

**Probing Relationships Between
Literacy Research, Policy Development and Classroom Practice**

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Abstract

This paper will report on preliminary findings of a collaborative investigation of literacy across wide-ranging contexts. Probing literacy policies, research and practices, we have asked the question, What is the nature of the relationship between literacy research, policy development, and classroom practice? Such a question is timely in the current climate of literacy inquiries and reforms. This question is explored in this paper, making key connections to Australia's national agendas. From this exploration, future directions for literacy that this study suggests are discussed.

Amidst literacy inquiries and proposed reforms in Australia and overseas, the nexus between literacy research, policy and practice remains a vexed issue. Research articles continue to proliferate in journals and other venues. Government-funded reports continue to present findings of literature reviews that may be exhaustive but, at times, are also highly selective and prioritise preferred paradigms of research and teaching. In the popular press, research is recontextualised again, sometimes seeing researchers pitted against one another in a sensationalised public arena.

In this variegated and often contentious context, this paper seeks to explore some aspects of the nexus among literacy research, policy and practice. It does so with a specific focus on research reported in the *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy (AJLL)* over the past five years. Findings of an analysis of this archive is presented and discussed in the broader context of recent national agendas and reports in Australia – notably, 'Teaching Reading' (DEST, 2005).

The 'Nexus Project'

This paper is located in a larger collaborative project, 'An Investigation of the Relationship Between Literacy Research, Policy Development and Classroom Practice' (Harris, Derewianka, Turbill, Cambourne, Cruickshank, Fitzsimmons, McKenzie, Chen and Kervin, 2003). Dubbed the 'Nexus Project', it critically examines current trends, practices and gaps in literacy research in relation to prior-to-school and school settings from early childhood on. The impetus for this study, and the paper at hand, has had its roots in quite practical concerns in terms of identifying research issues perceived as having high priority. There seemed to be no explicit research agenda on the part of the education systems and no transparent system of funding or tendering. Teachers appeared to feel marginalised and disenchanted by top-down imposition of research findings.

Academic literacy researchers were discouraged by bureaucratic obstructionism and lack of direction.

These perceptions led this research team to ask deeper questions about the nature of the relationship between literacy research, policy development, and classroom practice. A number of questions were generated, as we considered the collective futures of literacy teachers and researchers, from which this paper focuses on the following two:

- What is the nature of literacy research and its presentation in journals and conference proceedings that are intended for mixed audiences that include researchers and teachers, such as the *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy*?
- What happens to research findings in the process of reinterpretation by policy-makers?

This paper explores these two questions, first in relation to the *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy (AJLL)*, and second, in terms of the 'Teaching Reading' report (DEST, 2005). The analysis of the latter report considers *inter alia* what, if any, is the uptake and recasting of research published in the AJLL 2000-2005 archive.

Analysis of *AJLL* Literacy Research Publications

This section reports on an analysis of 80 research articles published in the *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy* February 2000 to June 2005. This archive has been selected as the journal is Australia's long-standing literacy journal published by the Australia Literacy Educators' Association, an affiliate of the International Reading Association; and its subscriptions include individual researchers and teachers as well as institutional subscriptions by schools.

Analysis began with a categorical analysis informed by research constructs of focal topics, literacy definitions, settings, participants and methods, and implications and recommendations. Authorship also constituted a key element in this analysis. The 'About the Author' notes that appear in each issue of *AJLL* were used to identify authors' professional roles. This yielded a sense of whose voices are directly authored, and whose experiences are filtered through the eyes of others.

A spreadsheet was developed, in which these categories were completed for each article. Next, thematisation and frequency counts were conducted and produced sub-categories within each category.

This analysis yielded a characterisation of the nature of literacy research reported in this key national venue in Australia; and longer-term, in the next phase of the Nexus Project, provides a basis for this research team to undertake comparative analyses with other literacy journals published overseas. Each part of the analysis is presented below and used as springboard to further investigation of teachers', researchers', policy makers' and employer groups' perspectives in the Nexus Project.

Who's Who among AJLL authors?

A total of 121 contributors are represented in this 2000-2005 archive. The categorical breakdown of authorship is shown in Figure 1. Researchers working in University and other types of settings constitute 86% of this authorship. In contrast, teachers represent 10% (most involved in post-graduate study), while those designated to be working with teachers in consultancy and professional development were less represented at 3%.

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

In the main, university and other designated researchers are filters through which experiences and perspectives of teachers, students and parents are represented in this archive. Most of those who authored their research are not teaching in school or prior-to-school settings, and those who are teaching are not reporting research on their work in this venue. This finding contrasts with practitioners' journals, such as ALEA's *Practically Primary* and *The Middle Years*, where teachers insert their voices more frequently as authors, and researchers less so. The question this finding raises is, Might this uneven representation reflect and reinforce problematic nexus between research and practice? This question is under investigation in interviews with teachers, researchers, policy-makers and employer groups in the next phase of the Nexus Project.

Focal Topics Under Investigation

A broad range of topics have been researched and published in the 2000-2005 AJLL archive, as seen in Figure 2.

[Insert Figure 2 about here]

Some topics appear disparate within the AJLL five-year archive, but articulate with theory, research and practice disseminated elsewhere. Some topics represent more sustained threads of cohesion within the archive, such as articles on critical literacy and multiliteracies, aided by themed issues. Concentrated topics such as multiliteracies represent and anticipate current and future needs perceived by researchers in their collective interest groups.

The extent to which these topics match teachers' concerns constitutes the next phase in the Nexus Project: Are these topics of interest and assistance to teachers? What topics do teachers seek to read about? Is sustaining threads of topical continuity helpful and engaging for teachers? Similarly, policy-makers perspectives will be explored – the extent to which these topics are of interest and taken up by them.

What is this thing called 'literacy/ies'?

With a journal dedicated to language and literacy, it might be assumed that each article that addresses literacy will provide an explicit working definition or characterisation of literacy as seen through the lens of the particular author/s. Literacy is not a phenomenon that is known for uniformity of definition – there are many definitions of literacy, as there are facets of this complex, changing and sometimes elusive phenomenon. The challenge of definition was accentuated in a recent conversation with colleague Ken Cruickshank who noted that 'literacy' was coined after 'illiteracy' and is one of the more recent words added to the English language. Indeed, 'literacy' does not have an equivalent in many

other languages, unlike ‘reading’ and ‘writing’. When we talk of literacy, then, are we confining the term to written text, or can it include spoken language too? Is visual literacy included? And what of technoliteracies and multiliteracies? Is ‘literacy’ one multi-faceted entity, or are ‘literacies’ many entities?

With these questions and reflections in mind, definitions of literacy/ies, as made explicit by authors, were explored in the 2000-2005 *AJLL* archive.

Across 80 articles in the archive, eight categories of definitions of literacy emerged, as seen in Figure 3. This overview presents variety in terms of dimensions of literacy that have been defined (e.g., ‘multiliteracies’, ‘critical literacy’), but overall presents a broad, inclusive collection that echoes sociocultural portrayals in contemporary society.

[Insert Figure 3 about here]

However, a large percentage of the archive (73%) did not provide explicit definitions. Those ‘in the know’ of particular ways of characterising literacy/ies could perhaps read between the lines, but what of those who are not or who are on a different page? Does this lack of explicit definition present a barrier between research and practice? The next phase of the Nexus Project will explore such questions with teachers, researchers, policy makers and employer groups.

Settings, Participants and Methods

27 articles, comprising 34% of the archive, were discussion papers, literature reviews, text analyses, artefact analyses, document analyses, instructional analyses, assessment score analyses and ABS analyses.

53 articles, constituting 66% of the archive, involved research inquiries directly conducted *in situ*, or through remote means such as written questionnaires, or both. Of these 53 inquiries, 27% used methods such as written questionnaires, interviews, focal group discussions and researcher-designed protocols that were not contextualised by *in situ* methods. 24% of the inquiries used *in situ* methods of observations, interviews, and artefact collection. 15 % inquiries used a combination of both *in situ* and more remote methods.

As for participants involved in the reported research, teachers were involved in 44% of the articles in the archive. 11 of these instances involving teachers entailed remote participation by written questionnaires, interviews and researcher protocols; while 19 studies involved *in situ* participation by way of researcher observations, interviews and artefact collections that directly involved teachers; and five studies involved combinations of both *in situ* and more remote methods

Students were involved in 43% instances (12 in remote ways, 21 instances that involved *in situ* participation, and one study that involved both). Parents participated in 18% of the research – 7 remotely and 7 *in situ*.

A breakdown of settings for these 53 inquiries is shown in Figure 4.

[Insert Figure 4 about here]

Overall, trends indicate a shift to research conducted in lower income settings and settings of cultural and linguistic diversity – a contrast to criticism once levelled at literacy research for tending to be middle-class and English-speaking oriented. Primary schools are strongly featured, with early childhood setting and secondary settings much less so. Yet, studies of transitions featured in this archive – the segmentation of research between settings might undermine the ability to address transition issues.

The impact of *in situ* research versus the use of more remote means alone on teachers' uptake of research might also be considered. Also worth considering are issues of research funding, time and access – one paper, for example, noted costs of conducting their research in a remote area. The Nexus project's next phase will explore issues such as these from teachers', employers' and researchers' points of view.

Implications and recommendations identified explicitly by authors

A plethora of recommendations emerge across the five-year archive of *AJLL*, as shown in Appendix A. As may be gleaned from this appended document, some recommendations are very specific, while others are more general. Some recommendations form cohesive threads of continuity. Overall, there is a relative absence of internal dissent.

These recommendations serve a number of functions in this archive, which are to:

- Recommend specific practices and ways of thinking
- Identify alternative conceptualisations
- Call to action participation in 'bigger picture' discussions and policy development
- Showcase classroom ideas that work and recommend them to others
- Confirm efficacy of existing practices
- Bring conceptualisations and practices into question
- Identify further research directions
- Raise questions for discussion and research
- Identify challenges

Clearly, recommendations transcend theory and research to include literacy pedagogic implications. The question then is, How do these recommendations reach teachers, policy makers, employer groups and other members of intended audiences? This question is the subject of further investigation in the next phase of the Nexus Project; and is taken up in the Discussion of this analysis that now follows.

Discussion of the *AJLL* analysis

In terms of critically examining the nexus between research, policy and practice, the previous analysis raises a number of issues and questions. Some of these have been raised as the analysis was reported above. Some are now taken up more concertedly.

It first needs to be noted that collectively as an archive, the 80 articles included here in the main represent broad and inclusive characterisations of literacy, although these are not always explicitly defined. On its lines of inquiry, argument and recommendations, the archive might be characterised by its breadth, inclusivity, and a sense of consensus within itself while debating contentious issues represented beyond this archive in other venues.

Predominantly, qualitative approaches are used, often combined with quantitative methods. Less frequent was the sole use of quantitative methods. As will be seen, this finding has important implications vis-à-vis Australia's national report on 'Teaching Reading' (DEST, 2005).

On the question of how research intersects with policy and practice, there is concern that the answer to this might well be, not always effectively. Luke (2003a) has argued the need to develop a common vocabulary and a mutually shared set of strategies that provide for repertoires of practices, to ensure inclusive and effective meeting of individual student needs. Wran (2005), in his submission to Australia's National Inquiry into Literacy, put the case that 'eduspeak' erects barriers between research and practice. Studies reported in the archive itself reported on teachers' concerns not necessarily being researchers' concerns (Hammond & Macken-Horarik, 2001); and engagement with binary oppositions between literacy approaches is not a concern for teachers who generally favour eclecticism (Broadley *et al*, 2000).

In the light of these perspectives, and the previous analysis of research articles, possible barriers between research and practice might be deduced to include the following:

- Who's doing the research – as noted and previously discussed, the large majority of authors reporting research in the 2000-2005 *AJLL* archive are researchers and not teachers or personnel working in professional development roles with teachers.
- Polarisation of perspectives with which teachers do not share a major concern, in their preference for eclecticism and drawing on repertoires of teaching practices (not that polarisation was in clear evidence in the *AJLL* 2000-2005 archive).
- Ways of telling the 'story' – the language of reporting and the style of structuring research. For example, recommendations tend to be outlined at the end of a research article. This is a different approach, obviously, to the more 'show and tell' descriptive and reflective approaches found in practitioners' journals. Understandable as these differences are (and not judging that one is 'better' than the other), tensions underpin this distinction in terms of what defines and is accepted as a 'research publication' in research journals, vis-à-vis institutionalised and bureaucratised guidelines. These guidelines present a dilemma for University researchers in their endeavours to converse with teachers about their common work and mutual concerns, when institutionally ordained ways of reporting may not be congruent with ways of receiving and engaging with the reporting. Bernstein's notions of vertical and horizontal discourses are relevant here - the horizontal characterised as everyday, context-dependent, implicit and often contradictory and changeable (see also Foucault, 1972) and the vertical viewed as formal, systematically principled, explicit and coherent.
- Researchers' topics may not be teachers' concerns. For example, while multiliteracies articles report on pedagogies and practices related to the incorporation of multi-modal texts in classrooms, teachers concerns' are often at a more fundamental level – resourcing and professional development to keep up with technological advancements (Knowles, 2004).

These issues, with an openness to other possibilities, are to be explored in follow-up interviews in the next phase of the Nexus Project: If not research, then what do teachers

access that influences their pedagogic work? What role does the popular press have, in its recontextualisation and manipulation of research studies and pitting researchers against one another in a public arena?

Defining literacy also emerged as an issue in the analysis of the *AJLL* archive. While literacy may be increasingly complex, multi-faceted and elusive, the power of defining it cannot and should not be under-estimated. If defined vaguely or not at all, the question we need to ask ourselves is, What kind of phenomenon are we researching, teaching, debating, polarising, and developing national agendas and policies for?

The Broader Context of National Literacy Inquiries, Reports and Agendas

The question of defining literacy continues to take on significance when considering the nexus between literacy research and policy – as revealed when now exploring the ‘Teaching Reading’ Report (DEST, 2005) in relation to this paper’s second question, What happens to research findings in the process of reinterpretation by policy-makers? Additionally and specific to this paper, what, if any, is the ‘Teaching Reading’ Report’s uptake of research and characterisations of literacy published in the five year *AJLL* archive, and to what effect for the Report’s recommendations?

Before proceeding, it needs to be noted that the ‘Teaching Reading’ Report is very welcome in terms of the attention and priority that this document gives the inherently significant endeavour of learning to read. What follows is intended to be a considered commentary of the report, in terms of how and what research is implicated in the recommendations that are identified. Space prevents this analysis from being exhaustive. Consequently, this discussion focuses on a core notion in the document: ‘evidence-based research’.

Amidst the ‘Teaching Reading’ Report’s 20 recommendations, shown in Appendix B, ‘evidence-based research’ frequently recurs in relation to evidence based pedagogy, preservice teacher education, professional development and partnership programs.

The Report defines evidence-based research in its Glossary as involving ‘the application of rigorous, objective methods to obtain valid answers to clearly specified questions’ (DEST, 2005, p. 85). This definition is elaborated on in terms of ‘(1) systematic, empirical methods that draw on observation and/or experiment designed to minimise threats to validity; (2) relies on sound measurement; (3) involves rigorous data analyses and statistical modelling of data that are commensurate with the stated research questions; and (4) is subject to expert scientific review.’ (DEST, 2005, p. 85).

This definition of evidence-based research excludes much of the research published in the 2000-2005 *AJLL* archive. However, this definition does resonate with recent national reports on literacy, and is purposefully aligned with particular definitions of literacy. Consider, for example, the ACER report, ‘Closing the Gap Between Research and Practice: Foundations for the Acquisition of Literacy’ (de Lemos, 2002). This paper, as overviewed in Figure 5, presents a telling example of how literacy and research may be

defined and categorised in ways that marginalise, alienate and exclude – thereby restricting who might participate, and how, in the nexus of research, policy and practice.

[Insert Figure 5 about here]

This visual provides a schematic representation of the Introduction to this report. Its numbers indicate the exact sequencing of this Introduction. In its identification of ‘a broader definition’ of literacy, the report presents a ‘grab bag’ of literacy practices, contexts, processes and dimensions. This definition, while appearing comprehensive and inclusive, is next put in a position of conflict, because it ‘rejects’ a more narrow definition. This point segues into ‘a narrower definition’ that the report identifies as ‘ability to read and write’. This definition is not put into a position of contestation; instead it is highlighted as ‘the conventional or commonsense view of literacy’, implicitly acceptable to all.

The report then aligns each of these definitions with a particular research paradigm for investigating literacy. The ‘broader definition’ is aligned with ‘descriptive studies’ that use ‘ethnographic and case study approaches’. The ‘narrower definition’ is aligned with ‘experimental studies’. Questionable as this alignment is - and one that omits a range of research approaches and their various combinations - this alignment has serious consequence for further exclusion.

This consequence is evident in the next statement in the report’s introduction: ‘For the purposes of this review, the narrow definition will be adopted. This will allow the review to focus on *those aspects of literacy that are seen as of critical importance in an education context*’ (de Lemos, p. 3, my emphasis). In these last few words, not only is ‘a broader definition of literacy’ excluded (and in fact, the many characterisations, nuances and studies embodied therein), so too are ‘descriptive’ research paradigms for investigating literacy.

Such approaches to defining literacy and research polarise perspectives and prioritise preferred standpoints while excluding or marginalising others. Clearly, the approach taken to definitions above challenges those who work in and/or consume other paradigms of research or who work across borders and blend approaches, as evident in the 2000-2005 *AJLL* archive – effectively excluding the research reported in this archive from the report and its accompanying literature review. This approach renders highly problematic the nexus between such research and conceptualisations of literacy, and the recommendations at hand in the ‘Teaching Reading’ Report.

In contrast, Ladwig’s (1996) critical realist approach to educational research suggests a constructive dialogue between qualitative and quantitative, hermeneutic and positivist paradigms – an antidote to polarisations and a solution with much potential to address the ‘Teaching Reading’ Report’s call for ‘rigorous evidence-based’ literacy research, pedagogy and partnership programs. A more constructive approach longer-term, then, to enhancing the nexus of research, policy and practice would be a broadening of the conceptualisation of research beyond ‘evidence based research’. Such conceptualisation would involve taking on sufficient of this definition to reflect what we each do as

researchers, but to also characterise research in terms of continua of research approaches, rather than in terms of discrete and competing entities. It is not the case that any one approach is 'better' than others; rather, each approach needs to be appraised in terms of its sense of 'fitness' for the research needs at hand.

A Foucauldian post-structuralist perspective is also helpful here to re-thinking the nexus of research, policy and practice (Foucault, 1972). With its notions of intersecting, divergent and competing discourses, this perspective illuminates the contradictory and changeable nature of our actions as human beings. Therefore, research in this approach acknowledges such inconsistency and analyses bias and assumptions for their underlying beliefs and agendas. As argued by Johnson (2002) in her classroom research published in the *AJLL* archive, shifting between different discourses – whether these discourses intersect, diverge or compete with one another – should not be problematic, provided those who are so doing – that is, teachers, researchers and policy-makers – are aware of the shifts that are occurring *and* the various discourses that are framing them.

On classroom pedagogy, the 'Teaching Reading' Report states as its first recommendation that 'teaching strategies based on findings from rigorous, evidence-based research that are shown to be effective in enhancing the literacy development of all children' (DEST, 2005, p. 38). The 'all children' is not an entity that can be readily defined. This phrase may be well intended as a rhetorical device and appears to be inclusive. Nevertheless, it is a troublesome device when it comes to recommending teaching practices that work for 'all children'. Its underpinning egalitarian assumptions, which make this recommendation appear inclusive, is in reality at odds with the notion of repertoires of practices documented in the *AJLL* 2000-2005 archive, which allow teachers to choose and adapt teaching strategies according to learners' needs and contexts (Luke, 2003a) – and may even see teachers shuttle seamlessly among approaches as they teach (Johnson, 2002).

A phrase that also occurs in the 'Teaching Reading' Report better acknowledges the nature of the student population with whom teachers work – 'individual children from diverse backgrounds and locations' (eg., found in the third recommendation on p. 38). Further, this construct demands we know something about these 'diverse backgrounds and locations'. Thus implicated is the need for research of a sociological and ethnographic kind that does not appear highlighted in the Report's Glossary definition of 'evidence-based research'.

Still on classroom pedagogy, the 'Teaching Reading' Report explicitly and strongly recommends 'systematic, direct and explicit phonics instruction so that children master the essential alphabetic code-breaking skills required for foundational reading proficiency' (DEST, 2005, p. 38). This recommendation is not in dispute in this paper, provided appropriate methods are chosen to meet learner needs. Clearly, phonics is an important sub-skill involved in code-breaking practices that, in turn, are part and parcel of reading (Harris, Turbill, Fitzsimmons & McKenzie, 2006). Code-emphasis is a strongly recurring theme throughout the report and its constituents are given considerable coverage in the Glossary.

In the same recommendation, however, the Report also states, ‘Equally, 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’ (DEST, 2005, p. 38). The use of ‘equally’ here seems to denote a broad and inclusive view of pedagogy. However, such a view appears undermined by what is included in the clause that follows – fairly inclusive in its itemisation, but representing another ‘grab bag’ reminiscent of the de Lemos report (2002) that bundles everything that is not so strongly favoured as priority into one group, and placing it second to what is singled out and more clearly prioritised and emphasised.

Further, there is a potential internal contradiction here between ‘systematic, direct and explicit phonics instruction’ and ‘an integrated approach to reading’. The former term is associated in the Report’s Glossary with “‘presenting material in small steps, pausing to check for student understanding and eliciting active and successful participation from all students” (Rosenshine, 1986, p. 60). Grounded in behaviourist theory... direct instruction programs are designed according to “what” and “how”, *not “who” is to be taught*’ (DEST, 2005, p. 85, my emphasis). Negating ‘who’ in this context may be consistent with egalitarian assumptions apparent in the mention of ‘all children’ in the Report’s first recommendation. However, there arises an internal contradiction in regard to the Report’s recommendation for catering to diverse student needs and building partnership programs with parents that build on children’s home and community experiences – such advocacy invokes notions about ‘who’ as much as ‘what’ and ‘how’ for different needs and contexts will shape these pedagogic choices.

Questions raised by the Report’s definition of ‘systematic direct instruction’ include, how might this approach marry with the ‘equally’ placed emphasis on ‘an integrated approach to reading’ in the same recommendation? Not defined in the Glossary, how might an ‘integrated approach’ co-exist with a ‘small steps’ approach that reportedly (according to the Glossary) does not concern itself with ‘who’ is being taught? What might consequent reading instruction look like in classrooms vis-à-vis a mapping framework such as Luke and Freebody’s four practices of coding, meaning, pragmatic and critical practices (1999)? An inclusive nexus of research, policy and practice is needed to answer questions such as these.

On partnerships with children’s parents and caregivers, the ‘Teaching Reading’ Report recommends the provision of ‘workshops, programs and guides for parents and carers to support their children’s literacy development. *These should acknowledge and build on the language and literacy that children learn in their homes and communities*’ (DEST 2005, p. 40, my emphasis). This recommendation resonates with several studies reported in the *AJLL* 2000-2005 archive. Yet, in this report, acknowledgment is not given to this research. Further, it is not clear what paradigm/s of instruction is/are to be adopted in this provision, and if they are meant to be the same paradigm as recommended for teachers in classrooms. If they are meant to be similar, then there is a risk of supplanting rather than ‘building on’ children’s home and community experiences. If not, how school and home experiences might form a comfortable nexus that provides continuity of experience, such

that builds on the past and paves the way for the future (Dewey, 1969) needs careful documentation and support at this policy level.

This recommendation raises questions that again implicate the need for an inclusive nexus of literacy research, policy and practice. For example, How will providers of parent programs know about the usual interaction patterns, literacy practices and day-to-day activities that occur in and across children's homes to build on? On what evidence base of home literacy practices will these programs be developed? Clearly, such questions require processes of working towards shared and mutual understandings of one another's experiences through dialogue – a process that might be described as constructivist in nature (criticised in the report) and further understood from post-structuralist perspectives (not highlighted in the report), that could enhance the sensitivity, effectiveness and sustainability of such programs.

Enhancement of such programs and this particular recommendation in the 'Teaching Reading' Report triangulates with DEST's National Agenda in Early Childhood and, specifically, this Agenda's National Read Aloud Summit, launched in 2005 and to become an annual event. At the inaugural and very welcome meeting of 2005, a cross section of participants were represented, predominantly from early childhood, medical and commercial sectors. Some Universities were also involved.

Emerging from this Summit was a clear and needed valuing of children's early literacy experiences, with an emphasis on reading and print. Early childhood literacy research can only contribute to this national initiative. For example, research reported in the *AJLL* 2000-2005 archive indicates the need for Early Childhood literacy teaching and research to go beyond traditional models of literacy and emergent literacy, to provide meaningful and contextualised experiences that account for children's multiliteracies (Jones Diaz, Arthur, Beecher & McNaught, 2000). There also is a need to move further into a multimodal language when considering preschool emergent literacy – we should not assume specific print-based practices as prerequisite for other literate practices (Carrington, 2001).

This exploration of the 'Teaching Reading' Report and related material, in terms of 'evidence-based research', reveals processes of definition, polarisation, prioritisation, and exclusion or marginalisation. Further, this exploration resonates with Luke's perspective that policy development may be less allied with systematic and inclusive application of research, and more involved with 'arbitrary play of discourse and truth, power and knowledge' (Luke (2003b, p. 98). In this play, we may see evidence of Bernstein's notion of recontextualisation of research by its appropriation and refocusing (Bernstein, 1996).

Luke further suggests reconceptualising 'evidence-based research' in terms of 'a more complex, theory-driven analysis, using and triangulating a range of social statistical, demographic, economic, sociological, ethnographic as well as psychometric data sources' (Luke, 2003b, p.98). Such an approach would provide a more inclusive and multi-faceted nexus of research, policy and practice that is needed in these increasingly complex times.

Concluding Discussion

This paper has presented outcomes of an analysis of the 2000-2005 archive of research publications in the *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy*. It has done so with a view to assist a critical exploration of the nexus between research, policy and practice, and possible barriers therein. The discussion that arose from this analysis identified possible barriers. This discussion was then located in the broader context of Australia's recent and current national inquiries, reports and agendas. This discussion focused on issues around 'evidence-based research', some problems associated with restrictive definitions and polarisations, and the potential of additional approaches for providing a more inclusive nexus between literacy research, policy and practice. This discussion identified areas in which research published in the *AJLL* archive could support and inform particular recommendations and areas of concern; yet were excluded through the power of selecting, prioritising and defining a particular kind of literacy research and aligning that research with particular ways of characterising literacy.

In his foreword to Ellis' ACER report 'Balancing approaches: revisiting the educational psychology research on teaching students with learning difficulties', Freebody (2005, p. ii) wrote:

'It is simply no longer the case that a review of research literature on basic skills education can claim for itself a po-faced neutrality. The best it can hope for is that it can enrich and sharpen the lines of debate, giving us better heuristics for agreement or disagreement, at the same time as pointing to potential convergences and more confident professional applications - that is, turning the heat up on some points and down on others. A good review can convince, but it can also press us to improve our grounds for rejection.'

In response to polarisations that have continued to eventuate, there is a need to move beyond dichotomies, in the recognition that they serve agendas and interests at policy and research level more than they do teachers and students at the chalkface. As argued by Anstey and Bull (2003, p. 141) in the *AJLL* archive, we need to consider 'when and why various teaching techniques are preferable to the site-specific needs of our local teaching contexts and the unique needs of our diverse students'. The prevalence of *in situ* studies in the *AJLL* archive seems well placed to contribute to such consideration. So, too, does the notion of 'dialogue', echoed by Mills (2005, p. 78) when writing to the need to 'go beyond the central binary oppositions of past pedagogies, transforming these to reframe innovative and relevant literacy pedagogy for the changing times'.

The Nexus Project's Future Directions

This collaborative project is now moving into its next phase. This phase consists of interviews, focal group discussions and document analyses, involving teachers, researchers, teacher educators, policy makers and employer groups across prior-to-school, primary school and secondary school settings in publicly funded and private sectors. Meanwhile, analysis of research literature will continue, and encompass journals overseas as well as conference proceedings. National reports and policy statements will continue to be examined, as begun in this paper.

Multiple perspectives, we argue, are necessary if our ultimate aim – and surely the aim of national literacy reports and agendas – is to be realised. That is, to improve the quality of children’s learning environments, so that they may experience success in acquiring literacy repertoires that equip them to function effectively now in their educational contexts and in the rapidly changing and unknown worlds of their tomorrows.

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Figure 1. Who's Who Among Authors in *AJLL*, 2000-2005

University lecturers/researchers	97	80%
Teachers	12	10%
Designated researchers	7	6%
Consultants, advisers, PD providers	3	2%
Personnel in government departments	2	2%
Total	121	100%

Figure 2. Topics that have been reported in *AJLL* 2000-2005

Home & community literacy practices	8	10%
Critical literacy	7	9%
Reading difficulties & special needs	8	10%
Gender and literacy	6	8%
Literacy assessment and reporting	8	10%
Multiliteracies	5	6%
Teachers' perspectives of literacy issues & pedagogies	4	5%
Writing in classrooms	4	5%
Adult literacy	3	4%
Classroom text studies	3	4%
Classroom discourses	3	4%
ESL	2	3%
Language across the curriculum	2	3%
Policy development	2	3%
Reading debates and beyond	2	3%
Preservice teacher education	1	1%
Oral reading	1	1%
Reading skills	1	1%
Parent/school partnerships	1	1%
Transitions	1	1%
Classroom literacy practices for indigenous children	1	1%

Children's perspectives of literacy	1	1%
Prior-to-school literacy	1	1%
Comprehension	1	1%
Intertextuality	1	1%
School literacy culture	1	1%
Classroom practices for disadvantaged children	1	1%

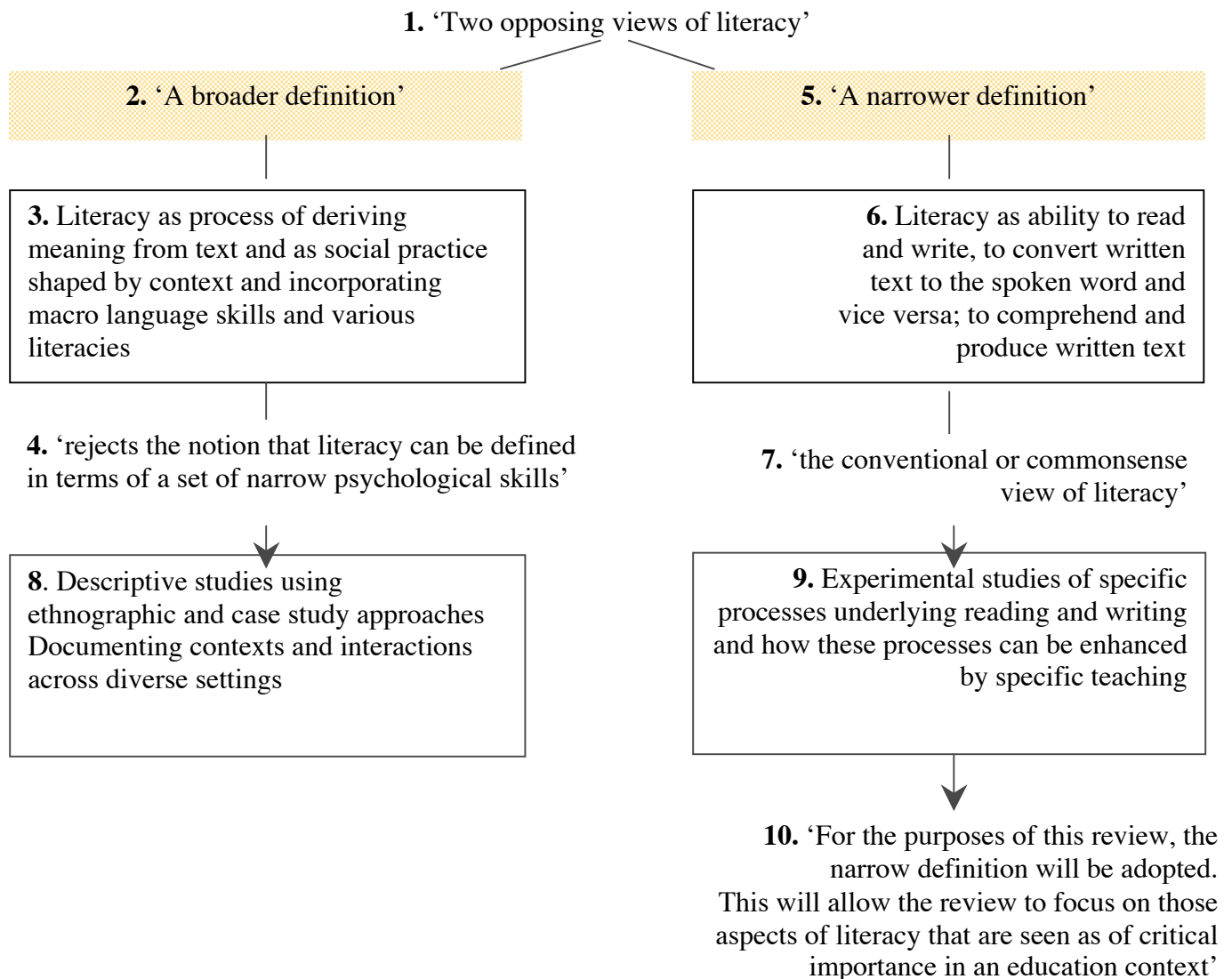
Figure 3. Definitions of Literacy made explicit by authors of *AJLL* 2000-2005

Not explicitly defined	58	73%
Defined in terms of multiliteracies	8	10%
Defined in terms of critical literacy (and ML)	4	5%
Defined as socioculturally constructed practices	4	5%
Not defined but multiple perspectives and changing nature acknowledged	2	3%
Defined in terms of reading difficulties	2	3%
Defined in terms of tertiary literacies	1	1%
Defined in terms of literary theory (intertextuality)	1	1%

Figure 4. Settings in the *AJLL* 2000-2005 Archive

Socio-economic settings n = 53						
Range 15%	Low 14%	Middle 8%	Random 4%	Not specified 30%		
Cultural and Linguistic Diversity n = 53						
Range 24%	English 6%	Chinese 1%	Random 4%	Not specified 35%		
Locality n = 53						
Urban 11%	Suburban 14%	Regional 4%	Rural 6%	Remote 4%	Other 6%	Not specified 29%
Type of setting n = 53						
Prior-to-school 11%	Primary school 74%	Secondary school 15%	University 9%			

Figure 6. An example of polarisation and exclusion in literacy literature



Appendix A.
Recommendations Identified in the AJLL 2000-2005 Archive

AJLL – Implications and Recommendations

Each entry represents one frequency count.

None

- Restates findings/conclusions and leaves it there

Text in classrooms

- Need to use social issues texts
- Need to exploit all variables of text to enrich and extend children's understandings and responses
- Need more research to explore new and innovative texts that can support early reading development
- Need to continue exploring how children respond to and interpret picturebooks that use metafictional devices

The 'Bigger Picture' of Policy and Participation

- Need to be active in debates over what forms of literacy education are most appropriate for all citizens
- Need to move beyond methods and develop a common vocabulary and a set of shared strategies and approaches that are appropriate and effective for communities – need repertoire of practices that might include reading recovery, ESL and EFL instruction, bilingual transitions, learning support, special education intervention, home, school, community partnerships and so on
- Need for commitment to shared vision and collaborative mission at whole school level.

Views of literacy

- Need to acknowledge and act on the 'true' nature of literacy as a culturally determined social practice
- Re-thinking and re-tooling for educators re new technologies
- Early Childhood literacy teaching and research need to go beyond traditional models of literacy and emergent literacy, to provide meaningful and contextualised experiences that account for children's multiliteracies
- Need to move further into a multimodal language when considering preschool emergent literacy – don't assume specific print-based as prerequisite for other literate practices
- Appropriateness of critical literacy to young children, because it makes *their* interests central – it is in all their individual and collective interests – needs to be ongoing, analytical, in classrooms, and take stock of children's vastly different repertoires of practices (including electronic practices)

- Critical literacy is important – we need to face up to the cultural significance of popular culture in children’s lives, and assist children to question and challenge texts and the society that creates them
- Need to attend to reality of new and emerging literacies. But we need to acknowledge that conventional, hard copy forms of ‘linear’ texts will continue for some time, and have complementary roles in a range of contexts
- None of the literacy pedagogies since 1950s is sufficient for literacy in contemporary culture – need to go beyond binary oppositions, transforming these to re-frame innovative and relevant literacy pedagogy for the changing times

ESL

- Need to link pedagogic practices (eg., email dialogue) to formalised evaluation plans, such as portfolios
- Need to have seamless integration of technology activities in the literacy curriculum
- ESL students need emotional support and resources while away from home furthering their education – eg., email communication to facilitate cross-cultural communication

Home/school partnerships

- Need to reconsider/recognise that national literacy assessment initiatives have done little to further partnerships – no real collaboration
- Differences in staff and parent perspectives are most acute in vulnerable populations. To break cycle of disadvantage and low literacy, parents and staff must both speak out and listen to each other, to develop shared understandings
- Discourse practices can disempower parents in relations to schools. Partnership discourses and practices should be matched, and parents given opportunities to contribute to policies
- Need to build on students’ cultural capital, evolving dispositions and material circumstances, linking with multiliteracies
- Use of learning technologies that encapsulate technoliteracies can facilitate and support meaningful and authentic communication between home and school.

Assessment

- Need to be clear about purposes of assessment
- Need to re-value teacher judgment in assessment, and invest in it through professional development
- Make performance expectations for literacy education explicit
- Use testing programs as opportunity for professional development
- Be mindful that assessment is contextualised and value-laden
- Teachers are supportive of Reading Development Continuum – a useful framework with variety of uses – impacted these teachers’ classroom practices and provided a systematic approach to assessing, recording and reporting
- Need to make assessment more effective
- Need to recognise difference in arriving at site valid judgments and those with system validity

- Need to observe learners' process, product and context in which processes and products are accomplished.
- Important that teachers are skilled at observing and recording children's oral language with insight and understanding – teachers who can build on and transform the language these children bring from their homes and communities
- Systematic profiles of individual children is one mechanism that works
- Teachers need to do diagnostic assessment that will help identify failing students' needs
- Need for innovative and inclusive web-based and other multi-modal assessment approaches

Teacher perspectives

- Lack of major concern over relative merits of whole language and phonetic approaches [Pauline: might this be because teachers are eclectic? It's academics who polarise and territorialise, engaging in border disputes and territorial skirmishes)
- Teachers see that failing students are a major concern
- Need to forge teaching/research links – an area needing more research, or (and more likely) where results of research are not getting to teachers in a form that they find useful – needs to be relevant to their style and context
- While teachers' priorities intersect with those of current research, they do not match exactly. Relatively little impact at classroom level of researchers' concerns with literacy theory, of impact of digital texts on what it means to be literate, or multiliteracies.
- New and old ways of teaching language and literacy have always co-existed. Need to understand conflicts that exist between and within particular teachers' discourses of literacy, so as to allow schools to address their staff's changing notions of literacy change
- Teachers need to examine their own literate practices vis-à-vis class, gender and race, so as to understand how they impact on those practices they promote in classrooms
- Teachers need to keep abreast of reading materials and methods, to be well informed, able to evaluate approaches and materials supporting a range of methods, and adapt to changing conditions of language, literacy and communication
- Teachers know no single approach or simple solution will lead all students to a high level of literacy. Defaulting to an eclectic approach fails to give students or teachers a coherent shared experience of literacy. Teachers need principled conceptual frameworks to guide thought and action.
- Teachers with a high degree of agency in improving literacy outcomes for students, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, are theory users and builders, and articulate their theoretical reasons clearly and cogently.

Preservice teacher education

- On assessment and feedback to preservice teacher education students, need for written responses and mindsets for teachers to their students

- Need for preservice teachers to acquire proficiency in language necessary to explaining mathematical ideas
- Need for systemic support for preservice teachers and teachers in PD courses, re Aboriginal English, early Aboriginal literacy, cultural subtleties, to nurture indepth understanding about Aboriginal culture and language

Gender

- Need to consider equity issues when using electronic media
- Need more extensive research on relative absence of a critical meta-language
- Need for teachers to consider sustained use of resources and PD packages on boys and literacy
- More research on roles of fathers and other male role models re literacy practices and engagement
- More research on how perceptive insights of boys committed to reading can inform teachers and parents as they attempt to encourage other boys to read more extensively for leisure
- Need to refine definition of reading to include boys' textual choices and better represent the realities of their reading practices
- Need to move beyond narrow definitions of school achievement and success (national performance indicators) and consider complexities of interplay between masculinity, school and literacy
- Boys' interest in electronic literacies gives them an advantage over girls

Classroom pedagogies

- Need complete picture of four practices (coding, meaning, pragmatic and critical practices)
- Use of drama for critical literacy is recommended
- Need to create space for students to consider what kinds of literate beings they wish to become – interrogation of texts (what is) and exploration of new social action (what might be)
- Educational systems must ensure that students are provided with all the resources they need to engage with and learn from the program; and design and deliver programs that are culturally responsive and futures-driven
- Given rate of social, cultural and technological change, new learning environments and text types will proliferate, and therefore educators need to challenge and adapt their pedagogic practices
- Use pedagogies to teach students how to use their identity as a reader more strategically, and identify knowledge and strategies to read strategically
- As teachers and researchers, we must continue to discover and celebrate new ways of artful teaching
- Connect literacy with children's social goals
- Realise and act on potential for intertextual connections, to enhance collaboration and meaning-making in classrooms

Home and community literacies, and nexus with school

- Traditional and emergent literacy models may not be able to fully embrace cultural and social variations in literacy learning, so that children who experience other than dominant English-speaking book-based literacy are not marginalised within those frameworks
- Disparities between home and prior-to-school settings
- Libraries shifting from books and buildings to bytes, transforming their textual forms and practices – students need to acquire skills of new information literacies

Adolescent literacy

- Need to incorporate choice, to build on students' knowledge
- Need to provide for multi-modal responses to reading

Reading difficulties and special needs

- Need to review/question and enhance level of appropriateness of instructional strategies chosen for struggling readers
- Many resources are more than 20 years old and need revision. Need to understand what's being assessed by particular measures. Need to assess oral language. Problem of equity of access to appropriate educational services needs to be redressed
- Texts that represent deaf people offer an opportunity for deaf students to engage in literate practices in meaningful contexts
- Success of children with learning difficulties need concentrated efforts by teachers, parents and students themselves – need support, in many instances, *throughout* their education
- There is no one literacy program or strategy that is effective for all children with learning difficulties – need to consider students' diversity, fragility of learning, identification and assessment, early years programs, ongoing support, variety of programs – need for \$\$\$
- A successful model was in-class, collegial and provided range of appropriate texts
- Need broader range of home/school communication
- Success ingredients of a program at a Centre: changing activities regularly; small group lessons; re-visiting and practising skills; using assessment battery; games to practices and apply skills
- Multi-level, flexible, small group instruction is confirmed and recommended
- Diagnostic assessment is confirmed and recommended
- Need access to speech/language and ESL specialists
- ESL students not always receiving additional support
- Need for highly organised time and comprehensive coverage of background knowledge, decoding and naming, vocabulary, fluency, strategy use and text structures.

Writing

- Need for explicit teaching strategies that highlight terms to be used in writing
- National Strategy in England – professional understanding to be extended to pedagogy of writing, particularly boys

- Teachers have a pivotal role in assisting students to write successfully – in this, teachers need to be explicit and linguistically aware

Transitions

- Primary/Secondary transition – teachers take less part I secondary schools in the teaching of reading. In Year 7, many students are floundering and don't see the connection between reading competence and later success in life

Visual literacy

- Need for more research to develop research-based theoretical frameworks to guide teaching and assessment of students' understandings of how images contribute to interpretive possibilities of texts. Develop model of image/text relationships in intermodal construction of meaning and questions which guide and assist children with accessing meaning that arises from this relationship.

Tertiary literacy

- Can Universities cater for increasing student diversity in current market-driven agenda? Need to develop educational practices that grow from an understanding of importance of human relationships and communities of practice in learning, and find ways to facilitate growth in these communities

Prior-to-school settings

- Need for more systemic attention to the large body of research on unequal access to rich preschool learning opportunities and its exacerbation of social and educational inequalities
- Problem of providing excellent preschool programs for *all* children remains a challenge for educators, policy developers and governments

Appendix B.
Recommendations from Australia's National Report
'Teaching Reading' (DEST, 2005)

1. That teachers be equipped with teaching strategies based on findings from rigorous, evidence-based research that are shown to be effective in enhancing the literacy development of all children
2. That teachers provide systematic, direct and explicit phonics instruction so that children master the essential alphabetic code-breaking skills required for foundational reading proficiency. Equally, 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.
3. That literacy teaching continue throughout schooling (K-12) in all areas of the curriculum. Literacy must be the responsibility of all teachers across the curriculum, to provide an educationally sound program meeting the specific skill and knowledge needs of individual children from diverse backgrounds and locations.

The Role of Parents

4. That programs, guides and workshops be provided for parents and carers to support their children's literacy development. These should acknowledge and build on the language and literacy that children learn in their homes and communities.

School Leadership and Management

5. That all education authorities and school leaders examine their approaches to the teaching of literacy and put in place an explicit, whole-school literacy planning, monitoring and reviewing process in collaboration with school communities and parents
6. That all schools identify a highly trained specialist literacy teacher with specialised skills in teaching reading, to be responsible for linking the whole-school literacy planning process with classroom teaching and learning, and supporting school staff in developing, implementing and monitoring progress against individual literacy plans, particularly for those children experiencing reading and literacy difficulties.
7. That specialist postgraduate studies in literacy (especially in teaching reading) be provided by higher education providers to support the skill base and knowledge of teachers, including the specialist literacy teachers.

Standards for Teaching

8. That Teaching Australia – Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, in consultation with relevant professional associations, employers from the government and Catholic school sectors and representatives of the independent schools sector, together with relevant teacher institutes and registration bodies, develop and implement national standards for literacy teaching, initial teacher registration, and for accomplished teaching, consistent

with evidence-based guides for practice. It is further recommended that these standards form a basis for the accreditation of teacher preparation courses.

Assessment

9. That the teaching of literacy throughout schooling be informed by comprehensive, diagnostic and developmentally appropriate assessment of every child, mapped on common scales.
10. That a confidential mechanism such as a unique student identifier be established to enable information on an individual child's performance to follow the child regardless of location, and to monitor a child's progress throughout schooling and across assessment occasions.

The Preparation of Teachers

11. That the key objective of primary teacher education courses be to prepare student teachers to teach reading, and that the content of course-work in primary literacy education focus on contemporary understandings of:
12. That literacy teaching within subject areas be included in course work of secondary teachers so that they are well prepared to continue the literacy development of their students throughout secondary schooling in all areas of the curriculum
13. That significant 'lighthouse' projects in teacher preparation and education be established to link theory and practice that effectively prepares teachers to teach literacy, and especially reading, to diverse groups of children.
14. That the conditions for teacher registration of graduates from all primary and secondary teacher education programs include a demonstrated command of personal literacy skills necessary for effective teaching, and a demonstrated ability to teach literacy within the framework of their employment/teaching program.

Ongoing Professional Learning

15. That schools and employing authorities, working with appropriate professional organizations and higher education institutions, provide all teachers with appropriate induction and mentoring throughout their careers, and with ongoing opportunities for evidence-based professional learning about effective literacy teaching.
16. That a national program of literacy action be established to
 - design a series of evidence-based teacher professional learning programs focused on effective classroom teaching, and later interventions for those children experiencing reading difficulties
 - produce a series of evidence-based guides for effective teaching practice, the first of which should be on reading
 - evaluate the effectiveness of approaches to early literacy teaching (especially for early reading) and professional learning programs for practising teachers
 - investigate ways of integrating the literacies of information and communication technologies in classrooms

- establish networks of literacy/reading specialist practitioners to facilitate the application of research to practice
 - promote research into the most effective teaching practices to be used when preparing preservice teachers to teach reading
17. That Australian and State and Territory governments' approaches to literacy improvement be aligned to achieve improved outcomes for all Australian children.
 18. That the Australian Government, together with State and Territory government and non-government education authorities, jointly support the proposed national program for literacy action.

Looking Forward

19. That the Australian Government Minister for Education, Science and Training raise these recommendations as issues for attention and action by MCEETYA, and other bodies, agencies and authorities, that will have responsibility to take account of, and implement the recommendations.
20. That progress in implementing these recommendations, and on the state of literacy in Australia, be reviewed and reported every two years.

