

Foundation for Learning and Literacy



<https://foundationforlearningandliteracy.info/>

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Submission in response to the Literacy Advisory Panel's Community Consultation Paper One

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

About the Foundation for Learning and Literacy (FLL) FLL is an Australian foundation established in 2020 to provide information about relevant research and classroom practices that establish an evidence base for effective literacy teaching and learning. Our aim is to support teachers and parents who work every day with children to give them the power, the joy and the skills of talking and listening, reading and viewing and writing. The Foundation's resources are also be of interest to anyone concerned with educational policy making, including politicians, business and the media. FLL has developed [Touchstones](#) for effective literacy teaching and learning that are supported by research, and successful classroom practice.

Feedback and comment

The panel is to be congratulated on the use of a broad definition of literacy that encompasses more than reading and acknowledges how different purpose and context require different ways of being literate. It is also important that the consultation is community-wide. The purposes of literacy in the Tasmanian context have been well articulated and it is these purposes that must stay at the forefront of the recommendations later in the paper, for example, 'Literacy is not an end, but a fundamental means by which we make sense of the world and participate in it. It continues to develop across the life span.' (p.7)

Answers and comments in response to the Advisory Panel questions:

1. What is currently working well to improve literacy?

- The ACT Education Directorate is currently using the [10 Essential Instructional Practices in Literacy](#) as a framework for literacy instruction in the early and primary years.
- Literacy, Social Justice and Inclusive Practice, Open Education <https://www.open.edu/openlearn/mod/oucontent/view.php?id=48460&printable=1>
- [Teacher Effectiveness for Language Learning \(TELL\)](#)
- [School Drama Program](#) - teacher professional learning using drama and literature to improve student literacy and engagement. See [research](#) about the success of this program.
- [Connected Program – adult literacy learning through drama](#)
- Identity texts program: <https://janetdutton9.wixsite.com/identitytextsproject/>

2. Do you know a program or activity that supports literacy development in Tasmania that is not listed in this document?

- [The Story Island Project](#) is supporting young writers with great success.

Effective teachers use their professional expertise to tailor programs to meet the needs of individual learners. FLL's Touchstone 10 reminds us that: 'Even a good program relies on a good teacher for it to have an impact on learning for individual learners. *Focused practitioners, not programs, drive success. Professionals working together with focus is what counts.*' ([Fullan](#))

3. Considering the organisational map (p. 35): There are some sweeping and highly generalised statements listed in parts of the key themes that emerged from gathering of evidence to date (p.28) without stating any

supporting evidence or research. Some interviewee participants may have stated opinions rather than cite current peer reviewed research as evidence.

What do you think the gaps are?

- p. 12 omits the importance of parents talking with their child – turn-taking conversation that promotes language and conceptual development and encourages storying and wondering. Fluid conversations about shared rituals and objects, (Hirsh-Pasek, 2014) and talking about shared reading. Insufficient mention of substantive conversation and talk.
- p. 13 outlines the Big 6 but omits to acknowledge the critical importance of writing. 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)
- reading and writing are reciprocal – connected and mutually supportive – engagement in one assists the advancement in another. ‘If you haven’t asked children to take it to writing, then they haven’t really mastered the foundational literacy skills they need to succeed.’ (Reutzel, 2020, p. 30).
- p.13 ‘Reading depends on speech and writing represents spoken language.’ This is an incomplete view of language. English is a morphophonemic language – a code that represents both sound and meaning. Writing is the representation of sense and meaning. The [role of morphology and context](#) is missing.
- on p. 14 it is suggested that adult learning is “contextualised appropriately” yet context applies to *all* stages of learning. This particularly relates to aspects of literacy such as ‘vocabulary in the Big Six p.13 in secondary school.
- p.14 – the conditions for learning omit the crucial element of motivation and engagement – see the research of [Linda Gambrell](#) and [Debra Crouch and Brian Cambourne](#).
- p. 28 - while phonics is an essential component, it is not sufficient to make literate learners and citizens. Learning to be literate is a complex process and the view portrayed here is ‘simple’. Reading is an active process where readers extract and construct meaning simultaneously.
- more emphasis is needed on sharing imaginative fiction at all ages and stages of learners’ literacy development. Research (eg [Castano and Kidd](#), [Koopman](#)) demonstrates its importance in developing understanding different perspectives, identity, and empathy and compassion.
- more attention to literacy skills in different subjects and disciplines including vocabulary etc is needed.
- a focus on the need to continue to develop lifelong literacy learning – 44% of adults over 40 are functionally illiterate because they do not continue to develop their literacy skills. Language and literacy issues are compounded over time with continued economic and social disadvantage.

What opportunities are there?

- continue to work with highly regarded Australian literacy experts such as MacKenzie and Adoniou who are already working with the Department of Education.
- emphasise the complex nature of learning to be literate. ‘Interventions such as programs are predicated on teacher learning being complicated, but teacher learning **is** complex. It is not surprising that most programs have little sustainable impact. Complexity is characterised by interactions and interdependencies.’ (Timperley et al. 2020, p.2).
- build teacher knowledge of the interrelationship of phonology (letter sound relationships), morphology (meaningful parts of words) and etymology (history of the language) in helping them understand the English orthography (writing system).
- place an emphasis on real world learning (contextualising knowledge) connecting important instruction to student interest whether in Kindergarten through to adult education: motivation and self-belief are key.

- raise the community's awareness of the joy of reading, where to access texts - partner with libraries. 'Emotion and cognition cannot be separated' (Vygotsky)
- ensure teachers start with what children, adolescents, adults know and can do and build.

What supports need to be in place?

- Professional learning for teachers building their pedagogical content knowledge – how and why they would choose from a repertoire of teaching strategies.
- Avoid overreliance on testing regimes. Commercially produced test regimes should not become the defacto curriculum driving what is taught and learned.
- Recognise and acknowledge the languages and dialects that children bring to preschool and school.

Questions on measures and targets *'The problem with inequity in education has worsened in recent decades, despite and perhaps even because of efforts to address the issue of inequality, to close the "achievement gap", and to help children from disadvantaged backgrounds to perform as well as their peers (Zhao, 2016, 2018). These efforts...are often rooted in the tradition of rewarding "excellence and performativity often in very narrow and selective ways." The so-called excellence is generally measured as test scores in a few subjects and consequently equity is indicated by the gaps in test scores among different groups of students. As such, education systems and schools have become prisoners of international and national testing agencies, investing in policies and practices to raise their test scores.'* (Zhao, Y. in Harris, A. & Jones, M. (2021) *System Recall- Leading for Excellence and Equity in Education*. Corwin)

FLL urges the Tasmanian Literacy Panel to move towards smaller data as advocated by eminent educational researcher Pasi Sahlberg. He urges school systems to downgrade the importance of the big test regimes and focus on what matters most in education. Big test data should not guide the fine-grained decisions that educators make for every student in classrooms every day. These judgements need to be based on deep professional knowledge and understanding. See [FLL Touchstone 7](#)

What measures and targets do you think are required for the community-wide framework?

- It is widely stated by educational researchers and educators themselves, that we need to work out what it is we value in learning and then look at ways to measure and monitor this in ways that are supportive of every student. We need to take an assets lens and see what each student can do rather than what they cannot.
Do you know of any sources of data, not listed in the organisational map (from page 54), that track literacy rates/development in Tasmania?
- Is the BASE assessment used in Prep? This can provide helpful tracking information as it is administered by the classroom teacher and is more fine-grained than some assessments.

Are there any additional measures that you believe are required to track the progress of the community-wide framework?

- Be aware that the phonics check is not a vocabulary check or a check of ability to read and comprehend. Consider ways of noticing the growth in learner's vocabulary (quality formative assessment) through noticing language they use both orally, in written text and comprehension when reading.

What short term (less than three years) and medium term (three to ten years) measurable targets across the lifespan do you consider important?

- Be mindful of naming measurable markers on one component of literacy learning such as phonics, and then wonder why students are unable to use that knowledge successfully.