

Lifting Literacy Lifting Tasmania

Tasmania's Community-wide Framework, Paper One: Setting the Scene

Response from

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Introductory Statement

The Premier and the Tasmanian Cabinet is to be applauded for recognising that community literacy is essential to increasing the state's social, cultural, creative and financial development. In addition, it is encouraging to see the importance of developing a community framework to 'lift literacy' is recognised and initiated in Paper One.

We endorse the development and implementation of 'Lifting Literacy' through a community framework. Our response identifies gaps and inconsistencies and makes further suggestions based on our background as literacy educators and researchers in the primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education and as a former director and writer of a state-wide project in Queensland 'The Literate Futures Project.' In addition, our experience as literacy consultants in Australia, New Zealand, Singapore and Sweden inform our response. We are also very familiar with the Tasmanian context having worked here as literacy education consultants regularly since 2014. We have lived in Tasmania since 2021.

We have responded in dot points to gaps and inconsistency in each section and provided further references to support our commentary.

1. **What is Literacy?** Defining literacy and reinforcing the definition throughout the document.
 - The definition 'what is literacy' endorsed by the Panel and reinforced by the declarative statement that literacy is 'more than reading' on page 4 is not consistently addressed throughout the document.

- The document foregrounds reading and in particular phonics, phonemic analysis, vocabulary development and reading fluency as the most important aspect of literacy (see page 15) neglecting other parts of the definition of literacy.
- Phonics, phonemic analysis, vocabulary development and fluency are necessary but not sufficient to develop literacy in the 21st Century. These skills are only applicable to the linguistic semiotic system.
 - Freebody, P & Luke, A 1990, 'Literacies programs: debates and demands in cultural contexts', *Prospect: Australian Journal of TESOL*, vol. 5, no. 7, pp. 7-16.
- The view of reading presented is narrow and while the document mentions the need to be able to engage with online and digital materials, it does not address the range of knowledge and comprehension skills necessary, that is, a knowledge of and ability to engage with all semiotic systems – linguistic, visual, spatial, audio, gestural, together with literal, inferential, critical and creative comprehension skills
 - Anstey, M & Bull, G 2006, *Teaching and Learning Multiliteracies: Changing Times, Changing Literacies*, International Reading Association, Newark, Delaware.
 - Anstey, M & Bull, G 2018, *Foundations of Multiliteracies: Reading, writing and talking in the 21st century*, Routledge, London.
 - Bull, G & Anstey, M. 2010, *Evolving Pedagogies: Reading and writing in a multimodal world*, Education Services Australia, Carlton South.
- The five semiotic systems are also essential to the development of oracy.
- The reciprocal relationship between reading and writing needs to be explicitly stated together with an explanation about how this relationship helps students make connections between reading, writing and learning at all levels of literacy development.

2. Why is Literacy important?

- Statements about the necessity of literacy and the sample tasks are largely consistent with the definition of literacy on page 4.

- The ‘new forms of literacy’ quoted from UNESCO on page 7 are not addressed consistently in this section. There is an absence regarding digital literacy, and semiotic systems other than the linguistic (that is, spatial, visual, gestural and audio are not addressed).
- The list of sample tasks on page 7 does not *specifically* include or mention the necessity for the development of talk and oracy.
- The list of sample tasks on page 7 requires sophisticated critical comprehension skills and an ability to engage with and use all semiotic systems. Acquiring phonics, phonemic analysis, vocabulary development and fluency are *necessary but not sufficient* to complete these tasks as indicated by the New Work Smarts Report published by The Foundation for Young Australians in 2017.
 - It identified the skills required of workers by 2030 and the implications for schooling. In summary, the report identified the following:
 - workers will spend 100% more of their time involved in problem solving
 - 41% more time on making judgements and engaging in critical thinking
 - 77% more time using science and maths skills, and
 - 17% more time engaging in verbal communication and using interpersonal skills. (The Foundation for Young Australians 2017, The New Work Smarts: Thriving in the new work order, The Foundation for Young Australians, Sydney.)

3. What is a community framework?

- We endorse a community-wide approach.
- It is essential that all cohorts identified in Figure One page 10 understand their community and are aware of each other and their various roles and contributions to literacy development in the community. This ensures collaboration and reinforcement rather than duplication and/or dissonant messages.

- A media campaign regarding these links and potential collaboration would reinforce these messages across Tasmania and provide opportunities for discussion and participation at the local community level.
- Encouraging community members understanding that literacy development is everybody's responsibility is important. Community activities such as the Reading Egg and Reading Bug that was developed in Circular Head community aid development of these understandings.
- Opportunities for community members (truck drivers, farmers, mechanics, sports coaches, dentists, shopkeepers, doctors) to demonstrate to students how reading, writing, digital literacies and oral communication are used in their occupations and businesses through sharing days are excellent ways for students to see the relevance of literacy and forge links in the community. One day 'Writer's camps' with authors and illustrators in the local community are also excellent ways to encourage students to develop their writing abilities.
- Schools should continuously collect data to identify the characteristics of their community rather than work with what they *think* are the characteristics. The process of data collection, together with analysis of the data, can build strong partnerships between school and community.
- Strong partnerships between school and community promote shared understandings about and commitment to literacy development.

4. How we Learn to be Literate

- We endorse the statements on page 12.
- The statement on page 13 regarding 'the Big Six' being representative of general agreement about the teaching of literacy is inappropriate. Five (except oral language) have been based upon the investigations of a National Reading Panel in the United States formed in 1997 to investigate the best approaches to the teaching of reading, *not literacy* in the United States.

- The subsequent findings of the National Reading Panel presented in 2000 identified five areas for teaching reading, *not literacy*. These findings are now 22 years old and based in an American context that is not reflective of Tasmania in 2022.
- In the Australian context, 'The Big Six' represents one group who have adapted and developed these findings into The Big Six which have then informed various commercial programs focussing on the teaching of reading in Australia.
- Such programs do not address the definition of literacy on page 4, nor do they address the diversity of Tasmanian students or differentiate between students.
- The 'explicit instruction' such programs endorse is often repetitive throughout all year levels and across all cohorts of students. It does not respond to the individual characteristics of a community or the individual dispositions and abilities of students, i.e. the teacher's role in knowing their students. It stems from a deficit model of education rather than recognising and responding to difference, where the teacher uses a strengths approach as a starting point for learning and learner success.
- Such an approach also fails to recognise and use the professional knowledge and experience of the teachers in the classroom who know the students and community in which they teach.
- The term 'explicit instruction' is inappropriately interpreted and used, it does not maximise student learning. Our experience in other contexts is that students become bored and tune out, because the approach or 'explicit Instruction' is repeated throughout year levels and does not differentiate between students' individual abilities.
- Such approaches fail to contextualise literacy learning and relate it to students' life experiences. This can alienate students and frustrate them as they fail to see the relevance of literacy learning in their contexts.
- There is a large gap in this section regarding classroom talk and teacher talk in the development of literacy. Research world-wide indicates that classroom talk is the vehicle through which students learn and that when the quality of classroom talk is high then student learning and literacy improves.

- Edwards-Groves, C Anstey, M and Bull, G 2014, *Classroom Talk: Understanding dialogue, pedagogy and practice*, PETAA, Newton, NSW Australia.
- Johnston, P. H. (2004) *Choice Words; How Our Language Affects Children's Learning*. Portland, Maine, Stenhouse.
- Alexander, R J 2001, *Culture and pedagogy: International comparisons in primary education*, Blackwell, Oxford.
- Alexander, R J 2010, 'Speaking but not listening? Accountable talk in an unaccountable context', *Literacy*, vol. 44, no. 3, pp. 103-111.
- The skills identified on page 13, while necessary, will not be sufficient to engage in the sample tasks on page 7. They focus on reading linguistic text. They do not fully address the literacy texts encountered in society which necessitate the use of digital and critical literacies.
- The statement about comprehension does not address the necessity to be able to engage with literal, inferential, critical and creative comprehension skills across all semiotic systems (linguistic, audio, visual, spatial and gestural).
 - Anstey, M & Bull, G. 2016, 'Pedagogies for Developing Literacies of the Visual', *Practical Literacy: The Early and primary Years*, vol. 21, no.1, pp. 22-24.
 - Bull, G. & Anstey, M. 2010, 'Using the Principals of Multiliteracies to Inform Pedagogical Change', in D R Cole & D L Pullen (eds), *Multiliteracies in Motion: Current Theory and Practice*, Routledge, New York, pp. 141-159.
- Statements about the development of writing, links between writing and reading and oracy on p13 are not addressed with the level of detail and explicitness as the preceding statements about oral language, vocabulary, phonemic awareness, phonics, comprehension and fluency. This infers that the development of writing, links between writing and reading and oracy are not as important. This is inconsistent with the definition of literacy on page 4.
- The lack of detail and explicitness regarding the development of writing, links between writing and reading and oracy is a gap that must be addressed in order to

ensure the 'Learning to be Literate' section is aligned with the definition of literacy on page 4.

- While reading and writing are different acts, they involve many of the same processes. Both are dynamic and involve continuous interpretation, shaping and reshaping, as representations of meaning are processed. Both potentially involve interaction with others as resources in the process of writing and reading. Both require drawing upon and using multiple resources in order to fulfil a specific purpose in, or for, a specific context. Both reading and writing as processes involve higher order thinking skills and problem-solving. A narrow, skills only, view of reading and writing will not assist students to engage with the literacy requirements of the 21st century.
- References 11, 12 and 13 on p13 are incomplete and therefore cannot be accessed.