why – to the community and their colleagues.
 - Support for families – from the very beginning – throughout their children’s schooling.
 - Support for students at all levels – Start with quality instruction in the classroom (first wave) and then provide necessary interventions to build on the classroom program providing extra help as needed.
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N.B. I have not commented on the data sets – I am sure others will. My concern is that large data sets can take the teacher away from the daily needs of students that are changing rapidly. ***What teachers need is knowledge of the reading and writing processes and then ways of systematically observing the development of their students to make day by day decisions on how to continue the child’s learning or provide needed intervention in a timely manner.***

Other observations

- The document is well designed and presented which gives the impression that the messages it represents are already set in concrete. That is off putting
- The images need to be reconsidered so that they confirm the message you are trying to portray – for example – the image following on from the discussion of literacy as a broad concept has a phonics lesson – Was this the intended message? The image on p.29 of a child so young being required to colour in - a restrictive, rule driven process. She should have blank paper and the freedom to explore without restriction. I think the images are telling their own story – one of adult dominance and control.
- The emphasis on the **need for good first teaching** is not as clear as I would like to see it.
- The diagram on page 10 may be improved by reference to **Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological theory**.
- The Phonics Check is not referenced. Is it the one which started in England (Not the UK)? There is no reference to identify it from other phonics assessments.
- The information from the Catholic Schools refers to the **Science of Reading (SoR)** when I think they mean ‘The Simple View of Reading’ (SVR) - Gough and Tunmer (1986). **The SoR and SVR are not one and the same although they are often used in the media as if they are.**
 - ‘The “Science of Reading” (SOR) . . . accumulated knowledge about *reading, reading development, and best practices for reading instruction obtained by the use of the scientific method. . . ever evolving, at times circuitous, and not without controversy.*’ (Peterscher et al, 2020)
- Reference is made to **Synthetic Phonics** (page 28) without reference – why? Where is the evidence? This document refers to the need for evidence and yet often lack evidence to support statements.
- On page 7 there is a list of bullet points representing *literacy at its simplest* – why not also show what literacy offers at the other end of the spectrum? Particularly in terms of writing to influence others – to make changes to a community. **Writing offers power as does the ability to speak well.**
- **Neglect of writing as mentioned above – must be addressed** - This is a huge oversight.