RESEARCH
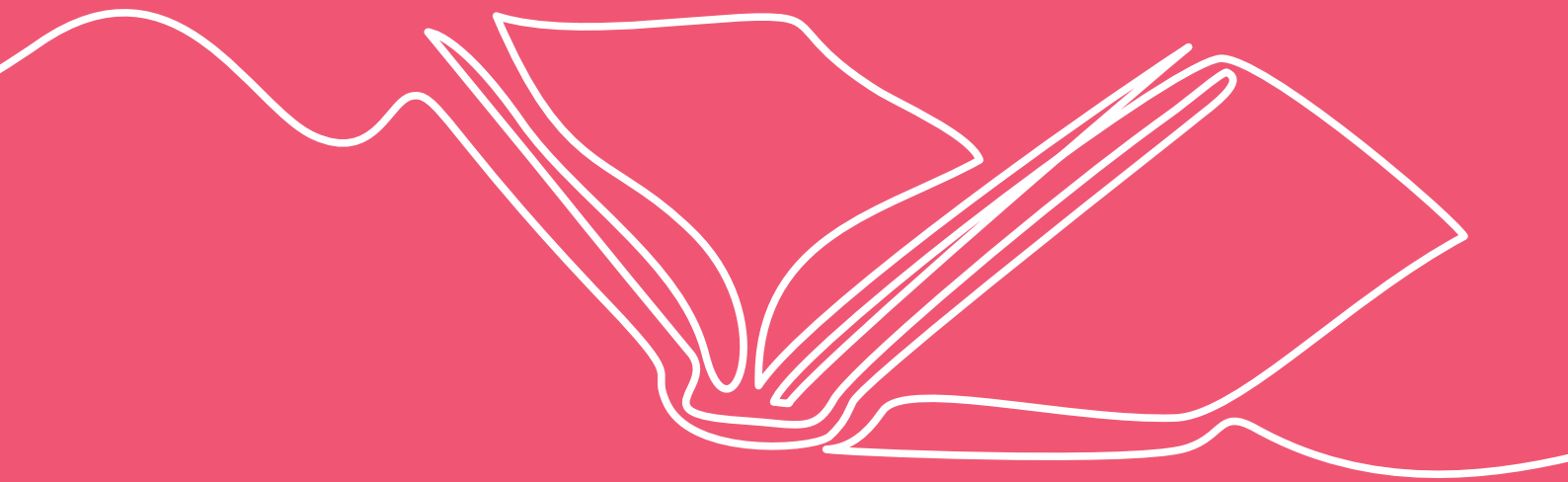# REPORT

JULY 2019

SHORT-CHANGED:

PREPARATION TO TEACH READING IN INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION

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MultiLit   five from five

Short-Changed: Preparation To Teach Reading In Initial Teacher Education

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Research Report July 2019

Acknowledgements

Contents

Executive Summary

Persistent and widespread concerns about the preparation of teachers to teach reading come from three sources: reviews and inquiries into the quality of initial teacher education; research surveys of preservice and graduate teacher knowledge about language and teaching, and their perceptions of their readiness to teach reading; and testimonies from preservice and graduate teachers.

This report adds to the evidence supporting the need for urgent and dramatic improvement in initial teacher education by looking at the extent to which literacy units in undergraduate initial teacher education courses provide evidence-based information on how children learn to read; and the most effective ways to teach them. It does this by examining the content of 116 literacy units in 66 degrees in 38 universities.

The report finds that

–   Only five (4%) of the 116 literacy units reviewed had a specific focus on early reading instruction or early literacy; that is, how to teach beginning readers in the first few years of school. In a further 30 (26%) of the unit outlines, early reading or early literacy was mentioned in some form but was included with other literacy content.

–   In 81 (70%) of the 116 literacy units reviewed, none of the five essential elements of effective evidence-based reading instruction were mentioned in the unit outlines. All five essential elements were referred to in only 6% of literacy unit outlines.

–   None of the unit outlines contained references to the Simple View of Reading. The specific model or theory mentioned most frequently in the unit outlines was the Four Resources / Four Roles of a Reader model which was referred to eight times. The sociocultural model or view of reading was referred to nine times.

–   Thirteen (15%) of the lecturers and unit coordinators that could be identified had specific expertise in early reading instruction or literacy, most with a particular interest in early literacy development among Indigenous and other children from non-English speaking backgrounds. Forty-seven (55%) had research interests and expertise in other aspects of literacy, most often digital and multi-modal literacies. Twenty-five (30%) of the literacy lecturers or unit coordinators had research interests and expertise in areas other than literacy, such as maths or music.

–   A review of the content of the six most commonly prescribed text books found that none contained sufficiently accurate and detailed content that would allow graduate teachers to use effective, evidence-based instruction, and many contained information that was inadequate and/or misleading.

Initial teacher education students, and the children they eventually go on to teach, are being short-changed. The lack of progress by universities in reforming and improving the quality of ITE in preparation to teach reading, despite the findings of numerous reports and inquiries, is apparent in the large number of students in Australian schools who struggle with reading.

Reading is a foundation skill that underpins all other learning in school. Too many teachers are being sent into classrooms without the benefit of the highly valuable knowledge about language and effective teaching of reading that has accumulated over decades of research.
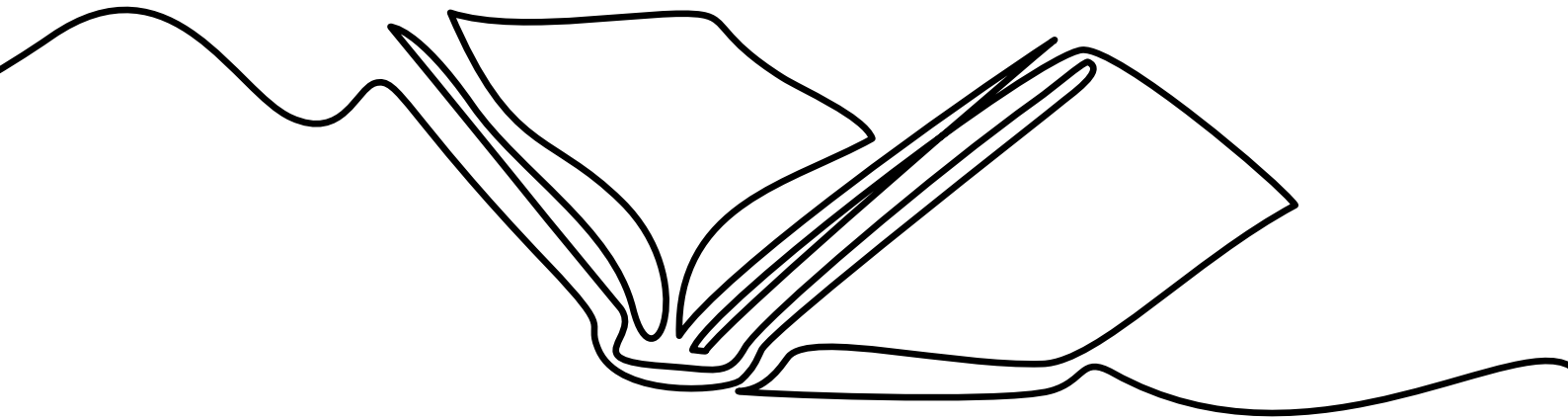
Introduction

Persistent and widespread concerns about the preparation of teachers to teach reading have been a feature of education policy discussions and debates for several decades. National and international assessments show that a large number of Australian students are not achieving a level of literacy proficiency that allows them to be successful in education, with adverse effects on their post-school outcomes. Quality of early reading instruction is a significant factor, and therefore the quality of teacher education is critical.

Anecdotal reports and testimonies from current and recent students of initial teacher education (ITE) courses have been highly critical of the lack of rigour and limited extent of the knowledge and training provided on how children learn to read, and the most effective methods for teaching them. In an open letter to faculties of education, a recent primary teaching graduate in Western Australia wrote that, "Despite the science and the evidence, the power of ideology maintains a stronghold on reading instruction, and as a result the scientifically grounded concepts of reading acquisition have largely been ignored in teacher preparation" (Hiatt, 2019; Snow, 2019a).

These criticisms are corroborated by two sets of findings – reviews and studies of the quality of teacher education courses, and the depth of knowledge exhibited by pre-service and practising teachers about language and evidence-based reading instruction.

This report adds to these findings by seeking to determine the extent to which literacy units in undergraduate ITE courses provide pre-service teachers with evidence-based information on how children learn to read and the most effective ways to teach them. It does this by examining the content of literacy units and the expertise of the people delivering them.

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Reviews of literacy teaching in initial teacher education (ITE)

Initial teacher education around the world has been the subject of many articles, investigations and reports, particularly in the US. The CITE-ITEL database hosted by the University of Texas contains more than 650 journal articles on initial literacy teacher education preparation (Maloch & Davila, 2019), which Hikida et al., (2019) refined to 38 articles focused on 'reading processes', that is, the sub-skills of reading.

However, since this report is interested in the quality of ITE in Australian universities, and specifically the preparation of teachers to teach reading, the following literature review will be limited to studies of Australian universities and their students and graduates.

Since 2005, there have been at least 12 inquiries, studies, or reviews of the quality of preparation for teaching reading and/or literacy in initial teacher education courses in Australia, involving universities in all states and territories. All found that preparation to teach reading was inadequate and all made various recommendations for improvement, most often that literacy teaching units place greater emphasis on evidence-based reading instruction.

The Prepared to Teach study published in 2005 surveyed teacher educators and beginning primary teachers and conducted intensive site studies with six universities in four states (Louden et al., 2005). Around half of teacher educators surveyed said that beginning teachers were either 'fairly well' or 'very well' prepared regarding the theories that inform current literacy practices.

Beginning teachers had a higher level of confidence in their preparation to teach literacy overall, with 75% saying that they felt well prepared to teach reading and writing. However, only 53% of beginning primary teachers felt well prepared to teach grammar and only 52% felt well prepared to teach phonics.

The National Inquiry into Teaching Literacy (NITL), published in 2005, looked at both current classroom practice and the quality of teacher preparation (Rowe, 2005). Many teacher educators who participated in focus groups for the inquiry raised the issue of the total duration and sequence of timing of literacy units within initial teacher education degrees. Concerns raised in the focus groups about insufficient time spent on literacy teaching was confirmed by responses to a survey of university education faculties which found that, on average, less than 10% of time in compulsory units/subjects was devoted to teaching reading. In half of all degree courses, less than 5% of compulsory subject study was spent on teaching reading. A related issue was that, in some degrees, compulsory literacy units were only available in the first year or two of the degree. Many institutions offered further elective units on literacy, which were perceived to substantially improve preparation to teach reading, and which the NITL report suggested should be compulsory.
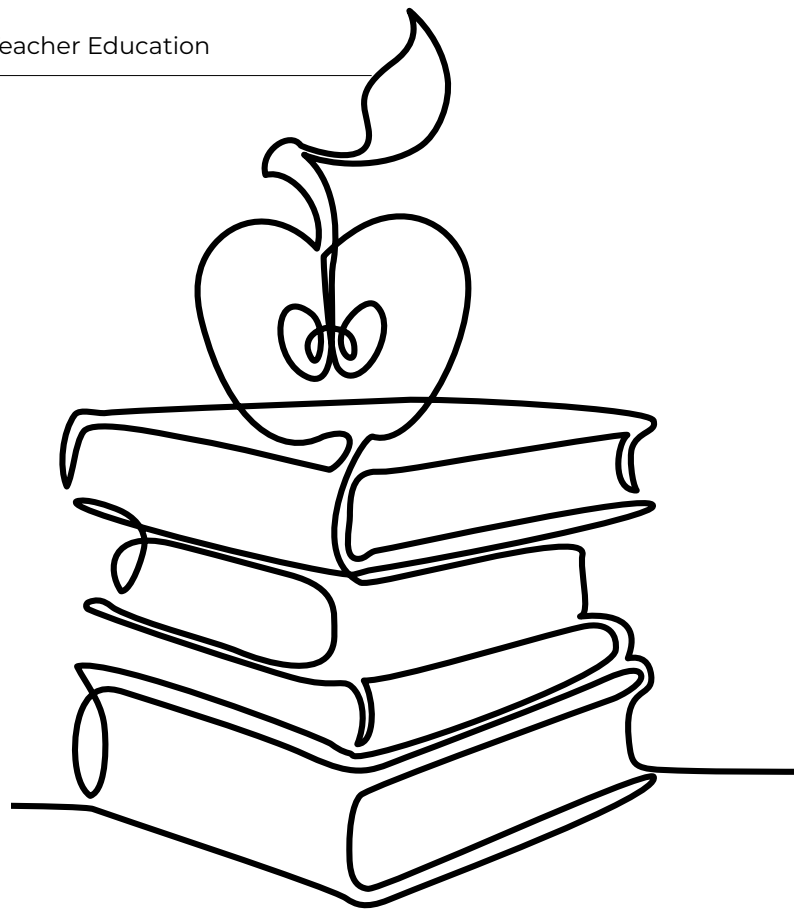
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In 2010, a review of teacher education in Queensland was commissioned in light of the poor performance of students in Queensland schools in the reading component of the National Assessment Program for Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) (Caldwell & Sutton, 2010). One of the review's benchmarks for initial teacher education was that "All [ITE] students who will be involved in teaching literacy undertake studies in evidence-based approaches that give substantial weight to explicit teaching". The review's assessment of current practice in ITE courses was: "While this should not be interpreted narrowly to refer exclusively to phonics, more attention should be given to explicit teaching across all programs before this benchmark can be met across the state" (p. 110).

The findings of a 2010 report commissioned by Teaching Australia with respect to preparation to teach reading were limited, but its survey found that ITE students rated their ability to 'plan a teaching program for students who cannot read', and their 'knowledge of different reading practices' lowest on a scale of confidence in teaching abilities (Louden et al., 2010). It also found that students in Master of Teaching programs had significantly better knowledge of literacy teaching than undergraduate ITE students.

The Staff in Australian Schools (SiAS) survey conducted in 2013 found that many beginning teachers were still reporting low satisfaction with their preparation to teach literacy (McKenzie et al., 2014). Only 60% of early career primary teachers said they found their ITE course to be helpful, or very helpful, in developing strategies for teaching literacy. Principals who participated in the SiAS survey also lacked confidence in the abilities of new teachers, with only 33% saying that they thought that recent graduates were well, or very well, prepared to develop strategies for teaching literacy.

In light of ongoing concerns about the quality of teaching degrees, the federal government convened a Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group (TEMAG) in 2013 to provide recommendations for improvement. This advisory group commissioned a team of researchers to develop 'best practice principles' and to benchmark Australia's teacher education programs against programs in other countries. The commissioned report confirmed that principals, senior teachers, and beginning teachers were of the opinion that teachers were not being adequately prepared to teach the foundation areas of the curriculum, including reading, and their extensive investigation of teacher education programs led them to conclude the following: "We do not know which Australian programs are more effective. Teacher education in Australia operates in a relatively evidence-free zone. This is not to imply any particular judgment about the quality of Australia's teacher education system. We simply do not have the evidence that would enable Australia's programs to be benchmarked against each other, or internationally in terms of their effectiveness" (Ingvarson et al., 2014, p. 44).

A review of literacy units in ITE courses in NSW universities in 2014 supported this conclusion. The NSW Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards (BOSTES) reported significant concerns among numerous stakeholders about the knowledge and skills of graduate primary teachers in evidence-based reading instruction. The review of literacy units found that "the extent to which [ITE] providers take the integrated, explicit and systematic approach to the teaching of reading as

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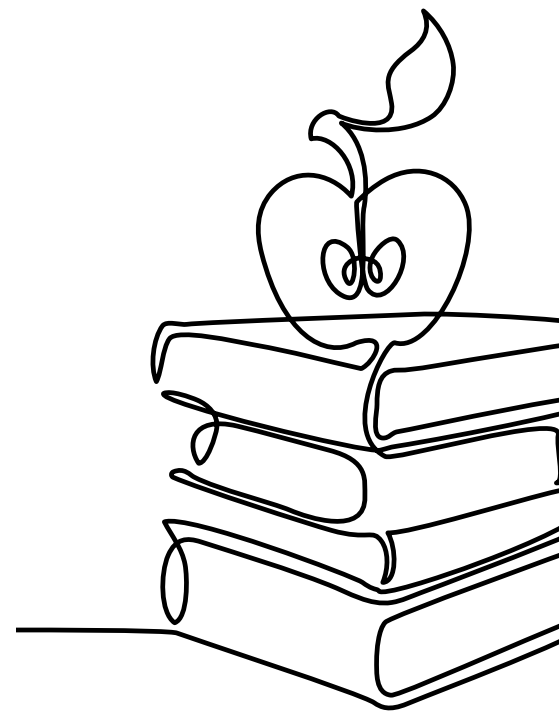
recommended by national and international research evidence remains unclear" (NSW BOSTES, 2014, p. 3).

The BOSTES report put forward a number of useful recommendations, including the requirement that essential content for ITE literacy units should include "the explicit and systematic teaching of phonemic awareness, systematic phonics instruction, how to assess reading, the analysis of reading assessment/data and monitoring student progress in reading" (NSW BOSTES, 2014, p. 3). The report also proposed that the accreditation processes for ITE courses be strengthened.

The final TEMAG report published in 2014 contained a number of findings about the preparation of teachers to teach reading that were consistent with previous reports and reviews (TEMAG, 2014), namely:

- There are concerns that initial teacher education programs include content not informed by evidence.

- Teacher education programs are not consistently equipping beginning teachers with the evidence-based strategies and skills needed to respond to diverse student learning needs.

- Providers are not preparing pre-service teachers with the knowledge and skills to use assessment data to inform and improve their teaching practice.

- Beginning teachers need a solid understanding of subject content, pedagogy and pedagogical content knowledge.

- Primary and secondary pre-service teachers should be adequately prepared to use a range of evidence-based strategies to meet student learning needs, particularly in literacy and numeracy.

The TEMAG report proposed numerous recommendations to address these points, including:

Recommendation 6: Initial accreditation of programs requires higher education providers to demonstrate that their programs have evidence-based pedagogical approaches, effective integration of professional experience, rigorous and iterative assessment of pre-service teachers throughout their education, and final assessments that ensure pre-service teachers are classroom ready. Higher education providers provide a set of measures that assess the effectiveness of their programs in achieving successful graduate outcomes.

Recommendation 14: Higher education providers deliver evidence-based content focused on the depth of subject knowledge and range of pedagogical approaches that enable pre-service teachers to make a positive impact on the learning of all students.

Recommendation 17: Higher education providers equip all primary and secondary pre-service teachers with a thorough understanding of the fundamentals of teaching literacy and numeracy.

The Studying the Effectiveness of Teacher Education (SETE) study was a four-year longitudinal study that followed almost 5,000 early career teachers from their ITE through to their first teaching positions. It investigated various aspects of preparation for teaching, from both the perspective of the participating early career teachers and the principals

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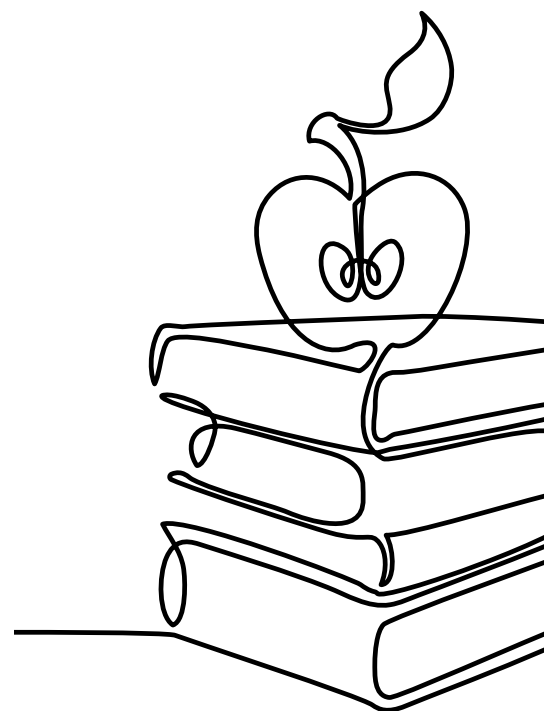
of the schools in which they were employed. According to the SETE report, published in 2015, a mapping of course content found that primary teaching preparation "focused on teaching reading, with a range of models, including instruction on how to teach phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary knowledge and text comprehension, and writing (including grammar and spelling), speaking, and listening." (Mayer et al., 2015, p. 33). No further detail is provided to support this statement. Participants in the SETE study were given a Graduate Teacher Survey but it did not ask about preparation to teach reading or early literacy. Overall, approximately 60% of graduates either strongly agreed or agreed that the knowledge gained in their university-based units was relevant to their current teaching context. However, participants were more likely to rate the relevance of their practicum more highly (more than 90%). The survey of principals found that pedagogical content knowledge in the area of literacy and numeracy was among the most frequently mentioned as needing improvement.

The SETE report noted that there has been "regular and consistent reporting of where teacher education has been seen to be in need of improvement. However, many of these are government or similar reports which follow a familiar procedure... largely re-hashed and re-presented well-worn and often anecdotally informed concerns about teacher education and the teaching profession as well as suggestions for remedying the situation...Large-scale empirical research to inform such debates has not been carried out. SETE set out to fill that gap." (Mayer et al., p. 145). This intention notwithstanding, the SETE report is still a high-level, generalised evaluation and relies on perceptions of preparedness and effectiveness on broad aspects of teaching.

A survey conducted by the Australian Primary Principals Association in 2015 provides further supporting evidence that principals do not rate the preparation of teachers highly. More than half of principals responding to the APPA survey said that graduate teachers could not teach reading to a 'reasonable' level (APPA, 2015).

Criticisms of teacher preparation to teach reading have been disputed (Honan, 2015). As described in this report, the evidence on the inadequacy of teacher education draws heavily on surveys of teachers and principals (who are, of course, highly experienced teachers). An Australian Literacy Educators Association (ALEA) project was developed to provide the views of people who had purportedly been "notably absent in the debate" (p. 39) – recently graduated primary school teachers and experienced primary school teachers (Exley, Honan, Kervin, Simpson, Wells, & Muspratt, 2016). Phase 1 of the project was a survey distributed via the ALEA email list and other ALEA promotional platforms. Its findings were strongly aligned with the results of previous surveys.

The survey results have so far been reported only in a summarised form in an ALEA journal. In survey items that focused on graduate teachers' teaching practices,

- 57% agreed with the summative statement 'overall graduate teachers are effective literacy teachers'.

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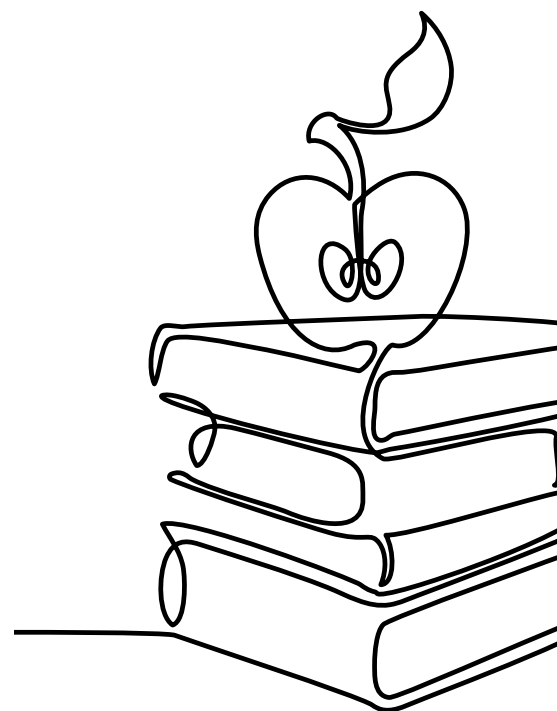
- 64% agreed that 'generally, graduate teachers know how to provide an integrated approach to reading that supports the development of oral language, vocabulary, grammar, reading fluency and comprehension'.

- 54% agreed that 'generally, graduate teachers have an in-depth knowledge of a range of instructional strategies that can be used to meet student literacy needs'.

- 48% agreed that 'generally, graduate teachers know how to interpret the results of standardised assessment tools that measure student achievement in English'.

- 29% agreed that 'generally, graduate teachers know how to address the complex nature of reading difficulties'.

In response to these findings, the ALEA project team concluded, "Given the centrality of methods of instruction and assessment to a primary school teacher's content knowledge of English and literacy and to redressing equity issues in institutionalised schooling, the findings reported by this particular group of respondents warrant further investigation" (Exley et al., 2016, p. 41).

The findings of the second phase of the survey were also reported in a summarised form in the ALEA journal in 2018 (Exley & Kitson, 2018). This phase of the project surveyed first and final year initial teacher education students. In survey items on self-reported content knowledge of English and literacy and pedagogical content knowledge of final year students,

- 85% agreed they had in-depth knowledge of 'phonics (including phonemic awareness and phonological knowledge) (sic)'

- 77% agreed they could interpret the results of standardised assessment tools

- 83% agreed they had the knowledge to 'provide systematic, direct and explicit phonics instruction', however only 66% agreed they had the knowledge to implement explicit and direct teaching strategies. This apparent contrast is not explained.

- 60% agreed they had the knowledge to address the complex nature of reading difficulties.

In calculating these percentages, all responses in the agreement half of a six-point Likert scale were included. It is possible that a large proportion of the agree responses were weak agreement. This breakdown is not provided.

The authors acknowledge the large discrepancies in self-reported knowledge between final year students and graduate teachers (for example, in their ability to address reading difficulties), suggesting an "idealism" among final year students (Exley & Kitson, 2018, p. 44). Studies which have found that teacher confidence often exceeds knowledge (noted below) suggest that this idealism may apply equally to other aspects of self-reported knowledge in the ALEA survey, including knowledge of phonics and how to teach it.

Several studies support the SETE finding that teachers were more likely to rate their practicum as providing relevant knowledge for their teaching decisions and practices than their university courses. Carter, Stephenson,

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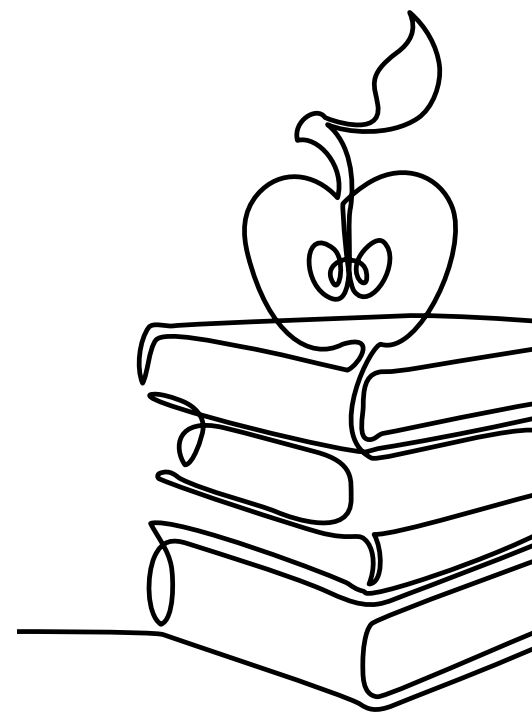
and Hopper (2015) from Macquarie University surveyed 290 final year education students in 15 universities and found that only 33% of students said the content of their current teacher preparation course was very important in deciding which instructional practices they will use in the classroom, compared with 70% who said their practicum was a very important factor in this decision. Even fewer students said that research was very important (25%).

Stark, Snow, Eadie, and Goldfeld (2016) investigated the knowledge about language and reading instruction of 78 prep teachers in Victorian schools. Their survey found that a minority of teachers (40%) felt confident in their knowledge and, of those who did feel confident, fewer than 4% attributed their confidence to their initial teacher education. They were far more likely to report they had gained their knowledge from classroom experience (13%) or professional development (15%).

The accumulated evidence on the inadequate quality of ITE courses in preparation for teaching literacy is almost exclusively based on perceptions. However, the fact that this perception is shared by almost every group of people involved in primary school education – teacher education students, graduate teachers, early career teachers, experienced teachers, principals, employers, and researchers – and has been confirmed without exception by numerous independent researchers over more than a decade means that it cannot be dismissed on the grounds that it is subjective. It also means that it cannot be ignored if there is to be any hope of improving literacy levels among Australian students.

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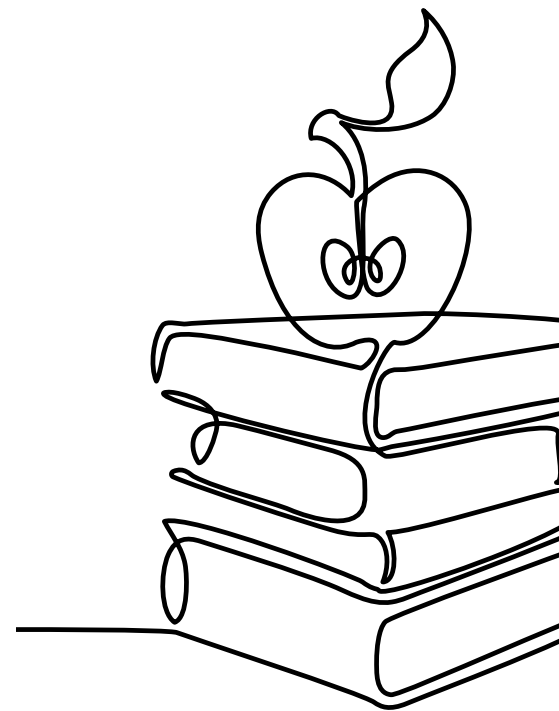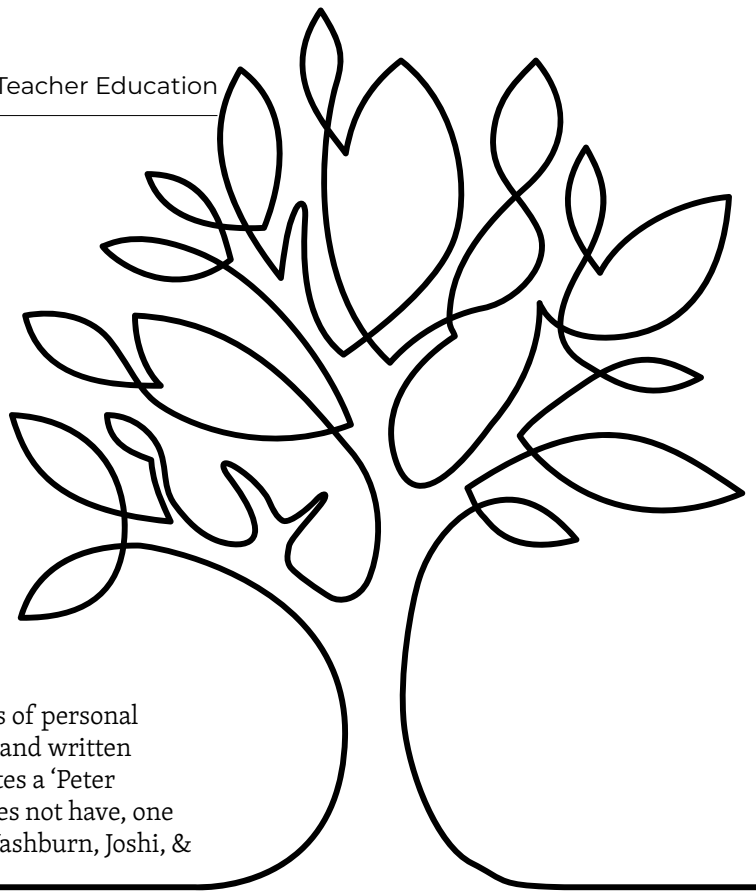
Teacher literacy and knowledge about language

Effective teachers of literacy need to have adequate levels of personal literacy and sound knowledge of the elements of spoken and written language, and of how to teach it. Lack of knowledge creates a 'Peter effect' in education – just as one cannot give what one does not have, one cannot teach what one does not know (Binks-Cantrell, Washburn, Joshi, & Hougen, 2012).

There is evidence that many graduate teachers do not have a sufficient level of proficiency with respect to their own literacy or their knowledge of how to develop reading literacy in children. Furthermore, numerous studies have found a mismatch between teacher confidence in their own literacy and knowledge about language, and their actual knowledge and ability (Bostock & Boon, 2012). The risk in such a mismatch is that teachers whose confidence exceeds their competence will not be open to the opportunities or incentives to improve and will be unlikely to seek professional learning. A further risk, from a policy perspective, is that research that explores only teachers' perceptions of their knowledge and ability is not necessarily accurate; actual knowledge must be measured to determine teacher competency (Stephenson, 2018).

As stated by Binks-Cantrell and colleagues in 2012,

> Effective teaching is the best weapon against reading failure, and, in order for preservice teacher preparation to be improved, an increase in teacher educators' understanding of the critical basic language constructs of reading is needed. (p. 535)

Personal literacy

There is little rigorous data on the personal literacy levels of ITE students in Australian universities – that is, their own reading and writing skills– but there is widespread concern that literacy levels among many prospective teachers are too low.

The National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy (NITL) (Rowe, 2005) reported that its focus groups of teacher educators expressed the view that many students lacked the literacy skills required to be effective teachers of reading and although most ITE degrees assessed literacy levels and provided course work to remediate it, this was not universal. The report recommended that all graduate teachers be required to demonstrate their literacy competence as a condition of registration. There is some research demonstrating that university-based interventions can improve preservice teachers' literacy skills (Sellings, Felstead, & Goriss-Hunter, 2018).

Effective teaching is the best weapon against reading failure, and, in order for preservice teacher preparation to be improved, an increase in teacher educators' understanding of the critical basic language constructs of reading is needed

The TEMAG report identified the personal literacy of ITE students as a concern again in 2014. Given the persistence of the concerns and the lack of action from universities to demonstrate they were addressing the issue, the TEMAG report recommended the introduction of a compulsory literacy and numeracy test for all ITE students in order to graduate and be accredited as teachers. The Literacy and Numeracy Test for Initial Teacher Education Students became mandatory in 2016 (Australian Government Department of Education and Training, 2018). Ninety-one per cent of students passed the literacy component in 2018 (Urban, 2019).

Knowledge about language and evidence-based practice

Teachers' personal literacy skills are essential, but in order to be highly effective teachers of reading, teachers need good knowledge of the structures and features of written and spoken English, and of evidence-based teaching methods.

Implicit knowledge of language is sufficient to be able to read and write well, but explicit knowledge of language is necessary to teach it to others. Implicit knowledge will allow a teacher to identify and point out where a child has made errors in reading or writing, but effective teaching requires an explanation of why it is an error. For example, knowing about the common 'schwa' vowel sound and being able to explain it to a beginning reader will help with pronunciation and spelling. This can be especially important for children learning English as a second language (Mahar & Richdale, 2008).

Louisa Moats gives the example of teaching the past tense to show how our implicit understanding of this language concept betrays its complexity, and how teaching it explicitly to a beginning reader and writer requires knowledge of phonological awareness, phonics and morphology.

> First, the student must learn that the English regular past tense has three pronunciations (/t/, /d/, /əd/) that are governed by the properties of the final phoneme in the base word. A base word ending in a voiceless consonant such as /s/ (kiss) adds the voiceless /t/ as the spoken form of the past tense (kissed). A base word ending in a voiced consonant or vowel such as /m/ or /ou/ (hum; vow) adds the voiced /d/ for the past tense (hummed, vowed). And base words ending in /d/ or /t/ add the syllable /əd/ (wanted, ended). The spelling "ed" looks like a syllable but in most instances is not pronounced as a syllable; it is a stable morpheme preserved in orthography to convey meaning. (Moats, 2014, p. 77)

Research on pre-service and graduate teachers' knowledge about language is more prevalent than data on their personal literacy levels. Harper and Rennie (2009) describe knowledge about language (KAL) as "a concept that relates to all aspects of linguistic form. It relates to knowledge about the sounds of a language, such as knowledge about the phonological and phonemic systems and how these systems relate to print (graphophonics), as well as to knowledge about the words of a language, word meanings (semantics) and the origins of words (etymologies). A major aspect of KAL, especially in the context of schooling, is knowledge about grammar" (p. 23).
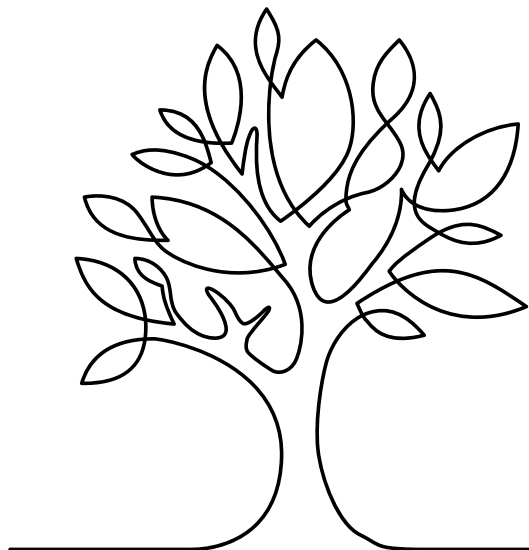
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A systematic review of the preparedness of pre-service teachers to teach reading by Meeks, Stephenson, and Kemp (2016) included studies that assessed the extent of their knowledge about language. Thirteen studies of pre-service teachers in Australian and the US were identified. In each study, few pre-service teachers had explicit knowledge of phonics terminology, phonics instruction and English language structures. As this current paper is concerned with Australian ITE, only the main findings of studies of Australian pre-service and graduate teachers are outlined below.

- Mahar & Richdale (2008)
  - Participants were 120 pre-service teachers and in-service teachers in Victoria.
  - The mean number of items answered correctly was 4.6 out of 10.
  - 13% of pre-service teachers and 20% of in-service teachers could identify a diphthong. Almost all could count syllables accurately in a given word, but only 38% of pre-service teachers and 52% of in-service teachers could identify the correct definition of a syllable.
  - Participants "did not demonstrate adequate knowledge of metalinguistics" (p. 17).

- Harper & Rennie (2009)
  - Participants were 39 first year pre-service teachers in one university.
  - Questions given were at a Year 7, Year 10 and Year 12 level of expectation.
  - "The majority of participants appeared to have poor understandings of basic linguistic concepts at all levels."
  - Fewer than half of the participants were able to identify the discrete sounds that make up a word. Only one third were able to identify a pronoun. Most were able to identify a verb in context but only half were able to identify a word in the simple past tense.
  - Generally the knowledge about language of the participants was "fragmented and lacked depth" (p. 22).

- Fielding-Barnsley (2010)
  - Participants were 162 pre-service teachers in first through to fourth year at one Queensland University.
  - 72% correctly identified the definition of phoneme; 33% correctly identified the number of phonemes in the word 'chop'; 25% for the word 'this', and 4% for the word 'box'.
  - 95% of pre-service teachers agreed that phonics is important in the teaching of reading.
  - "This study has confirmed that having a positive attitude towards the use of phonics in early reading does not necessarily equate to having adequate knowledge of phonics" (p. 106).

- Bostock & Boon (2012)
  - Participants were 180 pre-service teachers from first to final year in one university.

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- The mean number of correct answers for the year groups ranged from 57-71% for spelling, 53-73% for punctuation, 50%-75% for apostrophes, 38-53% for verbs and 25-45% for nouns.
- The second section (verbs and nouns) proved difficult for many students as they required explicit knowledge.
- "The second section showed most scores below 50% correct, indicating poor levels across the entire cohort. This is of considerable concern as these skills, the identification of nouns and verbs, are of a lower primary school focus and should be a perfunctory skill for university level participants such as pre-service teachers" (p. 31).

- Tetley & Jones (2014)
  - Participants were 224 pre-service teachers in second year and third year at a one NSW university.
  - Second year students had completed a language concepts course and third year students had completed a practicum.
  - Second year students' mean score on a test of knowledge of phonological constructs was 75%. Third year students' mean score was 66%.
  - PSTs had highest scores for items that required implicit rather than explicit knowledge.
  - Third year students whose practicum had exposed them to a commercial phonics program had higher scores on the knowledge test than students whose practicum had exposed them to Reading Recovery.

- Carter, Stephenson, & Hopper (2015)
  - Participants were 290 pre-service teachers in 15 universities.
  - Investigated the knowledge of pre-service teachers about evidence-based practices and the importance they place on evidence in decisions about teaching practices.
  - 25% of PSTs said research was very important when deciding on instructional practices. The highest proportion (70%) said their practicum was very important.
  - PSTs judged instructional practices as having strong or very strong evidence bases when they did not. For example, 61% of PSTs said that learning styles instruction and multiple intelligences have a strong or very strong evidence base. Only 50% said phonics had a strong or very strong evidence base.
  - "The data presented in the current study indicates that teachers may be continuing to place greater weighting on personal experiences and preferences than evidence" (p. 97).

- Stark, Snow, Eadie, & Goldfeld (2016)
  - Participants were 78 prep teachers in Victoria.
  - Results of a test of knowledge of language constructs showed that "teachers' explicit and implicit knowledge of basic linguistic constructs was limited and highly variable" (p. 28).

This study has confirmed that having a positive attitude towards the use of phonics in early reading does not necessarily equate to having adequate knowledge of phonics
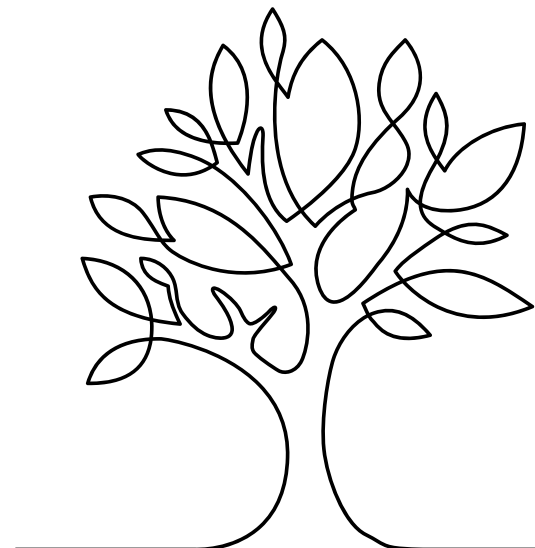
- Teachers' ability to correctly define or identify the definition of key language constructs was mostly low: phoneme (79%); phonemic awareness (38%); phonological awareness (47%); morpheme (53%); schwa (26%) and diphthong (13%).
- 46% of teachers identified the consonant clusters 'gr' and 'br' as single phonemes.
- "The findings from this study confirm that in the field of language and literacy instruction, there is a gap between the knowledge that is theoretically requisite, and therefore expected, and the actual knowledge of many teachers." (p. 28).

- Stephenson (2018)
  - A systematic review of 14 studies which measured knowledge about language and reading instruction in pre-service teachers. Only one study found adequate knowledge about language.

Research on the language knowledge of pre-service teachers and teachers in schools has repeatedly shown a generally poor level of knowledge of the key constructs of language and a weak understanding of the evidence base for effective reading instruction. While this is an indirect measure of ITE quality, it indicates that either this information has not been taught to pre-service teachers in the literacy units of their ITE courses, or it was taught, and they did not learn it. Either way, people are graduating with degrees that qualify them as primary school teachers without adequately preparing them for what is arguably their most important responsibility – teaching children to read.

Pre-service teachers judged instructional practices as having strong or very strong evidence bases when they did not. For example, 61% of pre-service teachers said that learning styles instruction and multiple intelligences have a strong or very strong evidence base
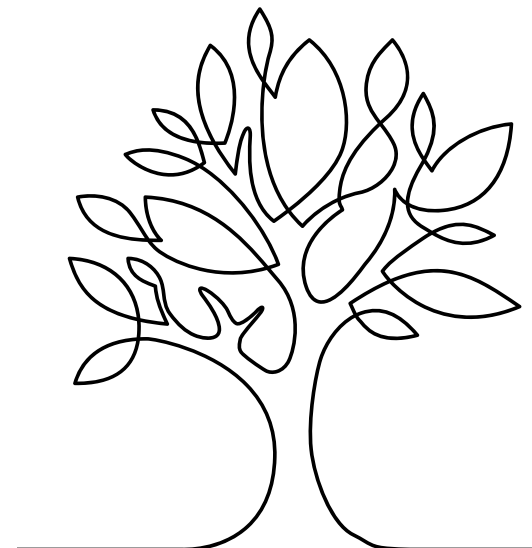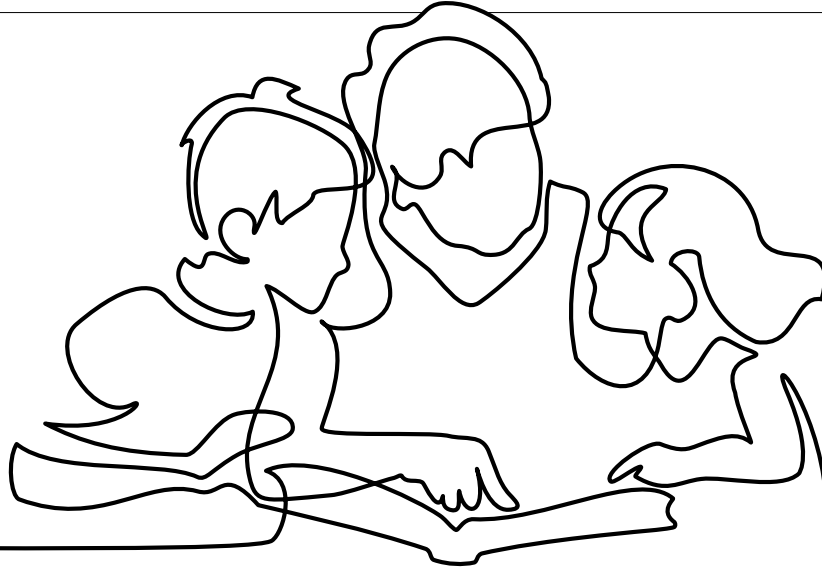
Evidence-based early reading instruction

This report will not present a detailed treatise for what constitutes evidence-based reading instruction as that research literature has been comprehensively covered elsewhere (Hempenstall, 2016; Seidenberg, 2017; Castles, Nation, & Rastle, 2018; Buckingham, Wheldall & Wheldall, 2019). Studies of reading over the past several decades have identified and repeatedly confirmed that reading development occurs most successfully when instruction includes five elements:

Phonemic awareness

Phonics

Fluency

Vocabulary

Comprehension

These five essential elements are often referred to as the 'five big ideas' of reading instruction. Studies have also repeatedly provided evidence that the most effective way to teach the 'five big ideas' is explicitly and systematically. Phonics and phonemic awareness have the strongest pedagogical evidence base, but the teaching of phonics is the most highly contested aspect of reading instruction.

Among reading researchers, it is also widely acknowledged that the conceptual model called the 'Simple View of Reading' is the most accurate predictive model of reading development known to date (Gough & Tunmer, 1986). The Simple View of Reading states that reading comprehension is, at the broadest conceptual level, the product of two factors: word identification and language comprehension. The two factors are described using simple terms, but each represents a cluster of complex knowledge and skills. If a child is struggling with either of these factors, they will have poor reading comprehension. Determining which of these factors is the major cause of the difficulty (sometimes it is both) can help determine the type of intervention required. The Simple View of Reading has been investigated and validated in dozens of studies involving thousands of children in multiple countries (Lonigan, Burgess, & Schatschneider, 2018; Hoover & Tunmer, 2018).

This report looks at the published information on the content of literacy units in undergraduate ITE courses in Australian universities to obtain an indication of the emphasis on these fundamental components of evidence-based reading instruction. It also looks at the qualifications and expertise of lecturers or unit coordinators in the specific teaching and research discipline of early reading.

Phonics and phonemic awareness have the strongest pedagogical evidence base, but the teaching of phonics is the most highly contested aspect of reading instruction

Method

All universities publish information about their teacher education courses on their websites. All list the names and unit codes of the core units and electives for each course. The amount of information they provide about each unit, and the way in which the information is organised, differs considerably. Some universities publish extensive detail on each unit while others provide very little.

This review gathered information on the core literacy units of undergraduate initial teacher education degree courses that qualify people to work as primary teachers. It did not look at Masters degrees. Teaching degrees carry various titles and can cover multiple levels of schooling. In some universities, early education degrees cover the early years of primary school as well as pre-primary. These degrees are included in the review. In other universities, early education degrees are pre-primary teaching qualifications only and they are not included in the review.

The information considered in the review is for units offered in 2018 or 2019, depending on the latest available information at the time.

The review looked at three aspects of primary school literacy units in undergraduate ITE courses.

1. **Unit outline, summary and/or outcomes**

This information is incomplete, but it is indicative. Arguably, the information in the course outline or summary is what the coordinator or lecturer considers to be the key aspects of the course. What is included in this summary (and what is missing) gives some indication of the focus of a course and its priorities.

Three aspects were noted:

a. The extent to which the unit focuses on early reading and literacy

b. Whether the 'five big ideas' (the essential elements of reading instruction identified in scientific reading research) were mentioned

c. The models/ theories/ theorists that were mentioned

2. **Prescribed and recommended texts**

The prescribed and recommended texts are also a proxy indicator of the content and quality of the course. If a text is set as required reading, this material will be the foundation of what is learnt in the course. It is highly unlikely a lecturer would set a text that contradicts the content of the lectures. Where the prescribed or recommended texts were not listed on the university website, the text book search function of the Coop bookshop or university bookshop was searched using the unit code. If this was not successful, an email was sent to the lecturer or unit coordinator requesting the information. Thirty-eight email requests were sent and 18 replies were received. Two of the replies declined to provide the information requested.

This review gathered information on the core literacy units of undergraduate initial teacher education degree courses that qualify people to work as primary teachers

The six texts that were most commonly prescribed or recommended for students were reviewed.

3. **Expertise of the unit coordinator or lecturer in early reading or literacy.**

Early reading instruction has a large and highly specific research base that is distinct from the development of literacy more broadly. The expertise and research interests of the unit coordinator or lecturer are therefore important indicators of the rigour and depth of the unit content. This was determined by looking at the research and publication history and academic biography of the lecturer or unit coordinator on the university website, and seeking further information from ResearchGate, Trove or Google Scholar if necessary. For units that did not have the lecturer or course coordinator listed on the university website, an email was sent to the relevant person in the school of education. Thirteen email requests were sent and six replies were received. One of the replies declined to provide the information requested.

Early reading instruction has a large and highly specific research base that is distinct from the development of literacy more broadly. The expertise and research interests of the unit coordinator or lecturer are therefore important indicators of the rigour and depth of the unit content
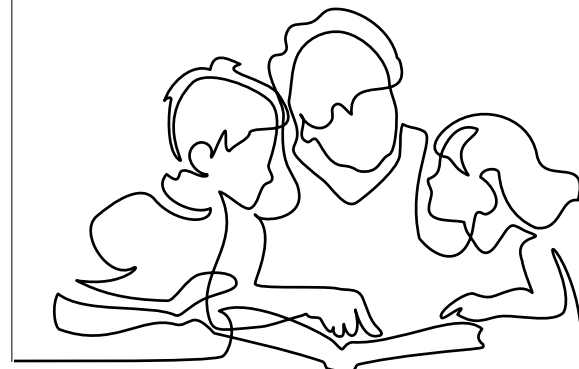
Results

The review looked at the websites of 38 universities offering 66 undergraduate primary initial teacher education degree courses. There was a total of 116 different core literacy units within these courses.

Table 1. Universities, courses and units in the review

Number of universities	38
Number of ITE courses	66
Primary	38
Early Childhood/Primary	14
Early Childhood*	9
Primary/Secondary	5
Number of literacy units	116

* includes early primary years

Table 2. Literacy unit content

Unit focus	Number
Focuses specifically on early reading instruction	5
Early reading is mentioned but is included with other literacy content	30
Broad focus on literacy; early reading instruction is not specifically mentioned but reading is mentioned	38
Broad focus on literacy; reading is not mentioned	33
Literacy and numeracy are included	5
No mention of literacy or reading	1
No information	4
Five big ideas	
All five elements mentioned or 'five big ideas' mentioned	7
Phonemic awareness	12
Phonics	13
Fluency	4
Vocabulary	7
Comprehension	7
None of the 'five big ideas' mentioned	81
Models/theories mentioned	
Balanced approach/model/view	14
Sociocultural or social approach/model/view	9
Explicit	9
Four resources/roles of a reader	8
Learning styles	4
Whole language	2
Inquiry	2
Simple View of Reading	0

Table 3. Unit lecturer or course coordinators' expertise in early reading instruction

	Number	% of known
Early reading or early literacy expertise or research interest	13	15%
Literacy but not early reading or early literacy expertise or research interest	47	55%
No early reading or early literacy expertise or research interest	25	30%
Not known	37	

Table 4. Most frequently prescribed and recommended texts

Book	Number of units for which it is prescribed or recommended	Number of universities where it is prescribed or recommended
Derewianka, B. & Jones, P. (2016). *Teaching language in context*. (2nd ed). South Melbourne: Oxford University Press.	10	8
Fellowes, J., & Oakley, G. (2014). *Language, literacy and early childhood education*. South Melbourne: Oxford University Press.	12	9
Hill, S. (2012). *Developing early literacy: Assessment and teaching*. South Yarra: Eleanor Curtain Publishing.	10	9
Seely Flint, A., Kitson, L., Lowe, K., & Shaw, K. (2014). *Literacy in Australia: Pedagogies for engagement*. Milton, Australia: Wiley.	17	8
Tompkins, G., Campbell, R., Green, D., & Smith, C. (2015). *Literacy for the 21st century: A balanced approach* (2nd ed). Melbourne: Pearson.	13	7
Winch, G., Ross Johnston, R., March, P., Ljungdahl, L. & Holliday, M. (2014). *Literacy, reading, writing and children's literature* (5th ed). South Melbourne: Oxford University Press.	6	6

Out of the 116 literacy units reviewed, only five had a specific focus on early reading instruction or early literacy, that is, how to teach beginning readers in the first few years of school. This means that 33 out of 38 universities' primary teaching courses did not have a compulsory unit devoted to early reading instruction. In a further 30 units, early reading or early literacy was mentioned in some form but was included with other literacy content.

In 81 (70%) of the 116 literacy units reviewed, none of the five essential elements of effective evidence-based reading instruction were mentioned in the unit outlines. Reference was made to all of the 'five big ideas' components in only seven units (6%). The remaining unit outlines mentioned at least one of the 'five big ideas', most often phonemic awareness and/or phonics, which were mentioned a total of 19 and 20 times in total respectively (*phonemic awareness* 12 times individually plus seven times with all of the 'five big ideas'; *phonics* 13 times individually plus seven times with all of the 'five big ideas'). This means they were each mentioned in approximately 16% of all literacy units.

The specific model or theory mentioned most frequently in the unit outlines was the Four Resources / Four Roles of a Reader model (Freebody & Luke, 1990), which was referred to eight times. The sociocultural model or view of reading was referred to nine times. Fourteen of the unit outlines contained references to a balanced approach to literacy, and nine referred to explicit teaching. Two outlines referred to inquiry approaches to literacy and four referred to learning styles. None of the unit outlines contained references to the Simple View of Reading.

Information about the prescribed and recommended texts was obtained for thirty universities. Six text books were much more frequently prescribed or recommended than others. At least one of those six books (sometimes several of them) were recommended or prescribed in 27 universities. As described in the review of the text books in Appendix 1, none of those six text books provides sufficiently comprehensive and accurate information about evidence-based early reading instruction. All have serious shortcomings in the amount of focused content on the 'five big ideas' as well as on the quality and evidence-base of the information provided.

There are more lecturers and unit coordinators than there are discrete literacy units because some units are taught on multiple campuses by different lecturers. Of 122 lecturers and coordinators of literacy units, 85 were able to be identified and their expertise in early reading instruction scrutinised. Thirteen (15% of those that could be identified) had specific expertise in early reading instruction or literacy, many with a particular interest in early literacy development among Indigenous and other children from non-English speaking backgrounds. Forty-seven (55%) had research interests and expertise in other aspects of literacy, most often digital and multi-modal literacies. Twenty-five (30%) literacy lecturers or unit coordinators had research interests and expertise in areas other than literacy, such as maths or music.

In 81 (70%) of the 116 literacy units reviewed, none of the five essential elements of effective evidence-based reading instruction were mentioned in the unit outlines

Discussion

Studies, testimonies from pre-service and graduate teachers, and surveys of teacher and principal perceptions regarding pre-service and graduate teacher knowledge about language and evidence-based pedagogy, have together contributed to persistent and serious concerns about the quality of preparation to teach reading in initial teacher education courses.

This review of the content of literacy units in ITE courses supports and extends the evidence that concerns about the preparation of teachers to teach reading are justified and that very little progress has been made since the National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy (NITL) (Rowe, 2005) reported its findings almost two decades ago. The NITL report in 2005 recommended 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 should focus on contemporary understandings of: evidence-based findings and an integrated approach to the teaching of reading, including instruction on how to teach phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary knowledge and text comprehension; child and adolescent development; and inclusive approaches to literacy teaching" (p. 20). Subsequent reviews of ITE made almost identical recommendations. This review of ITE literacy courses indicates that the recommendations with respect to a focus on beginning reading, the prioritisation of evidence-based practice and the five essential elements of reading instruction, have not been widely adopted.

Only 6% of literacy unit outlines referred to all five essential elements and 70% did not refer to any of them. None of the unit outlines referred to the Simple View of Reading. This does not prove that there are no courses teaching about the Simple View of Reading, or that the outlines that do not mention the 'five big ideas' do not include them in their content, but it does indicate the limited emphasis on these content areas. That eight literacy unit outlines mention the Four Resources model, three refer to

learning styles and none refer to the Simple View of Reading is certainly suggestive. A review of the content of the six most commonly prescribed text books found that four did not mention the Simple View of Reading and two gave only a perfunctory and dismissive description. None of the text books reviewed contained content on the 'five big ideas' that would allow graduate teachers to use effective, evidence-based instruction and many contained information that was either inadequate and misleading.

Part of the reason for this may be the low proportion (15%) of lecturers and unit coordinators with specialist expertise in early reading instruction. Again, the fact that a lecturer does not have specific early reading expertise does not prove they do not have good knowledge of the evidence base for effective early reading instruction, but it does make it less likely. Early reading instruction is a highly specific and extensive discipline that is distinct from literacy more broadly. It requires deep and explicit knowledge about the metalinguistic structures of written and spoken English, and a sound understanding of the research on effective pedagogies.

The NITL report and the TEMAG report, almost ten years later, recommended more stringent requirements for the accreditation of ITE courses. As a result of the TEMAG report the federal government tasked the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership to introduce new accreditation standards for ITE programs in 2016 (AITSL, n.d.), but the standards do not seem to be sufficiently rigorous in the area of literacy to have made a visible impact on the preparation of teachers to teach reading.

This situation is highly deleterious to beginning teachers, many of whom are graduating from three- and four-year degrees without the knowledge they need to provide effective reading instruction. This deficiency also has serious consequences for beginning readers, with as many as one in four children not developing sufficient literacy skills to achieve reading proficiency by Year 4 (Thomson, Hillman, Schmid, Rodrigues, & Fullarton, 2017).

The National Literacy Learning Progression was developed to provide more detail to teachers in implementing the Australian Curriculum: English in the early primary years (ACARA, 2018). The progression requires teachers to provide instruction to students in the five essential elements of phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. State departments of education, non-government school authorities, and principals associations have endorsed these elements (some add a further element – oral language – to make a 'Big 6' and have provided some advice to teachers on the teaching methods that are most likely to enable all children to achieve at the standard expected by the curriculum (NSW CESE, 2016; SA DECD, 2016; AISNSW n.d.). It should be noted that not all advice is entirely consistent with evidence-based practice, however.

It is the responsibility of teacher educators in universities to provide the knowledge and skills that enable primary school teachers to fulfil their responsibilities in the classroom for, as suggested by Hikida et al. (2019), "what preservice teachers do during their literacy preparation is what they believe the teaching of reading to be" (p. 191).

This review of the content of literacy units in ITE courses supports and extends the evidence that concerns about the preparation of teachers to teach reading are justified and that very little progress has been made since the National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy (Rowe, 2005) reported its findings almost two decades ago

Barriers to improvement

A number of factors explain the poor quality of preparation of teachers to teach reading and represent the barriers to change.

1. **Insufficient time devoted to early reading and literacy in ITE courses**

According to the unit outlines published by universities, only 5% of universities offer literacy units that focus on early reading and literacy. Even so, a focus on early reading does not guarantee that the information provided to ITE students will be sufficiently grounded in evidence, and the content of the text books prescribed in literacy units suggests this is the case.

Teaching beginning readers is a crucial aspect of primary teaching and there is an enormous amount of research on how children learn to read and practical evidence-based strategies on how to teach them. Arguably, even a 12-week unit of study on beginning reading would be barely adequate, but the vast majority of courses do not allocate even that much time. In some ITE courses, literacy is not studied beyond the second year of the degree, leaving a large gap between study and entering the classroom.

2. **Resistance to prioritising scientific research findings in education academia**

Scientific research has provided vital insights into the way children learn to read that have significant implications for classroom practice. This research takes the form of controlled experiments that have refined our understanding of the cognitive processes taking place when children learn to read, and therefore our understanding of the teaching and learning conditions necessary for reading development to occur. It also takes the form of applied studies conducted using experimental protocols which show that some teaching methods lead to greater learning progress.

While it is true that other forms of *non-scientific* evidence have validity, they should not be the prime form of evidence relied upon for preparing teachers to make instructional decisions. Theories of reading based on philosophical views about the socio-cultural aspects of reading have little relevance in helping children to make the neurological connections in their brains that allow them to translate the printed word into a phonological form that activates meaning. However, this approach to reading is given much greater emphasis in literacy texts and literacy units.

It has been evident for some time that the initial teacher education provided in universities has been largely impervious to the advances in knowledge acquired through scientific research. Among some education academics there is an apparent resistance to accepting, let alone prioritising, the importance of scientific forms of research to inform teaching practices. For example, a recent statement on reading published by the NSW Council of Deans of Education relied heavily on sociocultural and whole language literacy theorists and did not cite any scientific reading research or researcher (NSW Council of Deans of Education, 2018). This resistance is a significant obstacle that will have to be overcome for any reform in ITE to occur.

As a result of the TEMAG report the federal government tasked the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership to introduce new accreditation standards for ITE programs in 2016 (AITSL, n.d.), but the standards do not seem to be sufficiently rigorous in the area of literacy to have made a visible impact on the preparation of teachers to teach reading

3. **Misinformation in text-books**

Almost all literacy units in ITE courses have a prescribed text book. The review of the six most commonly prescribed text books in this report found that ITE students cannot rely on these texts for an accurate disciplinary knowledge base on early reading instruction. This mirrors the findings of reviews of textbooks used in ITE courses in the United States (National Council on Teaching Quality, 2019; Joshi et al., 2009). Like the US text books, these texts do not adequately address the five essential components of instruction identified and confirmed in thousands of studies over several decades.

The most egregious instances of misinformation and contradictory advice in the text books reviewed are on whether, and how, to teach phonics. Most books acknowledge the important role of phonics in reading acquisition, but none provide sound, practical and consistent guidance on systematic and explicit phonics instruction. Given that this is an area of knowledge in which studies have found pre-service and graduate teachers to be weak, this deficiency in the quality of information in prescribed text books needs to be taken seriously by both the publishers of the texts and the teacher educators who assign them to their students.

4. **Teacher educators**

It is simple enough to say that teacher educators must improve the content of their literacy units in ITE courses to provide pre-service teachers with sound, explicit knowledge about spoken and written language and evidence-based practices to teach children to read. However, it assumes that teacher educators themselves possess this knowledge.

There are no Australian studies of teacher educators' knowledge about language and their views on early reading instruction. A US study found that teacher educators had relatively poor knowledge of important features of English language. The average score on a test of knowledge was around 55% correct for phonics and comprehension and 35% correct for morphology (Joshi, Binks, Graham, Ocker-Dean, Smith, & Boulware-Gooden, 2009). This is an example of the Peter effect mentioned above – one cannot teach what one does not know. It is even more likely to be a problem when the lecturers and coordinators of literacy units have no specific expertise in early reading instruction. This is the case in the vast majority of literacy units in Australian ITE courses.

Additionally, there is a reluctance among administrators and teacher educators to acknowledge and accept the strong evidence supporting the view that almost all ITE courses do not adequately provide pre-service teachers with the evidence-based knowledge about reading instruction that they need to be effective graduate teachers (Exley & Kitson, 2018). That an ITE course meets the minimum national standards for accreditation is not sufficient proof of their quality of literacy teaching, as the standards themselves are not sufficiently rigorous in this regard.

A recent high-profile and widely-acclaimed documentary on deficiencies in reading instruction and the preparation of teachers in the US elicited a response that shows why it has been so difficult to achieve change in ITE in that country, too. In their article, administrators in two university education schools do not attempt to demonstrate how their ITE programs

Scientific research has provided vital insights into the way children learn to read that have significant implications for classroom practice

are rigorous and effective but instead express their worries about the effect that public criticism of ITE might have on university faculty, and question whether the research on reading instruction is "settled" (Bomer & Maloch, 2019, p. 263).

5. **Misinformation promoted to pre-service and in-service teachers.**

It is possible to get some insight about the views and knowledge of the people charged with teacher education in Australian universities from the publications and statements from leading, influential teacher educators. In particular, some teacher educators are promoted as being voices of authority by peak professional associations such as the Australian Literacy Educators Association and the Primary English Teachers Association of Australia. These publications often demonstrate an impoverished understanding of the evidence underpinning learning to read and promulgate inaccurate and misleading information (Buckingham, 2019a; Snow, 2019b).

The dataset of a high-profile evaluation of the Reading Recovery program, published by a leading university in England, was revealed to have been deliberately manipulated in order to produce an unambiguously positive finding (Buckingham, 2019a). Preservice teachers should be able to expect that the information provided to them by their lecturers reflects the best current state of knowledge about teaching and learning based on a firm foundation of evidence. This is not always the case. It is important to note, however, while some teacher educators are preparing pre-service teachers to teach reading using evidence-based practices, this group appears to be in the minority. It is only possible to speculate on the reasons for this: some teachers educators do not know what they don't know, some have invested entire careers into promoting an outdated approach, some have an ideological resistance to teaching methods that they see as in opposition to their philosophy of education. There is currently no incentive for teacher educators to change their approach.

Literacy is a right, not a roll of the dice. Reading is a foundation skill that underpins all other learning in school. Too many teachers are being sent into classrooms without the benefit of the highly valuable knowledge about language and effective teaching of reading that has accumulated over decades of research. This research is freely available through numerous reports, books, and articles in print and online. Too many children are being denied effective instruction that will set them on the path to reading.

The review of the six most commonly prescribed text books in this report found that ITE students cannot rely on these texts for an accurate disciplinary knowledge base on early reading instruction
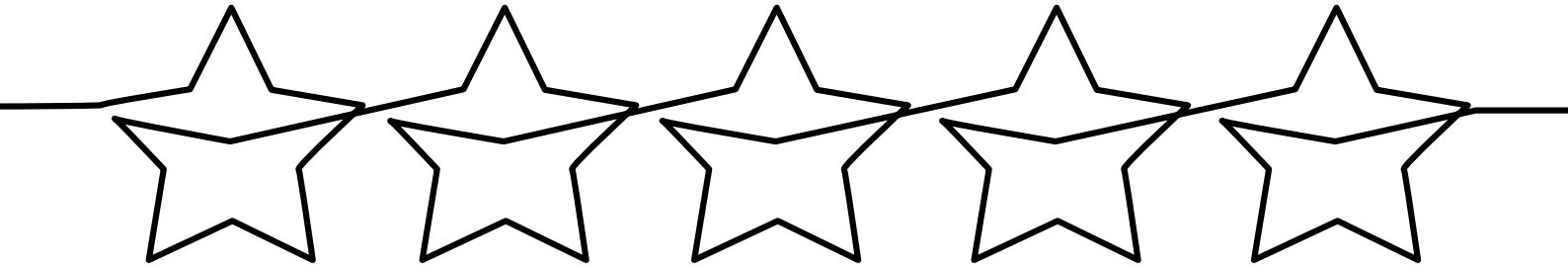
Recommendations

Initial teacher education students, and the children they eventually go on to teach, are being short-changed. There has been a not-unreasonable expectation that universities, as seats of knowledge with an ethical duty to scholarship and learning, would self-regulate and reform in the direction of best practice. However, this has largely not happened and many graduate teachers are entering classrooms without the knowledge of language and evidence-based pedagogy they need to be effective teachers of reading. Therefore, greater accountability is required.

The creation of 'an intermediary faculty-driven group, working in consultation with the administrator(s), … [to] help establish … priorities, better understand the issues and questions of the faculty, set goals, and determine strategies and structures to carry out curriculum change across the program system' as described by Bomer and Maloch (2019, p. 262), may well provide the basis for such changes to be possible.

1. **There must be stricter and more specific accreditation standards for ITE with respect to literacy**. In order to be accredited, all ITE programs that qualify teachers to teach in primary school should be required to demonstrate that they cover, in adequate depth, the scientific research on how children learn to read, and the evidence-informed reading instruction techniques that are most effective.

   Principle 2 of the National Accreditation Standards is particularly relevant:

   > Evidence-based – evidence must underpin all elements of initial teacher education, from the design and delivery of programs to the teaching practices taught within programs. Evidence is the basis on which panels make accreditation recommendations (AITSL, 2018, p. 3).

   For this principle to be upheld in the area of reading, what constitutes acceptable evidence must be more clearly defined. The evidence-base must have a greater weighting toward the extensive scientific literature produced through multi-disciplinary research, including cognitive science and educational research that meets rigorous research protocols.

   Numerous aspects of the national program standards and the graduate teacher standards are aimed at ensuring that ITE courses provide evidence-based information to students but these are liable to be broadly interpreted. For example, from the Graduate Teacher Standards,

   > 1.2 Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of research into how students learn and the implications for teaching.

   > 1.5 Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of strategies for differentiating teaching to meet the specific learning needs of students across the full range of abilities.

The evidence-base must have a greater weighting toward the extensive scientific literature produced through multi-disciplinary research, including cognitive science and educational research that meets rigorous research protocols

2.5 Know and understand literacy and numeracy teaching strategies and their application in teaching areas.

3.2 Plan lesson sequences using knowledge of student learning, content and effective teaching strategies.

These standards are not sufficiently explicit to guide accreditation panels in their decisions about whether ITE programs meet the evidence criteria.

2. **Literacy units need to be included in every year of the course to ensure that sufficient time is allocated overall and prevent a long gap between study and practice.** There also needs to be at least one compulsory unit devoted to early reading and literacy, as distinct from other aspects of literacy.

   Currently, the national program standards for undergraduate ITE courses require that English/literacy – discipline and discipline-specific curriculum and pedagogical studies – comprise at least one quarter of a year of equivalent full-time study (AITSL, 2018). In a four-year degree, this is 1/16th or 6% of study time (AITSL, 2018, p.14). Given the critical importance of literacy in education and beyond, and the extensive knowledge base required to teach it effectively, this minimum requirement is insufficient.

3. **Teaching Performance Assessments for primary teaching ITE should include a valid measure of reading progress.** All primary teachers must be teachers of reading and this should be a key and non-negotiable element of the assessment of whether they are 'classroom ready' and meet the graduate standards.

   The lack of progress by universities in reforming and improving the quality of ITE in preparation to teach reading, despite the findings of numerous reports and inquiries, is apparent in the large number of students in Australian schools who struggle with reading. Fewer than one in ten children have a moderate to severe reading or learning disability (Butterworth & Kovas, 2013), which means that the majority of struggling readers are largely 'instructional casualties' – children who could have learned to read more quickly and successfully if provided with evidence-based instruction in the early years of school.

   The Australian government has responded to this lack of self-initiated progress among universities by announcing a policy that all teaching degrees will be required to place greater emphasis on phonics instruction (Liberal Party of Australia, 2019). While this would be a welcome improvement, this report adds to the evidence indicating that ITE courses are deficient in all key aspects of reading instruction and require urgent and immediate improvement if literacy levels among Australian children are to be lifted.

All primary teachers must be teachers of reading and this should be a key and non-negotiable element of the assessment of whether they are 'classroom ready' and meet the graduate standards
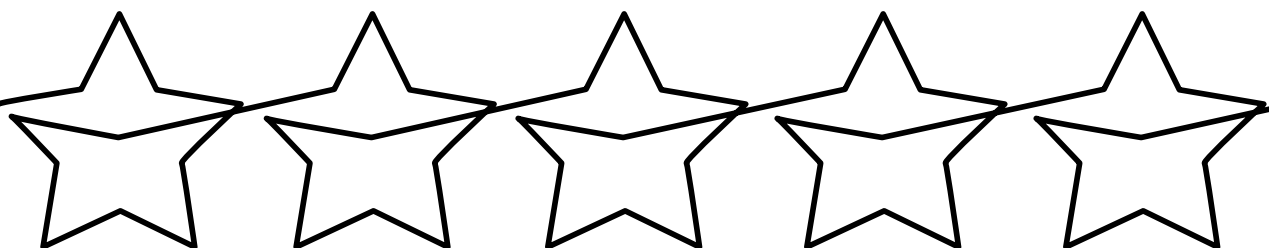
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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: LITERACY UNITS IN ITE COURSES

Name of Institution	Unit Code	Year of Program	Unit Name	The focus of the unit?	Mentions of the 'Five Big Ideas' in the unit outline	Models or theories/theorists mentioned in the unit outline	Prescribed/ recommended texts	Unit co-ordinator/ lecturer expertise
Alphacrucis College								
B.Ed. (Primary)	CRS103	1	Language and Literacy	3	None	Vygotsky; Bruner; Piaget; Clay; Cambourne	-	3
	CRS104	1	Numeracy & Literacy	5	None	-	-	-
	CRS203	2	English: Part A	3	All	Literature-based, whole language, systemic and functional linguistics, genre-based, thematic, visual language; learning styles	-	3
Australian Catholic University								
B.Ed. (Primary)	EDLA241	2	Literacy Education 1: Curriculum, Pedagogy and Assessment	2	None	-	Fellowes & Oakley (2014)	Canberra 3; Sydney 2; Brisbane 2; Ballarat na; Melbourne na
	EDLA342	3	Literacy Education 2: Curriculum, Pedagogy and Assessment	3	Fluency, Vocabulary; Comprehension	-	-	-
B.Ed. (Early Childhood & Primary)	EDLA264	2	Literacy Education 1	2	None	-	Fellowes & Oakley (2014)	Canberra 3; Sydney 1; Brisbane 1

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	EDLA369	2	Literacy Education 2	3	None	-	-	-
Avondale College								
B.A./B.Teach (Birth -12yrs)	EDUC11104	2	Curriculum Studies: Teaching English 1 & Early Childhood Literacy	2	Phonics	-	Seely Flint et al. (2014); Fellowes & Oakley (2014)	3
	EDUC24104	3	Curriculum Studies - Teaching English 2	3	-	Four resources model; Cambourne	Seely Flint et al. (2014); Tompkins et al. (2015)	3
B.A./B.Teach (Primary)	EDUC14102	2	Curriculum Studies - Teaching English 1	2	Phonics	Inquiry approaches; sociocultural practice	Seely Flint et al. (2014); Fellowes & Oakley (2014)	3
	EDUC24104	3	Curriculum Studies - Teaching English 2	3	-	Four resources model; Cambourne	Seely Flint et al. (2014); Tompkins et al. (2015)	3
Central Queensland University								
B.Ed. (Primary)	EDCU13019	3	English - Teaching Reading	2	None	Roles of a reader; sociocultural; balanced approach	Davis (2016)	2
Charles Darwin University								
B.Ed. Primary	ELA200	2	English Lang. and Literacy in Education 2	3	None	Balanced literacy	No set textbooks	2

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B.Ed. Early Childhood Teaching	ECL300	4	Approaches to Literacy in the Early Years	4	None	-	Hill (2012)	3
Charles Sturt University								
B.Ed. (Early Childhood and Primary)	EPT127	2	English Curriculum: Pedagogies in the Early Years of Learning	2	None	-	-	2
	EML306	3	English Curriculum: Pedagogies in Primary Years	4	None	Balanced literacy	Seely Flint et al. (2014)	-
B.Teach (Primary) Graduate Entry	EML439	2	English Curriculum: Pedagogies in Primary Years	4	None	Balanced approach; sociocultural	Seely Flint et al. (2014)	2
	EML440	1	Primary English Curriculum: Understanding Language & Literacy	3	None	Sociocultural	-	-
Christian Heritage College								
B.Ed. (Primary)	CR131	1	Introduction to Language, Literature and Literacy	3	None	Four resources model; Sociocultural	Derewianka & Jones (2016); Ewing et al. (2016); Simpson & White (2012); Tompkins et al., (2015)	-

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	CR232	2	Curriculum & Pedagogy: English and Literacy	4	None	-	Cope & Kalantzis (2012); Derewianka & Jones (2016); Hill (2012); Simpson & White (2012); Winch et al. (2014)	-
	CR333	3	Advanced Studies in English and Literacy	-	-	-		-
Deakin University								
B.Ed.(Primary)	ECL210	2	Multiliterate Learners in Early Years Environments	2	None	-	Hill (2012)	1
	ECL310	3	Multiliterate Learners in Middle Years Environments	3	None	-	-	-
	ECL410	4	Literacy Teacher: Researchers in New Times	4	None	-	-	-
B.Early Childhood Education.	ECE230	2	Language and Literacy Development in Early Childhood	2	Phonemic awareness	-	-	1

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	ECE330	3	Multiliterate Learners in Early Years & School Environments	2	None	-	-	1
Edith Cowan University								
B.Ed. (Primary)	LAN2240	2	English in the Early Years of Primary School	2	None	-	Hill (2012)	2
	LAN3280	3	English in Middle and Upper Primary School	3	Vocabulary; Comprehension	-	Tompkins et al. (2015)	2
B.Ed. (Early Childhood Studies)	LAN2266	2	English 2: Literacy Learning in the Early Years	2	Phonemic awareness; Phonics; Vocabulary; Comprehension	-	Fellowes & Oakley (2014)	2
	LAN3246	3	English 3: Literacy in the Junior Primary Years of School	1	All	-	Fellowes & Oakley (2014)	2
Federation University of Australia								
B.Ed. (Early Childhood and Primary)	EDBED1011	1	Literacy and Numeracy	5	Phonics; Vocabulary	-	-	3; 2; 3
	EDBED2006	2	Literacy, Language and Literature A	2	Phonemic awareness	-	-	-
B.Ed. (Primary and Secondary P-10)	EDBED1011	1	Literacy and Numeracy	5	Phonics; Vocabulary	-	-	3; 2; 3

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	EDBED2006	2	Literacy, Language and Literature A	2	Phonemic awareness	-	-	-
B.Ed (Primary)	EDBED1011	1	Literacy and Numeracy	5	Phonics; Vocabulary	-	-	3; 2; 3
	EDBED2006	2	Literacy, Language and Literature A	2	Phonemic awareness	-	-	-
Flinders University								
B.Ed. (Primary R-7) / B.A.	EDUC1222	1	English Curriculum Studies 1	2	Phonics	-	Seely Flint et al. (2014)	2
	EDUC4725	4	English Curriculum Studies 2	4	None	-	Derewianka (2016)	2
B.Ed. (Early Childhood) / B.A.	EDUC3521	3	Language, Literature and Literacies 4-8	3	None	Balanced literacy	Fellowes & Oakley (2014)	2
	EDUC2424	2	Literacy and Numeracy Birth to 4	5	None	-	-	2
Griffith University								
B. Primary Education	2103EDN	2	English Education. 1: Reading & Writing in the Early Years	1	Phonemic awareness; Phonics; Comprehension	Whole Language Approach; Phonics Approach	Hill (2012)	2
	2105EDN	2	English Education 2: Language and Literature in the Primary School	4	None		Articles from professional journal	2

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	4105EDN	3	English Education 3: Teaching Reading & Writing For the 21st Century	3	None	-	-	2
Holmesglen								
B. Early Childhood Teaching	ECT3204	3	Literacy 2	4	None	-	-	-
James Cook University								
B.Ed. (Primary)	ED1421	1	Foundations of Language and Literacy in Education	3	None	-	Emmit et al. (2014)	2
	ED2194	2	English Education for Primary School	4	None	-	Seely Flint et al. (2014); Tompkins et al. (2015)	3
B.Ed. (Early Childhood Education)	ED2094	2	Early Childhood Language and Literacy 1	3	None	Learning styles	Seely Flint et al. (2014); Tompkins et al. (2015)	3
	ED4590	4	Early Childhood Language and Literacy 2	4	None	Learning styles	Fellowes & Oakley (2014)	2
La Trobe University								
B.Ed (Primary)	EDU2ELL	2	Teaching English Language and Literacy	2	None	-	Fellowes & Oakley (2014)	2

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B. Early Childhood and Primary Education	EDU2ELL	2	Teaching English Language and Literacy	2	None	-	Fellowes & Oakley (2014)	2
Macquarie University								
B.A./B.Ed. (Primary)	EDUC260	2	Language, Literacy and Learning	3	None	-	Emmit et al. (2014)	2
	EDUC371	3	Reading Acquisition in the Primary Classroom	1	Comprehension	Balanced view	Fellowes & Oakley (2014)	2
Melbourne Polytech								
B. Ed. (Early Years)	BED212	2	Literacy 1: Introduction to Multiple Literacies	4	None	-	-	-
	BED313	3	Literacy 2: English Language and Literacy in Primary	3	None	Learning styles; anti-bias and inclusive programs	-	-
Monash University								
B.Ed. (Hons) Primary Education	EDF2020	2	English and Literacies 1	2	None	-	Hill (2012)	2
	EDF4020	4	English and Literacies 2	3	None	-	-	2
B.Ed. (Hons) in Early Years and Primary Ed.	EDF1030	1	English and Literacy Learning	3	Phonemic awareness; Phonics	-	Hill (2012)	2

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	EDF3034	3	Children's Literacy Development	4	Phonemic awareness; Fluency; Vocabulary; Comprehension	-	-	2
B. Ed. (Hons) in Primary & Secondary Education	EDF1205	1	English Education 1	4	None	-	Derewianka & Jones (2016)	3
	EDF3219	3	English Education 2	2	None	-	-	3
Murdoch University								
B.Ed. (Early Childhood & Primary)	EDN235	2	Teaching English and Literacy in Early Childhood and Primary	4	None	-	Winch et al. (2014); Seely Flint et al. (2014)	2
	EDN461	4	Language and Literacies in the Early Years	4	None	-	Fellowes & Oakley (2014); Fox (2012); Palmer (2014)	2
B.Ed. (Primary)	EDN235	2	Teaching English and Literacy in Early Childhood and Primary	4	None	-	Winch et al. (2014); Seely Flint et al. (2014)	2
Queensland University of Technology								
B.Ed. (Early Childhood)	EUP109	1	English Literacies and Language 1	4	None	Play-based pedagogies	-	1
	EUB202	2	English Literacies and Language 2	2	Phonemic awareness	-	Hill (2012)	1

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	EUB304	3	English Literacies and Language 3	2	None	Balanced approach	-	1
B.Ed. (Primary)	EUB110	1	Primary English Curriculum Studies 1	3	All	Four resources model; Continuum of literacy instruction	Tompkins et al. (2015)	-
	EUB209	2	Primary English Curriculum Studies 2	3	None	-	Tompkins et al. (2015)	-
	EUB306	3	Primary English Curriculum Studies 3	4	None	-	-	-
RMIT								
B.Ed. (Primary)	TCHE2641	1	Beginning and Early Literacy (Foundation to Year 2)	1	None	-	Seely Flint et al. (2014)	3
	TCHE2630	2	Developing Literacies	-	-	-	-	-
	TCHE2621	3	Planning for Diversity in Literacy Programs	-	-	-	-	-
B.Ed (Primary and Early Childhood Education)	TCHE2641	1	Beginning and Early Literacy (Foundation to Year 2)	1	None	-	Seely Flint et al. (2014)	3

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	TCHE2630	2	Developing Literacies	-	-	-	-	-
	TCHE2459	3	Language and Literacies in Early Childhood Education	4	None	Sociocultural theories	Seely Flint et al. (2014)	3
Southern Cross University								
B.A./B.Ed. (Primary)	EDU20001	2	Literacy, Assessment and ICT	3	None	-	-	-
	EDU10004	1	Foundations: English	3	None	-	-	-
	EDU20007	2	English Education: Curriculum and Pedagogy	3	All	-	Winch et al. (2014)	2
	EDU30004	4	English Education: Issues	4	Phonemic awareness; Phonics	-	-	-
B.A./B.Ed. (Primary/ Early Childhood)	EDU20001	2	Literacy, Assessment and ICT	3	None	-	-	-
	EDU10004	1	Foundations: English	3	None	-	-	-
	EDU20007	2	English Education: Curriculum and Pedagogy	3	All	-	Winch et al. (2014)	2

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	EDU30004	4	English Education: Issues	4	Phonemic awareness; Phonics	-	-	-
B.A./B.Ed. (Primary/ Secondary)	EDU20001	2	Literacy, Assessment and ICT	3	None	-	-	-
	EDU10004	1	Foundations: English	3	None	-	-	-
	EDU20007	2	English Education: Curriculum and Pedagogy	3	All	-	Winch et al. (2014)	2
	EDU30004	4	English Education: Issues	4	Phonemic awareness; Phonics	-	-	-
Swinburne University of Technology								
B.Ed. (Primary)	EDU10002	1	Understanding Language and Literacy	2	None	21st Century learning	-	-
	EDU20001	2	Developing Literacy	4	None	-	-	2
Tabor Adelaide								
B.Ed. (Primary)	ED5522	1	English Literacy	6	Phonics	-	-	3

Key: Focus of unit
1 = Focuses specifically on early reading instruction   2 = Mentions early reading instruction/early literacy but is included with other literacy content
3 = Broad focus on literacy; reading is mentioned but early reading is not specifically mentioned   4 = Broad focus on literacy; reading is not mentioned
5 = Includes literacy and numeracy   6 = Does not mention literacy or reading

Key: Unit lecturer/coordinator expertise
1 = Early reading instruction/early literacy
2 = Literacy but not early literacy
3 = Not literacy

Name of Institution	Unit Code	Year of Program	Unit Name	The focus of the unit?	Mentions of the 'Five Big Ideas' in the unit outline	Models or theories/theorists mentioned in the unit outline	Prescribed/ recommended texts	Unit co-ordinator/ lecturer expertise
	ED5523	1	Primary English Curriculum	2	Phonemic awareness; Phonics; Comprehension	-	Annandale et al. (2004); Beck (2006); Konza (2006); Pressley (2006); Tompkins et al. (2015)	3
	ED7527	2	Language, Literacy and Literature	2	-	-	Annandale et al. (2004); Konza (2006); Pressley (2006); Tompkins et al. (2015)	3
University of New England								
B.Ed. (Early Childhood & Primary)	EDEC435	4	Literacy in Early Childhood PrEx10days	2	None	Balanced literacy	Ewing et al. (2016)	3
	EDEE112	1	English Pedagogy in the Primary Curriculum	3	None	-	Hill (2012); NSW Board of Studies (2013)	1
	EDEE212	2	English Teaching: Focus on Reading & Viewing	3	None	-	-	2
B.Ed. (K-12 Teaching)	EDEE112	1	English Pedagogy in the Primary Curriculum	3	None	-	Hill (2012); NSW Board of Studies (2013)	1
	EDEE212	2	English Teaching: Focus on Reading & Viewing	3	None	-	-	2

Key: Focus of unit
1 = Focuses specifically on early reading instruction   2 = Mentions early reading instruction/early literacy but is included with other literacy content
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Key: Unit lecturer/coordinator expertise
1 = Early reading instruction/early literacy
2 = Literacy but not early literacy
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Name of Institution	Unit Code	Year of Program	Unit Name	The focus of the unit?	Mentions of the 'Five Big Ideas' in the unit outline	Models or theories/theorists mentioned in the unit outline	Prescribed/ recommended texts	Unit co-ordinator/ lecturer expertise
	EDEE300	2	Literacies and Numeracies in Context	5	None	-	Derewianka & Jones (2016); Seely Flint et al. (2014); Henderson (2012); Comber (2015)	2
University of Canberra								
B. Primary Education	9886	1	The Practice of Teaching English	3	None	-	Winch et al. (2014)	-
	9882	1	Linguistics for Educators	3	Phonics (phonetics)	-	-	2
B. Early Childhood and Primary Education	9886	1	The Practice of Teaching English	3	None	-	-	-
	9880	4	Issues in Literacy Development and Teaching	4	None	-	Derewianka & Jones (2016)	2
University of Newcastle								
B.Ed. (Primary) (Hons)	LING1000	1	Foundations of Language: Primary and Secondary	2	None	Balanced approach	-	3
	EDUC2748	2	K-6 Literacy 1	3	All	-	Seely Flint et al. (2014); Bayetto (2013)	3
	EDUC3748	3	K-6 Literacy 2	4	None	-	Seely Flint et al. (2014)	3

Key: Focus of unit
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Key: Unit lecturer/coordinator expertise
1 = Early reading instruction/early literacy
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Name of Institution	Unit Code	Year of Program	Unit Name	The focus of the unit?	Mentions of the 'Five Big Ideas' in the unit outline	Models or theories/theorists mentioned in the unit outline	Prescribed/ recommended texts	Unit co-ordinator/ lecturer expertise
	EDUC4748	4	Advanced Literacy Studies	2	All	-	Seely Flint et al. (2014); Bayetto (2013)	3
B.Ed. (Early Childhood & Primary) (Hons)	LING1000	1	Foundations of Language: Primary and Secondary	2	None	Balanced approach	-	3
	EDUC2748	2	K-6 Literacy 1	3	All	-	Seely Flint et al. (2014); Bayetto (2013)	3
	EDUC4175	4	Pedagogies of Reading and Writing: Birth to 12 Years	4	Phonemic awareness; Phonics	-	Ewing et al. (2016); Simpson & White (2012)	-
University of Notre Dame - Fremantle								
B.Ed. (Primary)	EDUC1611	1	English 1: Functional Literacy	4	Vocabulary	-	Emmit et al. (2014)	-
	EDUC2631	2	English 2: Reading and Viewing	3	None	-	Clay (2013); Winch et al. (2014)	-
University of Notre Dame - Sydney								
B.Ed. (Primary)	EDUC1009	1	English Language and Literacy	4	None	-	Humphrey et al. (2012); Derewianka (2011)	2
	EDUC2004	2	Reading, Viewing and Listening	3	None	-	-	-

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Name of Institution	Unit Code	Year of Program	Unit Name	The focus of the unit?	Mentions of the 'Five Big Ideas' in the unit outline	Models or theories/theorists mentioned in the unit outline	Prescribed/recommended texts	Unit co-ordinator/lecturer expertise
University of Queensland								
B.Ed. (Primary)	EDUC1730	1	Introduction to Teaching English and Literacy	3	None	Four resources model	-	3
University of South Australia								
B. Primary Education (Hons)	EDUC1106	1	Language and Numeracy for Learning	5	None	-	Derewianka & Jones (2016)	-
	EDUC2058	2	Studies in English Education 1	3	None	-	Derewianka & Jones (2016)	-
	EDUC3062	3	Studies in English Education 2	4	None	-	McDonald (2018)	-
University of Southern Queensland								
B.Ed. (Primary)	EHE1100	1	English Curriculum and Pedagogy in Early Primary	3	None	Four resources model	No textbooks	2
	EDX2170	2	English Curriculum and Pedagogy in Middle Primary	3	None	-	Seely Flint et al. (2014)	2
	EDX3270	3	English Curriculum and Pedagogy in Upper Primary	4	None	Four resources model	No set textbooks	2
University of the Sunshine Coast								
B. Primary Education	EDU104	1	Foundations of Literacy and Numeracy	2	None	Balanced approach	No set textbooks	2

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Name of Institution	Unit Code	Year of Program	Unit Name	The focus of the unit?	Mentions of the 'Five Big Ideas' in the unit outline	Models or theories/theorists mentioned in the unit outline	Prescribed/ recommended texts	Unit co-ordinator/ lecturer expertise
	EDU213	1	Teaching English: Curriculum and Pedagogy	2	None	Four resources model	Tompkins et al. (2015)	2
	EDU340	4	Teaching Reading and Writing	3	None	Balanced approach	Tompkins et al. (2015)	2
B. Ed. (Early Childhood)	EDU104	1	Foundations of Literacy and Numeracy	2	None	Balanced approach	No set textbooks	2
	EDU213	1	Teaching English: Curriculum and Pedagogy	2	None	Four resources model	Tompkins et al. (2015)	2
	EDU340	4	Teaching Reading and Writing	3	None	Balanced approach	Tompkins et al. (2015)	2
University of Sydney								
B.Ed. (Primary)	EDUP1002	1	English, Literacy and Learning	2	None	-	Ewing et al. (2016)	2
	EDUP2002	2	English: Learning to be Literate	2	None	Balanced approach	-	2
	EDUP3006	3	English: Becoming Literate	4	None	-	-	-
University of Tasmania								
B.Ed. (Primary)	ESH110	1	Foundations of English	4	None	-	No set textbooks	2

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Name of Institution	Unit Code	Year of Program	Unit Name	The focus of the unit?	Mentions of the 'Five Big Ideas' in the unit outline	Models or theories/theorists mentioned in the unit outline	Prescribed/ recommended texts	Unit co-ordinator/ lecturer expertise
	ESH210	2	Developing Understandings of English	2	All	-	Derewianka & Jones (2016); Fellowes & Oakley (2014)	1
	ESH310	3	Critical Approaches to English	4	None	-	-	2
University of Technology Sydney								
B. A./B. Ed. (Primary; Secondary; K-12)	28250	1	English Education 1	1	Phonemic awareness; Phonics; Fluency; Vocabulary	-	Tompkins et al. (2015); Derewianka & Jones (2016)	-
	28251	2	English Education 2	3	None	-	Winch et al. (2014); Tompkins et al. (2015)	-
	28252	4	English Education 3	4	None	-	-	-
University of Wollongong								
B. Primary Education	EDLL101	1	Language and Learning	4	None	-	Derewianka & Jones (2016)	1
	EDKL200	2	Language and Literacy 1: the Early Years	4	None	Sociocultural	Hill (2012)	1
	EDKL202	2	Language and Literacy 2: Teaching The Constrained Skills in Context	2	Phonemic awareness; Fluency	-	Mantei (nd)	-

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Name of Institution	Unit Code	Year of Program	Unit Name	The focus of the unit?	Mentions of the 'Five Big Ideas' in the unit outline	Models or theories/theorists mentioned in the unit outline	Prescribed/ recommended texts	Unit co-ordinator/ lecturer expertise
	EDKL401	4	Language and Literacy 3: The Later Primary Years	4	None	Social model of literacy	-	-
Victoria University								
B.Ed. (P-12)	EEC1108	1	Literacy across the Continuum 1	3	None	-	Seely Flint et al. (2014)	-
	EEC4102	2	Literacy across the Continuum 2	3	None	Social view of learning	Seely Flint et al. (2014)	2

Key: Focus of unit
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Key: Unit lecturer/coordinator expertise
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APPENDIX 2: PRESCRIBED AND RECOMMENDED TEXTS

List of prescribed and recommended texts in literacy units

Book	Number of units for which it is prescribed or recommended	Number of universities where it is prescribed or recommended
Annandale, K., Bindon, R., Handley, K., Johnston, A., Lockett, L., & Lynch, P. (2004). *First steps reading map of development* (2nd ed.). Port Melbourne: Rigby Heinemann.	2	1
Bayetto, A. (2013). *Read, record, respond.* South Melbourne: Oxford University Press.	2	1
Beck, I. (2006). *Making sense of phonics: The hows and whys.* New York: The Guilford Press.	1	1
Clay, M. (2013). *An observation survey of early literacy achievement* (3rd ed.). Portsmouth, NH: Heinneman.	1	1
Comber, B. (2015). *Literacy, place, and pedagogies of possibility.* New York, NY: Routledge.	1	1
Cope, B., & Kalantzis, M. (2012). *Literacies.* South Melbourne: Cambridge University Press.	1	1
Davis, A. (2016). *Teaching reading comprehension* (2nd ed.). South Yarra: Eleanor Curtin Publishing.	1	1
Derewianka, B., & Jones, P. (2016). *Teaching language in context* (2nd ed.). South Melbourne: Oxford University Press.	10	8
Emmit, M., Zbaracki, M., Komesaroff, L., & Pollock, J. (2014). *Language and learning* (6th ed.). Melbourne, Vic: Oxford University Press Australia.	3	3
Ewing, R., Callow, J., & Rushton, K. (2016). *Language and literacy development in early childhood.* South Melbourne: Cambridge University Press.	3	3
Fellowes, J., & Oakley, G. (2014). *Language, literacy and early childhood education.* South Melbourne: Oxford University Press.	12	9
Fox, M. (2012). *Reading magic.* Sydney, NSW: Pan MacMillan.	1	1
Hill, S. (2012). *Developing early literacy: Assessment and teaching.* South Yarra: Eleanor Curtain Publishing.	10	9

Konza, D. (2006). *Teaching children with reading difficulties* (2nd ed.). South Melbourne: Thomson Social Science Press.	2	1
Mantei, J. (n.d.). *Developing knowledge about sounds, letters and words for literacy* (3rd ed.). Melbourne: Pearson.	1	1
NSW Board of Studies. (2013). *Phonics: A guide for teachers*. Sydney: NSW Board of Studies.	1	1
Palmer, S. (2013). *Foundations of early literacy: A balanced approach to language, listening and literacy skills in the early years*. London, UK: Bloomsbury Publishing.	1	1
Pressley, M. (2006). *Reading instruction that works: The case for balanced teaching* (3rd ed.). New York: Guilford Press.	2	1
Seely Flint, A., Kitson, L., Lowe, K., & Shaw, K. (2014). *Literacy in Australia: Pedagogies for engagement*. Milton, Australia: Wiley.	17	8
Simpson, A., & White, S. (2012). *Language, literacy and literature*. South Melbourne: Oxford University Press.	3	2
Tompkins, G., Campbell, R., Green, D., & Smith, C. (2015). *Literacy for the 21st century: A balanced approach* (2nd ed.). Melbourne: Pearson.	12	6
Winch, G., Johnston, R., March, P., Ljungdahl, L. & Holliday, M. (2014). *Literacy, reading, writing and children's literature* (5th ed.). South Melbourne: Oxford University Press.	6	6

Review of six most common textbooks

Overview

The six textbooks most frequently prescribed or recommended for literacy units in undergraduate initial teacher education courses are reviewed below. The most common textbook – Seely Flint et al. (2014) was found to have been prescribed or recommended in 17 literacy units in 8 universities. This may be a severe underestimate of the prevalence of this text. Another source states that it had '40% of the pre-school – Year 6 market' in initial teacher education (Exley & Kitson, 2018).

The textbooks are of varying quality in terms of their presentation of the 'five big ideas' essential components of reading instruction, as well as the information they contain about evidence-based teaching methods. None of the texts provide an accurate and comprehensive overview of the evidence on how children learn to read, nor do they provide a consistent and coherent guide for teachers of reading.

None of the texts provide an accurate and comprehensive overview of the evidence on how children learn to read, nor do they provide a consistent and coherent guide for teachers of reading

With the exception of one textbook – Derewianka & Jones (2016) – all textbooks contain content on each of the five big ideas, to varying extents. However, not all of those textbooks devote focused attention to all five essential elements. For example, Fellowes & Oakley (2014) and Tompkins et al. (2015) each have chapters devoted to teaching vocabulary and comprehension but of these two books only Fellowes and Oakley (2014) gives focused attention to fluency.

While all of the textbooks reviewed have shortcomings to varying degrees in their content on phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension, the most problematic content relates to phonics instruction. Not one textbook provides a clear presentation of the evidence showing why phonics instruction is important in learning to read. Not one textbook provides teachers with a useful guide to planning lessons for explicit and systematic phonics instruction in the classroom.

Individual textbook reviews

The textbook reviews that follow state the number of pages of focused content on the 'five big ideas' (excluding references). They also state whether the textbook contains information on the Simple View of Reading, given that this is a model of reading with arguably the strongest scientific research support. All of the textbooks (with the exception of Derewianka & Jones [2016]), explicitly favour the Four Resources/Four Roles of a Reader model.

Phonics content is reviewed in more detail than the other four elements as it is the topic where the content is in most conflict with an evidence-based approach. Most of the textbooks with phonics content explicitly endorse the three-cueing system, and all textbooks promote it implicitly.

In addition, the reviews include whether each textbook has any information about dyslexia. Dyslexia is a serious learning difficulty that is estimated to affect approximately 5% of students. All teachers of reading should be aware of the indicators of dyslexia in a child who is struggling with reading so they can refer them for specialist diagnosis and intervention as early as possible. Only one book – Winch et al. (2014) – referred to dyslexia at all, and the content is brief.

While all of the textbooks reviewed have shortcomings to varying degrees in their content on phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension, the most problematic content relates to phonics instruction

Seely Flint, A., Kitson, L., Lowe, K., & Shaw, K. (2014). *Literacy in Australia: Pedagogies for engagement*. Milton, Australia: Wiley.

Reviewed e-book

	Number of units for which it is prescribed or recommended	**Number of universities where it is prescribed or recommended**
	17	8
	Number of pages of focused content	**Summary**
Five big ideas		
Phonemic awareness	< 1	• basic description is accurate • very brief treatment (half a page of focused coverage) • nothing on how to teach/develop phonemic awareness
Phonics	3-4	• describes synthetic and analytic phonics briefly but accurately (two paragraphs) • nothing on how to teach phonics
Fluency	1	• very brief treatment • one page on developing fluency
Vocabulary	< 1	• mentioned frequently throughout text, but no focused coverage • nothing on how to teach vocabulary.
Comprehension	1-2	• mentioned frequently throughout text but little focused coverage • 1-2 pages on how to teach reading comprehension.
Other important content		
Simple View of Reading	0	
Dyslexia	0	

Phonics content

This textbook does not present evidence-based, practical information on teaching phonics. Advice for promoting literacy in the Foundation year of school is to "Provide many opportunities for children to explore and identify sound–symbol relationships in meaningful contexts" (p. 220). There is no advice on systematic, explicit phonics instruction.

Phonics is described as "the prescriptive approach" (p. 224) and a "behaviourist" method that "does not consider background and experience" (p. 109).

With respect to helping struggling readers, the text is disparaging about "mindless activities" including teaching "phonics at the expense of text participant and critical practices focused on comprehending" (p. 447). It suggests a number of non-evidence-based strategies.

The chapter on beginning reading is based on the Four Resources/Four Roles of a Reader model (Freebody, 1997) – code breaker, text user, text participant, text analyst.

All strategies for code breaking presented in the text are in context, not systematic or explicit.

A suggested 'mini-lesson for code-breaking' says that sounding out words is an "ineffective strategy" and that "using the first letter and gaining meaning from the sentence is a much more predictable strategy". It suggests a number of non-evidence-based strategies, for example,

- "Use onset and meaning to figure out a word. Children can simultaneously use the beginning letters of a word with their sense of meaning for the sentence to decode an unfamiliar word."

- "Use onset and reading ahead to gather more information. It is not uncommon for children to say 'I read ahead and thought it was pony but when I took another look, I noticed it started with "s" – it must be stallion'."

- "Sound out a word by elongating its sounds. This is a familiar but often ineffective strategy, known as 'sounding out'. This strategy encourages readers to stretch out the sounds from left to right, noticing all the sounds in the word. As a strategy it is not all that predictable because of the large variation in the way letters and words are sounded. Using the first letter and gaining meaning from the sentence is a much more predictable strategy." (p. 232)

Phonics is described as "the prescriptive approach" (p. 224) and a "behaviourist" method that "does not consider background and experience" (p. 109)

Fellowes, J., & Oakley, G. (2014). *Language, literacy and early childhood education*. South Melbourne: Oxford University Press.

Reviewed e-book

	Number of units for which it is prescribed or recommended	**Number of universities where it is prescribed or recommended**
	12	9
	Number of pages of focused content	**Summary**
Five big ideas		
Phonemic awareness	7	• basic definition is accurate • section within a chapter on phonological awareness • often conflates phonological and phonemic awareness • IPA symbols table provided • small number of teaching strategies and activities
Phonics	16	• 16 pages on 'letter-sound knowledge'; teaching approaches compared; no coherent teaching strategy presented; basic description of synthetic phonics is brief, but reasonably accurate.
Fluency	21	• many of the fluency mentions throughout the text are in respect to oral fluency and writing fluency • one chapter devoted to developing reading fluency with teaching strategies
Vocabulary	23	• many of the vocabulary mentions relate to oral language development • one chapter devoted to vocabulary for reading and writing • says explicit and structured vocal teaching is important alongside experiences and environment • explains explicit vocabulary teaching in some detail (several paragraphs) and provides some teaching activities

Comprehension	37	• many of the comprehension mentions relate to listening comprehension • one chapter devoted to reading comprehension • contains teaching strategies and activities • states that: "Reading comprehension is a highly complex activity that needs to be taught. The assumption that children will learn to comprehend by simply listening and reading is erroneous." • also says that "background knowledge is essential" (p. 295)
Other important content		
Simple View of Reading	< 1	• short paragraph that introduces the SVoR then dismisses it without sufficient explanation
Dyslexia	0	

Phonics content

The advice to teachers on phonics instruction is contradictory and confusing. Some of the evidence for the effectiveness of systematic, synthetic phonics instruction is cited but the pedagogy is not accurately represented in the book, and the examples of teaching activities provided are not synthetic phonics activities.

In a section called 'Perspectives on how to teach reading', phonics is included in the "Part-to-whole approach" which says that, "phonics skills are often taught in isolation with the assumption that children will be able to apply these skills to real, connected texts when necessary." (p. 203). This is not an accurate characterisation.

Phonics is contrasted with the 'whole to part approach' which "emphasises meaning-making and enjoyment of texts, not decontextualised learning of component skills" (p. 204). It mentions Goodman and Smith as key whole-language proponents, going on to claim that, "excellent educators who have a whole language philosophy often do successfully weave explicit and systematic teaching into the authentic activities that form the basis of their literacy instruction" (p. 204). This conception of what constitutes explicit teaching is not consistent with reading research.

The text mentions the Clackmannanshire study from Scotland, which showed synthetic phonics to be highly effective, and the National Inquiry into Teaching Literacy, which found that the strongest evidence was in favour of systemic and explicit phonics instruction, but then says "there is evidence that teaching children to 'bark at print' is fruitless and detrimental to motivation and comprehension." Such evidence is not cited.

Explicit and systematic teaching is described and the Rose report, which firmly recommended synthetic phonics as the most effective teaching method, is mentioned. The phonics sequence from Carnine, Silbert, and

Phonics is contrasted with the 'whole to part approach' which "emphasises meaning-making and enjoyment of texts, not decontextualised learning of component skills"

Kameenui (1997; Direct instruction reading) is presented and the Carnine, et al. text is referred to several times. However, this is followed by a series of activities that are neither synthetic phonics nor direct instruction activities, but are mostly word family / analogy-based.

The Four Resources/Four Roles of a Reader model is described uncritically and with more detail than the Simple View of Reading. The book also describes Cambourne's Seven Conditions of Literacy Learning, acknowledging that the Seven Conditions theory has been criticised for not having supporting evidence, but says that "readers are encouraged to refer to Cambourne's original work", which suggests that the authors do not accept these criticisms.

Winch, G., Johnston, R., March, P., Ljungdahl, L., & Holliday, M. (2014). *Literacy, reading, writing and children's literature* (5th ed). South Melbourne: Oxford University Press.

Reviewed e-book

	Number of units for which it is prescribed or recommended	Number of universities where it is prescribed or recommended
	6	6
	Number of pages of focused content	Summary
Big 5		
Phonemic awareness	7	• good definition and description • focused section with teaching activities within one chapter
Phonics	16	• sections within two chapters – theoretical discussion and teaching • an incomplete sequence is presented in teaching section • synthetic phonics is defined as 'segmentation and blending' (p. 62)
Fluency	0	• all mentions are brief • no content on developing reading fluency
Vocabulary	< 1	• frequent mentions of vocabulary throughout textbook, but no section devoted to teaching vocabulary
Comprehension	30	• one chapter on comprehension • includes developing background knowledge and comprehension strategies
Other important content		
Simple View of Reading	< 1	• attributes the Simple View of Reading (SVoR) to the Rose report (2006) • does not accurately describe the SVoR model • rejects in favour of the Four Resources model
Dyslexia	1	• one page description of dyslexia

Phonics content

The textbook discusses phonics largely from a theoretical perspective, with the authors putting forward strong views that are not necessarily based on evidence nor on accurate representations of all approaches.

The textbook endorses the Four Resources/Four Roles of a Reader model: "We have taken the position that the four roles of the reader, as described by Freebody, provide a valuable description of reading practices and have built these practices into our model of reading" (p. 13). No evidence to support this position is provided.

According to this textbook, "While various researchers have argued strenuously for a reading program based exclusively on one or other specific approach, the evidence is now overwhelming that no one element holds the key to the successful teaching of reading" (p. 10). No examples of any researchers that have argued for a reading program based exclusively on one specific approach are given.

Systematic phonics is described as part of a "bottom-up approach", which according to the text "has been heavily criticised for its limited vision of what reading is, for its lack of emphasis on comprehension of the text, and its playing down of the input that the reader makes to reading" (p. 8).

The textbook acknowledges that "Children learning to read need to be taught how to 'crack the writing code' by understanding and learning the sound–symbol relations in printed text, thus leading to effective word recognition in the early years of school. This is called phonics and it must be taught explicitly (clearly) and systematically (in a carefully planned and executed program)" (p. 54).

These seemingly conflicting positions on phonics instruction arise because the authors' concept of explicit and systematic instruction is not consistent with the terms as they are used in scientific reading research. For example, the textbook claims that "Teachers should be aware that the whole-language movement today supports teaching the components of language (the phoneme– grapheme relationships, grammar, etc.) by isolating them and teaching them systematically and explicitly within what they describe as meaningful contexts. That is certainly not a position opposed to the teaching of phonics" (p. 61). This is an inaccurate description of the way phonics is taught, if at all, in a whole language approach. Teaching phonics only 'in meaningful contexts' is not systematic or explicit.

This is confirmed in the statement that excludes synthetic phonics from their recommended approaches to instruction. "In the balanced approach taken in this book to teaching all facets of literacy, the authors certainly agree that forms of phonic instruction (other than synthetic phonics), or a combination of approaches, are effective if they are taught thoroughly in the first years of school" (p. 63).

"In the balanced approach taken in this book to teaching all facets of literacy, the authors certainly agree that forms of phonic instruction (other than synthetic phonics), or a combination of approaches, are effective if they are taught thoroughly in the first years of school"

Derewianka, B., & Jones, P. (2016). *Teaching language in context* (2nd ed). South Melbourne: Oxford University Press.

Reviewed hard copy

	Number of units for which it is prescribed or recommended	Number of universities where it is prescribed or recommended
	10	8
	Number of pages of focused content	Summary
Five big ideas		
Phonemic awareness	0	Not in index
Phonics	0	Not in index
Fluency	0	Not in index
Vocabulary	10	• includes types and use of vocabulary • does not include teaching strategies
Comprehension	0	Not in index
Other important content		
Simple View of Reading	0	Not in index
Dyslexia	0	Not in index

This text is not suitable as the sole textbook for literacy units preparing teachers to teach reading.

Hill, S. (2012). *Developing early literacy: Assessment and teaching*. South Yarra: Eleanor Curtain Publishing.

Reviewed hard copy

	Number of units for which it is prescribed or recommended	Number of universities where it is prescribed or recommended
	10	9
	Number of pages of focused content	Summary
Five big ideas		
Phonemic awareness	27	• definition is accurate • multiple pages of phonological and phonemic awareness activities (often conflated) • questions the need for explicit PA teaching, saying that "it is rich language discussion about topics of interest to children that is important." (p. 136)
Phonics	60	• definition is accurate • two chapters on phonics • one paragraph on synthetic phonics is inaccurate
Fluency	< 1	• no substantial coverage • mentioned only as a comprehension strategy
Vocabulary	3	• three pages in comprehension chapter • no teaching strategies
Comprehension	14	• one chapter on comprehension • describes main comprehension strategies
Other important content		
Simple View of Reading	0	Not in index
Dyslexia	0	Not in index

Phonics content

The National Reading Panel's recommendation of the five essential components of reading instruction are mentioned in this text, but the three cueing system and Four Resources model are the preferred approaches.

The author of this textbook claims that "proficient readers do not read every word"; they "sample some words, predicting what words would come next" (p. 162) and that "The reading process does not involve every single letter, and that is why proofreading is so difficult: when you are very familiar with the ideas you hardly need to read the words at all" (p. 162). This indicates no familiarity with the concept of orthographic mapping.

The three cueing model is presented as fact. "The use of multiple cues for early reading is important for early reading and many teachers explain to children that in order to solve problems in reading, miscues will occur" (p. 204).

The author advises using three cueing prompts. 'Visual' prompts are last and consist of prompting the child to look at the first letter. An example is given where a child reads the sentence "When the Pizza heard this he was afraid", but said 'angry' instead of 'afraid'. This is described as a 'miscue' but clearly shows the flaws in this approach, as both words start with the same letter and make sense in the context of the sentence and the story, but one is completely incorrect.

For the example sentence, 'The girl was by the fence', in which a child reads 'goat' instead of 'girl' the response suggested is that the teacher might prompt the child with, 'Look at the picture. Is goat right?'

The advice given to teachers in this textbook is: "To encourage self-monitoring in emergent reading and effective reading of more challenging texts, direct the child's attention to meaning. Say 'Did that make sense?' or 'Look at the picture'" (p. 204).

Onset-rime activities, final consonant substitutions, and detecting medial sounds are suggested in the book for "very beginning work with cracking the code" (p. 209). These tasks would be difficult for very beginning readers.

The authors encourage investigation to construct knowledge, for example, to discover that 'c' can make different sounds. "Phonics can be thought of as a puzzle, and needs to be taught in classrooms that promote active investigation about sounds and letters" (p. 241). According to the authors, "The English language is an arbitrary, socially agreed upon set of conventions" (p. 242).

A phonics teaching sequence is suggested that is not consistent with research-based criteria, including teaching all the consonant blends as units (28 beginning blends and 34 end blends) rather than the skill of blending the individual consonant phonemes. However, some useful advice is given about sequence as well: teach letters that have the most consistent phonemes first (m, b, n); teach letters that are easily confused separately.

"The reading process does not involve every single letter, and that is why proofreading is so difficult: when you are very familiar with the ideas you hardly need to read the words at all" (p. 162). This indicates no familiarity with the concept of orthographic mapping

The book has one short paragraph on synthetic phonics, and it is not well-described. This would lead teachers to think they are using synthetic phonics when they are not. The vast majority of the chapter on teaching phonics is on whole-to-part, analogy phonics.

All teaching activities are embedded/analogy phonics. "The letter sound is always taught in context – in a book, song or jingle. The letter is then made explicit as the teacher writes the letter in upper and lower case and invites children to find more words containing the letter" (p. 274). The description of explicit instruction is not consistent with the use of the term as it is used in reading research.

According to this textbook, "There are many different approaches to teaching phonics and new methods are constantly being invented" (p. 260). Those listed include synthetic, VAKT (visual, auditory, kinaesthetic, tactile) phonics, analytic phonics, analogy phonics, embedded phonics, and guided reading. No reference is made to the evidence regarding the effectiveness of the different approaches.

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Tompkins, G., Campbell, R., Green, D., & Smith, C. (2015). *Literacy for the 21st century: A balanced approach* (2nd ed.). Melbourne: Pearson.

Reviewed hard copy

	Number of units for which it is prescribed or recommended	Number of universities where it is prescribed or recommended
	12	6
	Number of pages of focused content	Summary
Five big ideas		
Phonemic awareness	10	• definition is accurate • section within a chapter with teaching activities and assessments • "instruction should be planned and purposeful, not just incidental" (p. 133)
Phonics	11	• definition is accurate • section on phonics is within a larger chapter • synthetic phonics is not in the index
Fluency	9	• basic definition is questionable, but components are explained well later • section within a chapter • common activities are presented; many not evidence-informed.
Vocabulary	29	• chapter on 'knowledge of words' • good coverage of important elements • explicit teaching encouraged
Comprehension	29	• chapter on comprehension • good coverage of important elements • includes explicit teaching and comprehension strategies
Other important content		
Simple View of Reading	0	Not in index
Dyslexia	0	Not in index

Phonics content

The three cueing system and Four Resources/Four Roles of a Reader model are the preferred approaches.

The text states that the 'code breaker' role in the Four Resources model is not "simplistically referring to phonics" .... "This graphophonic knowledge is only one of several cues that readers use to crack the code of print texts. The others include semantic knowledge, syntactic knowledge (the language patterns of phrases, clauses, groups, and sentences, and the word order systems that operate within and between these patterns), pragmatic knowledge and paralinguistic knowledge" (p. 3).

The book lists 'Eight principles of effective teaching of language, literature and literacy'. The second principle is "Effective teachers support student use of the cueing systems."

It raises the phonics-only straw man, saying that, "Some parents and politicians, and even a few teachers, believe that most of our educational ills could be solved if children were taught to read using phonics only" (p. 153). No examples are provided of people who have stated this belief.

The findings of the National Reading Panel are acknowledged and summarised as "The best way to teach phonics is through a combination of explicit instruction and authentic application activities" and notes that phonics is best taught in systematic way, in a predetermined sequence (p. 147). A suggested phonics teaching sequence is presented in which all the consonants are taught first and vowels are not taught until Year 1 (p. 148). This is not a useful sequence as it does not allow for the blending of whole words. In addition, the section on explicit instruction does not accurately describe explicit instruction as it is understood in reading research.

Phonics content in this textbook strongly favours analogy/word family phonics, with most teaching activities focused on onset-rime reading. The use of word walls for onset-rime word families is also recommended. In recognising the research findings that phonics by analogy (onset-rime) is successful only if children have a large sight word vocabulary, the book recommends teaching lots of sight words (p. 226).

The book claims that "By Year 3, most students have figured out the alphabetic code" (p. 131), but for struggling readers who cannot decode, the textbook advises using phonics by analogy (word walls) and advises against decodable 'basal' readers (claiming there is no research they are effective), saying "trade books at students' independent reading levels are more effective for decoding practice" (p. 150).

The book lists 'Eight principles of effective teaching of language, literature and literacy'. The second principle is "Effective teachers support student use of the cueing systems"

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About the Authors

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Jennifer Buckingham is Director of Strategy and Senior Research Fellow at MultiLit, and founder of the FIVE from FIVE project. She has published numerous reports and articles on reading instruction and has provided advice to state and federal governments on the introduction of a Year 1 Phonics Check. Jennifer is a board member of the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership.

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