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SYDNEY

**Examining Approaches to the Kindergarten Literacy
Block**

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Philosophy*

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Statement of Originality

This is to certify that the content of this thesis is my own work. This thesis has not been submitted for any other degree or purpose.

No content produced by generative AI tools has been used in the preparation of this thesis.

I certify that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work, and that all assistance received in preparing this thesis and all sources have been acknowledged.

Corrina Helen Goddard

Abstract

Designing and executing inclusive literacy practice that is grounded in both the principles of inclusion and the evidence-base related to the teaching of literacy is a fundamental but challenging endeavour for teachers. Discourse regarding literacy practice in the political and research domains, in Australia and internationally, has commonly emphasised school- and system-wide issues that are far removed from classroom teachers' control. These issues include: problems of resourcing; administrative concerns; amendments to initial teacher education; changes at a government level; and isolated research debates concerning the merits of specific pedagogical components and approaches. Such discourse represents a distraction from the construction of inclusive, integrated classroom literacy practice that is effective for all students as teachers' primary concern.

Given recent changes to syllabus requirements which are state-specific, and the significance of the first year of formal schooling, kindergarten classrooms in New South Wales (NSW) represent an important context in which to examine inclusive literacy practice. Accordingly, this thesis explores the conceptualisation, examination and interpretation of a framework for inclusive literacy education which uses the Inclusive Pedagogical Approach (Florian & Spratt, 2013) as a lens through which to consider classroom literacy practice. This exploration moves beyond the theoretical and methodological constraints of previous studies in both fields. The study employs mixed methods and uses both qualitative and quantitative data gathered from a survey of 266 kindergarten teachers in Sydney, NSW, alongside three case study observations and interviews with teachers from the survey sample. The triangulation of the data allows for a detailed exploration of classroom practice and the professional judgements that underpin inclusive literacy education.

The framework for inclusive literacy education has broad implications for: addressing the need for improvements in student literacy achievement (United Nations, 2015); enabling the pursuit of improvements in classroom teachers' practice; and illuminating potential areas of focus for professional learning within education sectors and initial teacher education. It also lays the foundation for further exploratory research in this domain (Swedberg, 2020).

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There has been a great symbiosis in my approach to this study as a teacher and as a researcher. Undertaking this thesis has been a mammoth task but it has had a profound impact on me and there are many people to acknowledge who have supported me to persevere.

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I dedicate this thesis to my grandpa, Dr Trevor Mark Florence, and to my nanna, Aynsley Perini. I wish you were here.

And finally, to KH, my first class of 2015, and to all my students since: this is for you.

Personal Statement

*And so
We begin at the end
You are the compass
You always were
She just hadn't met you yet*

*She with her rose coloured glasses
In the golden sunrise hue
She orbited folklore's professions
Mystified by riddles
Paradoxes she could not decode
In her lens reflected
Some delusions and some truths
Lamination and lamentations
Drew the ire of the sleuth*

*But her
A mirror ball of musings
Her mosaic of reflections fusing
In the optical illusions' bounds
The albatross's wings becloud
By silver dawn to dusk
Through her refracted visions
From her litmus tests of potency
She finally perceived
The forest for the trees*

*And you
With your copper polished candour
In your carousel of contemplations
Your kaleidoscope of clarity
Resurrected from her raw inflections*

*You circumnavigate
The pretend panaceas
Drank the pedagogue's elixir
But remained upon your feet
With your repertoire of incantations
In your tapestry
Of tenacity and dreams
Woven with your hard-earned wisdom
Of a decade's ventured schemes*

*The magic bullets missed
But the needle's edge persists
Now you turn to new horizons
Making headway through the mist*

As a primary classroom teacher, I began my career in 2015 by teaching students in kindergarten: their very first year of school. Among many challenges as a beginning teacher, I was suddenly faced with the prospect of somehow teaching a group of young learners to be literate. Despite four years and

countless hours of preparation, I felt extremely uncertain about how to 'do it well'. I persevered and fumbled my way through the first two hours of every school day, wondering exactly what my 'literacy block' was supposed to involve. Everywhere I looked seemed to provide a different and often conflicting answer. I worried about students who seemed to be struggling to learn to read and write and whether I was addressing their needs in my classroom teaching. I was absorbed into a culture of traditional practices, complete with reading groups, 'running records' and an apparent acceptance that some children just could not learn to be literate.

Almost a decade ago, I set out to find 'answers' for myself in journal articles and beyond, driven by a belief that I could be a better teacher for my students. I hoped to find research that synthesised existing evidence regarding classroom literacy practice that would be interpretable and actionable for a teacher like me who hoped to improve. Any such studies eluded me but after undertaking that research for myself in this thesis, I have finally found the 'answers' I sought back in 2015.

As I approached the final stages of this thesis, I realised that the overall structure, involving three sections, seemed to mirror the three constructs I identified for my study, and to echo my process in undertaking it. The first section of the thesis relates to my 'knowing', as teacher and researcher, about the current research landscape according to the existing literature, in order to conceptualise inclusive literacy education for myself and for other in-service teachers. The second section involved me 'doing' inclusive literacy education by executing my conceptualisation, both as a teacher in my own classroom, and with other teacher participants in my research. The final section revealed what my 'knowing' and 'doing' has led me to 'believe' about inclusive literacy education. For the past nine years, I think I have been undertaking the kind of critical reflection recommended for teachers in the conclusion of this thesis, which I hope is captured in the poem above.

Throughout this study and in analysing the results, I was acutely aware of my own role as an in-service classroom teacher. I was consistently cognisant of the potential conflict between my two roles: while my own experience as a kindergarten classroom teacher may have enhanced the analysis and interrogation of the results, it may also have served to emphasise comparison and criticism in the approach to analysis. It has been suggested that translational research in the field of literacy is necessary, but that it "include, rather than blame and devalue, teachers and teacher educators" (MacPhee et al., 2021, p. 152). This research meets this criterion in that it has been designed and executed by a teacher and involves the input of in-service teachers in primary classrooms.

But, in examining classroom practice and its alignment with the research literature, and with the Inclusive Pedagogical Approach (Florian & Spratt, 2013), there is necessarily some criticality in interpreting the findings. Finkelstein et al. (2021) argue that "understanding what teachers actually do and gathering 'snapshots' of inclusive teacher practices remains an underexamined research area" (p. 739). Engaging in this process with a critical but constructive eye was necessary if this research is to be translational for classroom teachers as a springboard for reflecting on their own practice.

While the critique of findings is key to this study, critique of individual teachers and their practices is not intended to evoke 'blame', or to overlook the sample size and lack of generalisability of the findings. Indeed, the promotion of literacy and of inclusive practice are context-dependent (Finkelstein et al., 2021) and this study examines the self-reported and existing practices of just a selection of kindergarten classroom teachers in NSW. But unless teachers actively reflect on and evaluate their existing practice – which may or may not be suited to the needs of all learners – their professional actions may continue unchanged (M. Ryan & Barton, 2020).

MacPhee et al. (2021) suggest that “researchers must be clear and explicit regarding how and to what extent their empirical evidence may inform practice” (p. 151). The complexity of teachers’ roles and of the classroom environment cannot be overlooked, and research which examines them must be undertaken and interpreted with some nuance and with this complexity in mind. The reporting and discussion of the results of this study are driven by this principle.

I hope that kindergarten teachers can see *themselves* and their classroom experiences in this research, and that if at least some of my findings resonate with them, my research may act as a catalyst for constructive reflection, for the benefit of all students.

Contents

Statement of Originality	ii
Abstract	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Personal Statement	vi
Contents	ix
Abbreviations	xiv
Index of Tables	xv
Index of Figures	xvi
Section One: <i>Conceptualising Inclusive Literacy Education</i>	1
Chapter 1 Introduction	2
Research Aims and Purpose: A Dual Focus.....	2
Organisation of the Thesis	2
Building the Fields	4
Key Definitions	7
Defining 'Literacy'	8
Theoretical Framework.....	10
Theories of Learning	11
Theories of Teaching	12
The Inclusive Pedagogical Approach	14
'Reasonable' Adjustments	19
Chapter 2 Literature Review	23
Oral Language	24
Reading.....	27
Science of Reading.....	29
The Big Six	31
Oral Language and Early Literacy Experiences.....	32
Phonological Awareness.....	32
The Alphabetic Principle	34
Fluency.....	35
Vocabulary.....	37
Reading Comprehension.....	40
Writing.....	43
Transcription Skills	43
Spelling	45
Text Composition	46
The Literacy Block.....	47

Issues Impacting Teachers	50
The Great Debate.	50
‘Effective’ Literacy Teachers.....	53
Teacher Knowledge.	54
Decodable or Predictable.	54
Allocation of Time	56
Differentiation.....	57
Teacher Autonomy.....	59
Literacy Education as Inclusive Practice	61
The Current Research Landscape	61
The Impetus for the Study.....	66
Conclusion	68
Section Two: Examining Inclusive Literacy Education.....	70
Chapter 3 Methodology	71
Research Design.....	72
Participants.....	76
Phase One Data Collection	76
Survey Instrument.....	77
Procedure.....	78
Data Analysis.	80
Phase Two Data Collection	82
Classroom Observations	82
Data Analysis.	84
Analytic Procedure.	86
Semi-Structured Interviews	88
Data Analysis.	88
Ethical Considerations.....	90
Chapter 4 Phase One Findings	91
Survey Section One: Kindergarten Teachers	91
Survey Section Two: Defining ‘Literacy’	94
Cognitive.....	96
Sociocultural.....	97
Combination.....	98
Survey Section Three: The Literacy Block	99
‘Who’	102
‘What’	102
Literacy Block Structure.	103

Emphases and Theoretical Underpinnings.....	105
Types of Practice.....	106
‘How’	107
Allocation of Time.....	107
Differentiation.....	109
‘Why’.....	110
Survey Section Four: Levels of Agreement About Inclusive Literacy Practice	111
Factor Analysis.....	113
Construct Scores.....	115
Percentage Agreement.....	117
Knowing.....	117
Doing.....	118
Believing.....	121
Chapter 5 Phase Two Findings.....	122
Case Study Classrooms.....	122
Augustine School – April.....	122
Kings School – Kathy	122
Riverbank School – Robin.....	123
Classroom Observations	123
Pedagogical Content.....	123
Allocated Time.....	126
Analysis of Observations Using the CLOS-R.....	130
Respect.....	133
Knowledge.....	135
Orchestration.....	138
Support	141
Differentiation.....	143
Semi-Structured Interviews.....	147
Knowing.....	149
Student Needs.....	150
Professional Knowledge.....	151
Doing.....	152
Classroom Literacy Practice.....	152
Autonomy and Agency.....	154
Pace and Allocation of Time.....	154
Differentiation.....	155

Believing.....	155
Student Capacity.....	155
Teacher Responsibility.....	157
Section Three: <i>Interpreting Inclusive Literacy Education</i>	161
Chapter 6 Discussion.....	162
Setting the Scene.....	162
Consistency vs. Difference	165
Consistency.....	166
Difference.....	168
Self-Reported vs. Actual Practice.	169
Commercial Programs.....	170
Teacher Autonomy.....	172
Privileged Knowledge vs. Knowledge Gaps.....	173
Privileged Knowledge	174
Research Alignment.....	174
Definitions of Literacy.....	175
Knowledge Gaps.....	176
Confusions and Conflations.....	176
Professional ‘Learning’	179
Time vs. Substance.....	180
Time.....	181
Substance	181
Stasis vs. Responsive Practice.....	183
Visions of Inclusion vs. Visions of ‘Ability’	187
Visions of Inclusion	188
Visions of ‘Ability’	188
Attributing Success and Responsibility.	190
Support or Extension.....	192
Reflections and Refractions	193
Implications	194
Conclusion	196
Limitations and Future Research.....	198
References.....	200
Appendices.....	260
Appendix A Glossary of Companies, Programs and Resources.....	261
Appendix B Pilot Study Procedure, Results and Analysis.....	263
Appendix C Pilot Study Survey Instrument.....	267

Appendix D Main Study Survey Instrument.....	272
Appendix E Example Responses to Survey Section Three with Evidence of Coding.....	276
Appendix F CLOS-R Summary of Teaching Practices by Dimension (Louden et al., 2008, p. 107)	281
Appendix G Example of Researcher and Research Assistant Coding Comparison Using CLOS-R (Louden et al., 2008).....	282
Appendix H Semi-Structured Interview Protocol	283
Appendix I Example Transcripts of Semi-Structured Interviews with Evidence of Coding.....	284
Appendix J University of Sydney HREC Approval.....	285
Appendix K NSW Department of Education SERAP Approval and Extension, and Catholic Dioceses Ethics Approvals.....	288
Appendix L Participant Information Statements and Consent Forms.....	294
Appendix M Principal Component Analysis Scree Plot.....	311
Appendix N Principal Component Analysis Component Matrix of Unrotated Loadings.....	312
Appendix O Principal Component Analysis Pattern Matrix and Structure Matrix	314
Appendix P CLOS-R Frequency Scores by Video	316

Abbreviations

ACARA	Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority
AITSL	Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership
CESE	Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation
CLOS-R	<i>Classroom Literacy Observation Schedule – Revised</i> (Louden et al., 2008)
GPC	Grapheme-phoneme correspondence
HREC	University of Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee
ICSEA	Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage
IPA	Inclusive Pedagogical Approach (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Florian & Spratt, 2013)
IPAA	Inclusive Pedagogical Approach in Action (Florian & Spratt, 2015)
IWB	Interactive whiteboard
MCEETYA	Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs
NESA	NSW Education Standards Authority
NSW	New South Wales
ORF	Oral reading fluency
PA	Phonological awareness
RTI	Response to Intervention
SERAP	State Education Research Applications Process
SOR	Science of Reading
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
WCPM	Words correct per minute

A range of commercial programs and companies related to the teaching of early literacy that were referred to by participating kindergarten classroom teachers in NSW will also be named throughout the thesis, particularly in Chapter 4. A list of these programs and companies, including brief outlines and hyperlinks, can be found in Appendix A.

Index of Tables

Table 2.1 <i>Intersections of the Kindergarten Syllabus, the 'Big Six' with the Addition of Writing, and Relevant Principles and Practices from the Research Literature</i>	49
Table 3.1 <i>Categories and Associated Practices Identified in the Video Footage</i>	85
Table 4.1 <i>Demographic Characteristics of all Participants (n = 266)</i>	91
Table 4.2 <i>Summary of Coding and Examples of Participants' Definitions of Literacy</i>	96
Table 4.3 <i>Frequency of Vocabulary Usage Across Participants' Literacy Block Outlines</i>	100
Table 4.4 <i>Summary of Theme Coding and Examples from Participants' Descriptions of Literacy Practice</i>	101
Table 4.5 <i>Allocation of Instructional Time According to Participants' Open-Ended Survey Responses</i> ...	107
Table 4.6 <i>Explanations of Practice Coded for 'Why' and Participant Examples</i>	110
Table 4.7 <i>Demographic Characteristics of Participants with Full Survey Completion (n = 140)</i>	112
Table 4.8 <i>KMO and Barlett's Test of Sphericity</i>	113
Table 4.9 <i>Component Correlation Matrix</i>	114
Table 4.10 <i>Pearson Product-Moment Correlations Between Construct Scores and Demographic Variables</i>	115
Table 4.11 <i>Pearson Product-Moment Correlations Between Survey Items and Demographic Variables</i>	120
Table 5.1 <i>Summary of Key Teaching Practices Observed in Each Case Study Classroom</i>	124
Table 5.2 <i>Aspects of the 'Big Six' with the Addition of Writing and Evidence from Phase Two Observations</i>	125
Table 5.3 <i>Average Allocation of Whole Class Time in Each Case Study Classroom in Minutes</i>	126
Table 5.4 <i>Average Allocation of Whole Class Time in Survey Responses and Case Study Classrooms</i>	127
Table 5.5 <i>Frequency of CLOS-R Teaching Practices by Teacher</i>	132
Table 5.6 <i>Frequency of Coding in Each Participant Interview</i>	147
Table 5.7 <i>Frequency and Description of Coding with Examples of Participants' Interview Responses</i>	148
Table 5.8 <i>Frequency of Language Across the Three Participant Interviews</i>	156

Index of Figures

Figure 1.1 <i>Concept Map of the Overall Structure of the Thesis</i>	3
Figure 1.2 <i>Conceptualising Inclusive Education in Terms of Students and Teachers Using Rouse (2008).</i>	15
Figure 2.1 <i>Overview of Current English Syllabus (Reproduced from NESAs, 2025b, K-2 focus areas).</i>	25
Figure 2.2 <i>The Language House (Reproduced from P. Snow, 2020)</i>	26
Figure 2.3 <i>'Syllabus, Content, Pedagogy and Allocation of Time' Relevant to Literacy Education Through the English Curriculum Area within the Constructs Identified by Rouse (2008)</i>	67
Figure 3.1 <i>Illustration of Sequential Mixed Methods Design (Reproduced from Teddlie & Sammons, 2010, p. 120).</i>	74
Figure 3.2 <i>Visual Overview of the Mixed Methods Research Design</i>	75
Figure 3.3 <i>Visual Illustration of Four Themes Identified for Coding with Participant Examples</i>	82
Figure 3.4 <i>Adapted from Florian and Spratt (2013), Rouse (2008) and CLOS-R (Louden et al., 2008)</i>	87
Figure 3.5 <i>Visual Illustration of the Construct Coding with Participant Examples</i>	89
Figure 4.1 <i>Specific Professional Learning in Early Years' Literacy Pedagogy Cited by Participants</i>	93
Figure 4.2 <i>Commercial Programs Cited by Participants</i>	94
Figure 4.3 <i>Word Cloud Visualisation of Survey Respondents' Definitions of 'Literacy'</i>	95
Figure 4.4 <i>Summary of General Literacy Session Structure with Participant Examples</i>	104
Figure 4.5 <i>Percentage Agreement per Likert Scale Item</i>	117
Figure 4.6 <i>Percentage of Responses to Item 12 'My overall approach to literacy instruction is the same each year'</i>	119
Figure 4.7 <i>Percentage of Responses to Item 17 'If a child is struggling with literacy acquisition, support is provided by a different teacher in a withdrawal setting'</i>	120
Figure 5.1 <i>Percentages of Allocated Time in April's Literacy Sessions at Augustine School</i>	128
Figure 5.2 <i>Percentages of Allocated Time in Kathy's Literacy Sessions at Kings School</i>	129
Figure 5.3 <i>Percentages of Allocated Time in Robin's Literacy Sessions at Riverbank School</i>	130
Figure 5.4 <i>Teaching Practices within the Five Dimensions of the CLOS-R (Louden et al., 2008)</i>	131
Figure 5.5 <i>Total Frequency of CLOS-R Practices Across All Video Footage</i>	133
Figure 5.6 <i>Frequency of Practices Observed Within the Respect Dimension</i>	134
Figure 5.7 <i>Frequency of Practices Observed Within the Knowledge Dimension</i>	136
Figure 5.8 <i>Frequency of Practices Observed Within the Orchestration Dimension</i>	139
Figure 5.9 <i>Frequency of Practices Observed Within the Support Dimension</i>	141
Figure 5.10 <i>Frequency of Practices Observed Within the Differentiation Dimension</i>	144
Figure 6.1 <i>Visual Overview of Themes Embedded in Research Constructs</i>	164
Figure 6.2 <i>Visual Overview of Theme 1</i>	166
Figure 6.3 <i>Visual Overview of Coverage of Essential Components of Literacy Practice Across Both Phases</i>	167
Figure 6.4 <i>Visual Overview of Theme 2</i>	174

Figure 6.5 <i>Visual Overview of Theme 3</i>	180
Figure 6.6 <i>Visual Overview of Theme 4</i>	187
Figure 6.7 <i>Literacy Education Through the English Curriculum Area within the Constructs Identified by Rouse (2008) and the IPA (Florian & Spratt, 2013) with Students at the Centre: A Reflection Framework for Teachers</i>	197

Section One: *Conceptualising* Inclusive Literacy Education

Chapter 1

Introduction

Research Aims and Purpose: A Dual Focus

The aim of this research was to examine the classroom literacy practices of kindergarten teachers in New South Wales (NSW), specifically in the context of the English curriculum area, and to consider the extent to which these practices may align with an Inclusive Pedagogical Approach (IPA; Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Florian & Spratt, 2013). The study maintains a dual focus on both the fields of inclusive education and literacy education by applying the IPA (Florian & Spratt, 2013) as a paradigm for conceptualising, examining and interpreting inclusive literacy practice. The IPA (Florian & Spratt, 2013) will ultimately be used as a lens through which to view and attempt to understand the intricacies and transformability of early literacy teaching and learning in the case study classrooms. Such an approach seeks to address the research and practice nexus in both the fields of inclusion and literacy education and is yet to be applied in the Australian context.

Teachers' current approaches to classroom literacy as 'practice-based evidence' (Cook & Cook, 2016) must be properly understood if their alignment with research and potential areas for improvement and inclusion are to be considered. This thesis aims to contribute to existing bodies of knowledge within the inclusive and literacy education domains but also to move beyond the constraints of literacy- or component-specific research by providing a broader consideration of classroom literacy practice which is relevant for teachers.

Organisation of the Thesis

The thesis is divided into three sections which reflect the dual focus of the research. A concept map outlining the sections and the chapters within them has been included in Figure 1.1.

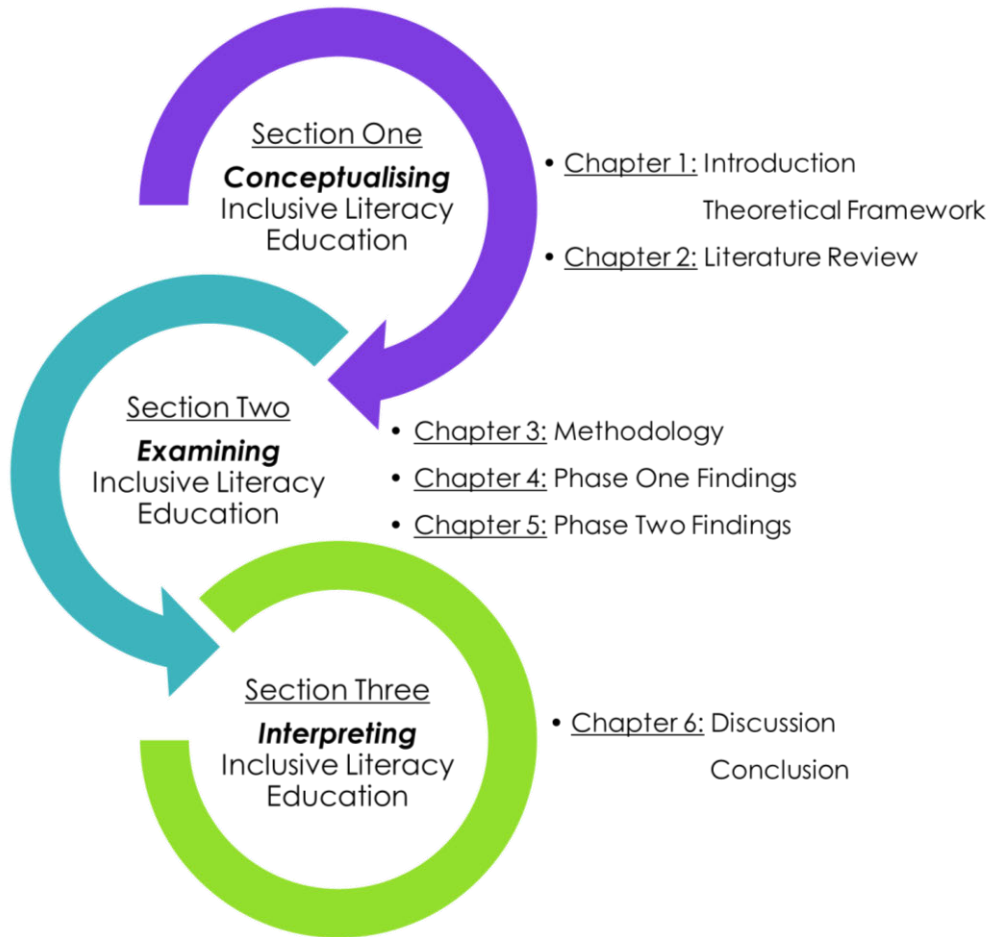
The focus of Section One is on conceptualising inclusive literacy education. Section Two examines inclusive literacy education using data drawn from kindergarten teachers' classrooms in Sydney, NSW. Section Three discusses the interpretation of that data and considers a practical way forward for teachers to critically reflect on and improve inclusive literacy practice.

Section One features two chapters which establish the constructs of inclusive education and literacy education and draw them together to conceptualise inclusive literacy education. Chapter 1 establishes the theoretical framework for the research with an emphasis on *inclusive* education and considers the challenges faced by kindergarten classroom teachers in NSW in pursuit of inclusive literacy education. Chapter 2 shifts the focus to theories informing *literacy* education by reviewing existing research literature in the literacy domain. This review considers the potential intersections between research, policy and practice that may exist for kindergarten classroom teachers in NSW. The final section presents a conceptualisation of literacy education connected with inclusive practice,

demonstrating how a combination of both fields of research offers a new framework applied in this study.

Figure 1.1

Concept Map of the Overall Structure of the Thesis



Section Two contains three chapters which examine inclusive literacy education and how it may be manifested in practice. Chapter 3 describes the two sequential phases of the mixed methods research process required for examining inclusive literacy education. This description introduces the study context and the participant sample. Chapter 4 reports the results of the first phase of the qualitative and quantitative data collection from teachers using online survey questionnaires. Chapter 5 details the findings of the second phase of the study which included classroom video observations and semi-structured interviews on a case study basis.

In Section Three, Chapter 6 presents the interpretation of inclusive literacy education by discussing the findings to draw meta-inferences across the phases of the research. This discussion establishes the tensions inherent in interpretation of inclusive literacy practice given the complexity of the kindergarten classroom context. The final section highlights a way forward for classroom teachers' professional reflection and includes a consideration of the limitations of the present study,

recommendations for future research and implications for the fields of inclusion and literacy education.

Building the Fields

Access to inclusive and equitable quality education is critical to ensure students' future success and participation in society as unique, literate, and active citizens (Education Council, 2019; Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs [MCEETYA], 2008; United Nations, 2015). Inclusive education is an international priority for education providers, governments, and individuals and it underpins educational policy and practice in Australia (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2009, 2020).

Literacy is similarly an integral part of life and learning. It enables engagement, wellbeing, communication and understanding while contributing to individuals' empowerment and facilitating their participation in society (Castles et al., 2018; UNESCO, 2025). Transforming literacy practice to meet the needs of all children is embedded in the principles of inclusive education and, more broadly, issues of social justice, equity and student wellbeing (Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation [CESE], 2015; Klibthong & Agbenyega, 2018; NSW Department of Education and Communities, 2015; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2015; Woods et al., 2015).

Constructing inclusive literacy practice that supports learning for all students is therefore an essential pursuit for classroom teachers (Forsling & Tjernberg, 2023; Garcia et al., 2025; Woods et al., 2015). Teachers must maintain a broad but evidence-informed pedagogical repertoire which addresses current policy directives, synthesises research recommendations and translates them into actionable, resourced and inclusive teaching and learning programs. Teachers' programs must be inclusive of both strategies which enable the equitable provision of literacy support, and of the diverse needs of individual students in their classrooms.

Improvements in student literacy achievement within a quality inclusive framework have been prioritised for education within Goal 4 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (2015). But literacy education has commonly been framed in divergent and sometimes narrow ways and this has represented an ongoing definitional issue (Ellis & Rowe, 2020; Hayes et al., 2017; J. Rose, 2006; Scott et al., 2023). Although national inquiries in the United States and England (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development [NICHD], 2000; J. Rose, 2006) sought to provide an evidence-based review of the research literature on literacy development, they were limited to the teaching and learning of reading as a singular albeit important aspect of literacy acquisition.

In Australia, the achievement of significant and sustained improvements in children's literacy has remained a key government priority. The Minister for Education commissioned a National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy – a title that suggested consideration of the wider significance and application of literacy beyond reading alone. And yet, the inquiry's report *Teaching Reading* (National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy, 2005) narrowed 'literacy' to 'reading' once again. Only later was

literacy examined more broadly in the *Report of the National Early Literacy Panel* (National Early Literacy Panel [NELP], 2008), but not in the Australian context.

The more recent *Next Steps: Report of the Quality Initial Teacher Education Review* (Paul et al., 2022) conducted in Australia signposts the need for the evidence base to be promoted in classroom teacher preparation but only emphasises reading in Recommendation 7. Only the accompanying *Teacher Education Expert Panel Discussion Paper* (Scott et al., 2023) broadens its emphasis to at least include both reading and writing. Approaches at this broader level of inquiry have remained relatively consistent in their focus on specific components of literacy but there has been some change evident at the policy level.

In NSW, policy standards outline the requirements of public schools in developing learning programs based on the relevant syllabus documents, including expectations for addressing literacy K-12 and inclusive education. Importantly, such expectations are outlined in separate policies (NSW Department of Education, 2025a, 2025b). Despite the existence of the Australian Curriculum English, NSW operationalises the curriculum through a state-based syllabus (the *English K-10 Syllabus*; NSW Education Standards Authority [NESA], 2025b). Based on recommendations from the NSW Curriculum Review facilitated by the NSW Government in 2018, the syllabus places an emphasis on explicit outcomes for content and teaching, and on applying the evidence base provided by research literature (NESA, 2025a). The current documentation acknowledges changes in approaches to curriculum and teaching across the past three decades and it therefore represents a seismic shift from the previous syllabus (NESA, 2012).

Despite extensive policy developments, there still remains an apparent diversity of opinion about the teaching of early literacy and a persistent ‘research to practice gap’ related to components of literacy, including reading (Buckingham et al., 2013; Paul et al., 2022; Pogorzelski et al., 2021; Scott et al., 2023) and writing (Malpique et al., 2024). With regard to classroom practice, discussions in the research domain have commonly been limited to reading and prioritised a false but pervasive dichotomy between ‘phonics’ and ‘whole language’ methods (Hamston & Scull, 2007), as if these two approaches are both mutually exclusive and exhaustive of the strategies required for effective literacy practice. On one ‘side’ are those who prioritise explicit, systematic instruction in the alphabetic code (e.g., Buckingham et al., 2013; Castles et al., 2018; Hemenstall, 2005) while on the other ‘side’ are those who value the importance of literature, meaning and context in literacy development, from a ‘whole to part’ point of view (e.g., Ewing, 2018; Goodman, 1965, 1967). More recent literature has moved away from the ‘reading wars’ (Castles et al., 2018) to emphasise the ‘science of reading’ (Kambach & Mesmer, 2024; Petscher et al., 2020; Seidenberg et al., 2020; Tierney & Pearson, 2024) and ‘science of learning’ (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Weinstein et al., 2018). But there is much more to classroom literacy practice than ‘reading’ alone.

Discourse surrounding early literacy practice in political, research and educational domains, in Australia and internationally, is persistently divisive. Recent reform in NSW regarding the

incorporation of literacy through the English curriculum area adds complexity and topicality to this field. For teachers, translating government policy and educational research into the practical realities of the classroom is a challenging task: while teachers in Australia are mandated to teach the content outlined by the curriculum or syllabus documents for their state or territory, this mandate does not prescribe specific classroom practices, and syllabus requirements do not always align with student needs evident in the classroom setting. Teachers have the autonomy to determine the nature and execution of classroom practices, and this decision-making may be influenced by multiple knowledge sources, including research recommendations and syllabus requirements. This complex task relies on teachers' professional judgement and is particularly significant in the context of kindergarten classrooms which represent students' first exposure to formal literacy education.

Unfortunately, discussions of literacy education often emphasise policy development, initial teacher education, standardised assessment results, teacher retention and curriculum changes as factors which are highly relevant but far removed from teachers' classroom literacy practices and the students for whom they matter (Deuchar, 2025; Lupton & Hayes, 2021). Scrutiny of results of international assessments which reveal high proportions of students struggling with literacy, alongside calls for improvement in literacy education and in teacher preparation, are constantly resurfacing (Deuchar, 2025; Jarke & Breiter, 2019; D. Mayer & Mills, 2021; te Riele et al., 2022). Discussions of literacy education are also plagued with key terms such as 'quality', 'direct', 'authentic', 'effective' or 'content-rich' (e.g., Cabell et al., 2025) which are loaded and frequently misinterpreted, in what remains such a highly contested area. Indeed, conceptions of 'quality' or 'effective' literacy practice and implementation are contingent on a range of variables. The notion of a 'policy' ensuring teacher practice may be elusive and the professional judgements that teachers make are far more complex than the guidance provided by syllabus documents or journal articles in isolation (Dewitz & Graves, 2021).

Despite substantial research in the field of literacy education, notions of improvement are multifaceted and context-dependent. National surveys of teachers, including those in NSW, reveal time pressures which significantly impact effectiveness (J. Hunter et al., 2022). Further, the current landscape of standardisation and 'datafication' in education often serves to devalue teachers' professional judgements (Daliri-Ngametua & Hardy, 2022; Hardy, 2025). This landscape can also lead to schools and leaders pursuing an elusive 'recipe' for optimal literacy practice. This pursuit often includes the purchase of commercial programs or the use of prescribed curriculum materials, which downplay the interpretation, critical judgement and inclusive mindset required to actively address all students' individual needs (Brennan & King, 2022; Gawne, 2023; Lupton & Hayes, 2021; Poulton, 2025). Teachers' professional judgements require high levels of professional knowledge relevant to inclusive literacy education. However, working against this expectation, genuine gaps in Australian teachers' knowledge required for successful literacy teaching have been identified in the literature (e.g., Carson & Bayetto, 2018; Stark et al., 2016).

The next section outlines definitional issues that arise in education. This includes a consideration of different approaches to framing 'literacy' and establishes the definition of literacy applied in this research. The section on 'key definitions' is followed by the theoretical framework for the study which considers theories of learning and teaching in order to synthesise them into a conceptualisation of the inclusive pedagogical approach which underpins this study.

Managing the 'noise' and competing emphases related to literacy education represents a significant challenge for educators. As noted above, one factor that contributes to this 'noise' is the definitional confusion that often arises in education and specifically with regard to 'literacy'.

Key Definitions

Many key terms in the field of education are often conflated or used interchangeably. This synonymous use of terms is particularly true of literacy given the reciprocal nature of many components, such as oral language and reading (Adlof, 2019; P. Snow, 2021), and reading and writing (S. Graham, 2020). This section clarifies the definitions of key terms to frame their use throughout this thesis: 'inclusion', 'inclusive practice', 'instruction', 'teaching', 'pedagogy' and 'explicit teaching'. This is followed by an emphasis on defining 'literacy' and the 'literacy block' referred to in the title of this study.

The essential principle of inclusion which underpins this research is that all students have a right to access and participate in social and academic learning and achievement with a sense of belonging in the classroom environment (Ainscow, 2020; Finkelstein et al., 2021; Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). The United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities defines inclusive education as "a transformation in culture, policy and practice... to accommodate the differing requirements and identities of individual students, together with a commitment to removing the barriers that impede that possibility" (United Nations, 2016, para. 5). As such, inclusive practice will be used in this thesis to refer to teaching which facilitates the participation of all learners and incorporates strategies which support students' diverse needs and are evidence-informed to maximise student success (Finkelstein et al., 2021).

The terms 'instruction' and 'pedagogy' are frequently used synonymously, though the challenge of defining them has previously been acknowledged (Kameenui, 1999). 'Instruction' has been associated with a didactic process of 'transmission' of information (Biesta & Miedema, 2002; Black & Wiliam, 2009). Similarly, 'teaching' has been referred to as encompassing the performative or observable actions of teachers but not providing justification for their choices (Nicholson, 2023). The term 'pedagogy', as a broader alternative, includes instruction but acknowledges that "how one teaches is inseparable from what one teaches, from what and how one assesses and from how one learns" (NSW Department of Education and Training [DET], 2003, p. 2) and incorporates the theories, beliefs and choices that shape classroom teaching (Nicholson, 2023). Though both terms may be used,

this understanding of pedagogy or practice as a 'bridge' between students, teachers, and the curriculum (Dewey, 1938; Hyun, 2006) underpins this research.

The terms 'explicit teaching' and 'explicit instruction' are also commonly used interchangeably (Hughes et al., 2017). Both 'explicit teaching' and 'explicit instruction' have been used to refer to a suite of core, evidence-informed strategies which promote student learning and reduce cognitive load (Hughes et al., 2017). 'Direct instruction', without capitalisation, aligns with this definition while the capitalised term is similar but involves scripted lessons which prescribe both the 'what' and 'how' of classroom teaching (Hughes et al., 2017). The nature of explicit teaching and the relevance of cognitive load theory are explored further in the Theoretical Framework in this chapter. Although the terms 'explicit teaching' and 'explicit instruction' may both be used in this thesis, they are used to refer to an approach which involves teacher-led but interactive classroom practice, maximises student engagement and prioritises corrective feedback. Given the accessible modelling, structured support, student feedback and progress monitoring by which explicit teaching is characterised, it is an approach which aligns with the emphasis on inclusive practice embedded in this thesis (Ainscow, 2020; Finkelstein et al., 2021; Hughes et al., 2017).

While some educational terms are often used synonymously, others are frequently presented in a dichotomous relationship, such as student-centred 'versus' teacher-directed or explicit instruction. In the context of literacy education, one of the most persistent dichotomies presents phonics and whole language as 'opposing' approaches to the teaching of reading (see Literature Review).

Dichotomising pedagogies polarises educators and oversimplifies often complex and context-specific approaches. When teachers succumb to such dichotomies in practice, either based on a personal ideology or under the influence of public and political debates on the issue, they tend to choose 'one or the other' as though a singular approach can be both superior and sufficient on its own. As such, they lose sight not only of the research base (or lack thereof) for each approach, but also of their students and their learning needs (Hamston & Scull, 2007; LaBoskey, 1998). Teachers should, instead, be critically informed of education practices that may be of benefit to their students and remain in pursuit of a broad but evidence-informed pedagogical repertoire. Indeed, LaBoskey (1998) argues that "in the search for 'best' practice, we tend to lose sight of the fact that the real 'best' practice is the journey itself" (p. 43).

Defining 'Literacy'

Definitions of 'literacy' itself are divergent and contextual. Further, the terms 'literacy' and 'reading' are often used interchangeably. Even authors of recent literature use 'literacy' in their titles but emphasise reading in the content of their articles (e.g., Smith et al., 2023, 2025; Spear-Swerling, 2019).

Literacy is value-laden and understood differently in different contexts (Snyder, 2008). It has traditionally been conceptualised in a domain-specific way as "a set of reading, writing and counting

skills" (UNESCO, 2025, para. 2) but is now accepted more broadly as a means of understanding, participating, and communicating in various contexts. These two perspectives of English literacy have generally been regarded as opposing and are described, respectively, as "psychological-neuroscientific and socio-culturally oriented ways of thinking" (Wyse, 2017, p. 25). Literacy may also be applied to skills across various subject areas (P. Snow, 2021). For example, the role of 'mathematical literacy' in students becoming numerate has been acknowledged (D. Evans, 2017; Powell et al., 2021). Although it may be applied to a broad range of learning contexts, the present study focuses specifically on the promotion of literacy through the English curriculum area. As such, the discussion below focuses on the two dominant paradigms in defining literacy.

Literacy is frequently defined from a cognitive perspective in terms of specific, universally recommended components (Gough & Tunmer, 1986; Konza, 2014; NICHD, 2000). This perspective is often associated with typical stages of development which can guide teaching in aspects of literacy such as reading (Chall, 1983), word recognition (Ehri, 1995, 2005, 2014) and spelling (Bear et al., 1996, 2020). Paris (2005) reconceptualised and challenged this notion of 'stages' of development with a theory of skills which are 'constrained', 'moderately constrained' and 'unconstrained' developmentally and conceptually (Dougherty Stahl, 2011). This cognitive understanding of literacy focuses on 'in the head' processes (Purcell-Gates et al., 2004) that are supposedly independent from social or cultural environments (Davidson, 2010).

In apparent opposition is the sociocultural perspective which emphasises the social context in which literacy develops (Gee, 1992; Perez, 2004). According to this paradigm, children's literacy development must be considered not simply as a set of discrete skills, but in terms of the social, cultural and historical contexts in which it has been shared and mediated (Vygotsky, 1978). Literacy must therefore be seen "in a holistic context that links to the individual's thinking with social and cultural influences" (Wyse, 2017, p. 43). Literacy, more broadly understood, is not limited to print-based skills such as reading and writing (Lo Bianco & Freebody, 1997; Paris, 2005). It includes "a variety of educational outcomes – dispositions toward learning, interests in reading and writing, and knowledge of subject-matter domains" (Rayner et al., 2001, p. 34).

And yet, theoretical distinctions such as those discussed here cannot be narrowly applied to dynamic and responsive classroom practice (Ewing, 2018). Of course, children bring different knowledge and understandings of literacy to the classroom, and pedagogy may therefore focus on particular domains at different times depending on the needs of students (C. E. Snow & Juel, 2005). Purcell-Gates et al. (2004) reject the notion that "the social and cognitive are independent and incommensurable" (p. 81). While neither theory on its own is adequate, rather there is potential for integration of the two theories "in a nested relationship, with the cognitive occurring within the sociocultural context" (Purcell-Gates et al., 2004, p. 81). Such an approach, which acknowledges the role of cognition in developing literacy according to the relevant sociocultural context, may facilitate more equitable and responsive literacy practice (Davidson, 2010; Purcell-Gates et al., 2004). Indeed,

curriculum materials and syllabus documents in Australia (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority [ACARA], 2025b; ACARA, n.d.-a), and specifically in NSW (NESA, 2025b), reflect an integrated understanding of literacy, with consideration of students' skills proficiency within a broader context of application and participation as literate citizens in society.

The definition of literacy adopted for the purpose of this study, in an attempt to examine the nature of classroom literacy practice "through a wider cognitive-sociocultural lens" (Davidson, 2010, p. 255), is that of ACARA (n.d.-a):

Students become literate as they develop the knowledge, skills and dispositions to interpret and use language confidently for learning and communicating in and out of school and for participating effectively in society. Literacy involves students listening to, reading, viewing, speaking, writing and creating oral, print, visual and digital texts, and using and modifying language for different purposes in a range of contexts. (para. 1)

The *Strathclyde Three Domains Tool* (Ellis & Rowe, 2020) mirrors the emphasis on cognitive knowledge and skills within a sociocultural learning environment, as described above, but also includes the *learner* as a third, distinct perspective that is relevant to literacy teaching. It is for teachers to determine the extent to which each of these perspectives drives their approach to classroom literacy practice (Ellis & Rowe, 2020).

With this model in mind, the term 'literacy block' as the context for this classroom literacy practice, and as a key part of the title of this study, must be defined. In the United States, the design of a 'core literacy block' or 'language arts block' is typically associated with the use of a specific curriculum or commercial program (Reed, 2024; Spear-Swerling & Zibulsky, 2014). Similarly, in England, the 'literacy hour' prescribed in primary schools involved the coverage of reading, writing, phonics and spelling in the context of specific whole class or group activities (Jerrim et al., 2023; Machin & McNally, 2008). Both approaches were designed to enhance student literacy achievement and there is evidence for the success of initiatives such as the 'literacy hour' (Machin & McNally, 2008).

Although it has not been associated with a specific government policy or strategy, the allocation of a specific session or 'block' of the school day to core components of literacy, including reading and writing, is common in Australian primary classrooms (e.g., Meeks et al., 2020; Nicholas et al., 2021; te Riele et al., 2022). In the Australian context, the 'literacy block' does not involve prescribed allocations of time but includes a range of whole class, small group or independent activities. As such, the 'literacy block' is used in this study to refer to the typical session of teaching and learning which emphasises core literacy components through the English curriculum area.

Regardless of the exact design of a 'literacy block', it must be developed according to relevant syllabus requirements and, importantly, according to the needs of students. The following section outlines the theoretical basis for this research.

Theoretical Framework

Theory provides a lens through which to perceive educational knowledge, concepts and contexts. It can capture a phenomenon or paradigm that the researcher has otherwise been unable to

express (Ball, 2006b). It can be a productive tool which enables understanding of different concepts and it can also challenge “cherished orthodoxies and taken-for-granted practices and methods” (Ball, 2006a, p. 1). Theory is particularly significant in the field of education because it is expected that theoretical perspectives shape teachers’ pedagogical approaches (Fellowes & Oakley, 2020). However, particularly in the inclusive literacy domain, longstanding ways of thinking about education, whether beneficial or detrimental to student learning, may remain pervasive in classrooms.

The following section is organised into four key subheadings: theories of learning; theories of teaching; the inclusive pedagogical approach; and ‘reasonable’ adjustments. In the final subsection, the theoretical framework includes a consideration of the inclusive pedagogical approach in the context of departmental and policy requirements and makes the case for the suitability of its application to the context of literacy education in NSW classrooms.

Theories of Learning

Historically, theories of learning have been underpinned by different beliefs about knowledge acquisition, some of which have been challenged and altered over time. The last two decades have seen a shift in thinking about education, moving away from the conception of students as empty vessels, waiting to be filled passively with knowledge, and towards the notion of students’ active construction of knowledge (Liu & Matthews, 2005; S. Wilson & Peterson, 2006). Central to the sociocultural perspective adopted in this study is the idea that students actively construct new knowledge based on their prior knowledge, experiences and social interactions within a particular environment (Collins, 2013; Howell & Nolet, 2000; Piaget, 1954; Vygotsky, 1978). Crucially, this perspective on the acquisition of knowledge is context-dependent but does not dictate a confined set of instructional strategies (Schuh, 2003). It considers “individual differences as something to be expected and understood in terms of the interactions between many different variables rather than fixed states within individuals” (Florian, 2015, p. 14). Students’ individual needs should be prioritised as the starting point for teachers’ instructional decisions. If not, teachers risk persisting with instructional approaches at their students’ expense.

While conceptions of student learning have changed and continue to evolve, traditional paradigms and assumptions about students’ ‘ability’ continue to influence teachers’ decision-making. For example, ways of thinking about ‘intelligence’ centre on the view that it is “a fixed, measurable genetic endowment, differentially distributed in the population as a whole, which determines the upper limits of an individual’s intellectual powers” (S. Hart, 1998, p. 155). Fendler and Muzaffar (2008) describe this “bell-curve thinking” (p. 63) as a widespread and generally unchallenged understanding of ‘ability’ in education domains. This perspective assumes that students’ intelligence or ability is fixed and can be distributed on a normal curve, with most deemed to be ‘average’ and a smaller number at either end who excel or fail (Fendler & Muzaffar, 2008; Florian, 2015).

Misconceptions about students' capacity to learn, such as 'fixed ability', influence teachers and the learning opportunities they provide (Howell & Nolet, 2000). Ladwig and McPherson (2017) argue that the notion of ability is frequently used by teachers to "declare what students ostensibly cannot do" (p. 345). As a result, educators commonly attribute weak academic mastery or achievement to some 'within-child' difficulties rather than looking closely and critically at the education provision itself (Wang & Hall, 2018; J. Wilson & Colmar, 2008; Woodcock et al., 2019). In their study of student choice in the classroom, Flowerday and Schraw (2000) found that teachers' perceptions of student 'ability' influenced their decisions about which students could benefit from a choice of instructional activities. The use of 'ability' to inform instructional decisions is particularly relevant to the teaching of literacy. 'Ability groupings' are commonly used by teachers, especially in the primary years, to cater for student needs in areas such as reading (Hong et al., 2012; Steenbergen-Hu et al., 2016). The assumption is that such groupings enable students to reach their "given potential" (S. Hart & Drummond, 2014, p. 440).

While theories of student learning and 'ability' have been considered, approaches to teaching have also oscillated according to these different paradigms. As in the learning domain, ways of thinking about teaching, including pedagogical approaches which have the greatest impact on student learning, have been developed, refined and revisited over time.

Theories of Teaching

For the past several decades, there has been ongoing disagreement regarding the amount of instructional guidance to be provided to students. Long-established ways of thinking suggested that students required explicit teaching of key concepts and could not be left to 'discover' this understanding for themselves (Engelmann, 1980; Hemenstall, 1996; Kirschner et al., 2006). The introduction of constructivist paradigms regarding student learning as a process of 'construction' in a "minimally guided environment" (Kirschner et al., 2006, p. 75) began to influence thinking about pedagogy. The perception that learning is an active process of 'construction' undertaken by the learner may suggest that teaching should mirror this approach (R. E. Mayer, 2004). Indeed, constructivist approaches to teaching have been prevalent in classrooms. 'Discovery' or 'problem-based' learning in which students are encouraged to discover new concepts for themselves, with educators in the role of 'facilitator', took hold (e.g., W. S. Anthony, 1973; Schmidt, 1983).

Despite this approach becoming prominent in classrooms, Kirschner (2009) warns against confusing the "psychological bases of learning and the pedagogic bases for teaching" (p. 151), given that constructivism refers to a theory of learning, not teaching. The idea that students construct knowledge based on prior knowledge and experiences, and the notion that students require explicit explanations of core concepts to maximise learning, are not mutually exclusive. Further, activating students' prior knowledge or learning, a key aspect of constructivist thinking, is frequently referred to as one of the tenets of explicit instruction (e.g., Rosenshine, 2012).

Explicit teaching is an approach which can be applied to any learning area and which integrates teacher modelling, demonstration, guided practice and corrective feedback as key principles of classroom implementation (Hughes et al., 2017). It involves independent repeated practice, coupled with timely feedback, and requires frequent teacher evaluation by checking for student acquisition and understanding to inform subsequent teaching (CESE, 2020b; Hattie, 2009). The benefits of explicit instruction have been explored more recently with regard to cognitive load theory, which relies on two key principles: that the human brain may only simultaneously process a limited amount of new information, and that the amount of stored information it can process is unlimited (CESE, 2017a). The processing of new information results in a 'cognitive load' on the learner's working memory. Working memory is the "limited mental 'space' in which we think" (Clark et al., 2012, p. 8) and the potential to overload it has significant pedagogical implications.

Research related to cognitive load theory provides an empirical basis for the use of explicit instruction, given its capacity to reduce cognitive load by structuring learning from simple to complex and supporting long-term memory (Hughes et al., 2017; Tuovinen & Sweller, 1999). Other research has provided evidence of explicit instruction producing superior outcomes when compared to 'student-centred' or 'discovery learning' approaches (e.g., Alfieri et al., 2011; Kirschner et al., 2006; R. E. Mayer, 2004). Explicit instruction has been identified as particularly important in literacy areas such as reading and writing which are "biologically secondary" (P. Snow, 2021, p. 225). Some have noted the value of more inquiry-oriented approaches later in students' learning trajectory (Martin, 2016), though the focus of the present study is on students' experiences as novices in the earliest phase of formal literacy teaching.

Concerns have been raised in the literature regarding the consistency of approaches to measuring cognitive load (and overload, e.g., T. de Jong, 2010). Despite this, in NSW, embedding the principles of explicit instruction in classroom practice has been prioritised. The 'What Works Best' document and more recent update published by the Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation (CESE, 2014, 2020b) identify explicit instruction as one of eight 'themes' likely to have the greatest impact on student learning. Though the reference to "ability levels" (CESE, 2020b, p. 13) is unfortunate, the documents acknowledge the benefits of explicit teaching for all students.

While conceptions of teaching and learning and their evolutions in isolation are significant, teaching and learning must be considered together in a dynamic and multi-faceted relationship in the classroom context. As noted earlier, this research considers pedagogy or practice as a 'bridge' between students, teachers and the curriculum (Dewey, 1938; Hyun, 2006). Learning is therefore the result of the interaction between three essential variables: instruction, curriculum and the students themselves (Howell & Nolet, 2000) and this aligns with the lens of inclusive education applied in this research. This is perhaps a consequence of the integrated nature of educational contexts. The many variables worth considering, including classroom practice and students' individual traits, have different but simultaneous and significant impacts on learners and learning. It is therefore difficult to consider them

in isolation. Learning is a shared, social activity (Florian, 2015) which is “inextricably linked to the choices and decisions made by teachers” (Florian & Spratt, 2013, p. 123). Indeed, the *Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities* (United Nations, 2006) refers to disabilities as the result of interactions with other influences, including attitudinal and environmental barriers to individuals’ learning and successful participation.

Educational outcomes arise from a complex interaction between teachers, students, curriculum and other outside influences (Florian, 2015; Pantić, 2021). Learning can be facilitated if teachers focus on variables that *are* within their control, such as classroom pedagogy, rather than attributing failure only to variables they cannot influence. Taking this inclusive approach not only prioritises classroom pedagogy as a catalyst for facilitating student learning, but it also overcomes the constraints imposed by notions of ‘fixed ability’. This principle underpins the Inclusive Pedagogical Approach (IPA; Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Florian & Spratt, 2013).

The Inclusive Pedagogical Approach

The IPA (Florian & Spratt, 2013) represents a way of thinking about pedagogy that highlights the significant role of the teacher in facilitating learning for all students. Having emerged from research into the craft knowledge of teachers whose pedagogy reflects an inclusive approach (Brennan & King, 2022; Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011), it has since been applied as a tool - the Inclusive Pedagogical Approach in Action (IPAA) - for teachers and researchers to consider inclusive pedagogy in the classroom (Florian & Spratt, 2015). The IPAA identifies three key assumptions necessary for teachers to successfully enact inclusive pedagogy (Brennan & King, 2022). Teachers must: believe in their own capacity to teach all students; be committed to collaboration and professional development in order to continue their growth as inclusive practitioners; and acknowledge the concept of “transformability” (S. Hart et al., 2004, p. 166) with regard to students’ capacity to learn (Brennan et al., 2021; Florian & Spratt, 2015; Rosenberg et al., 2025; Van Mieghem et al., 2020).

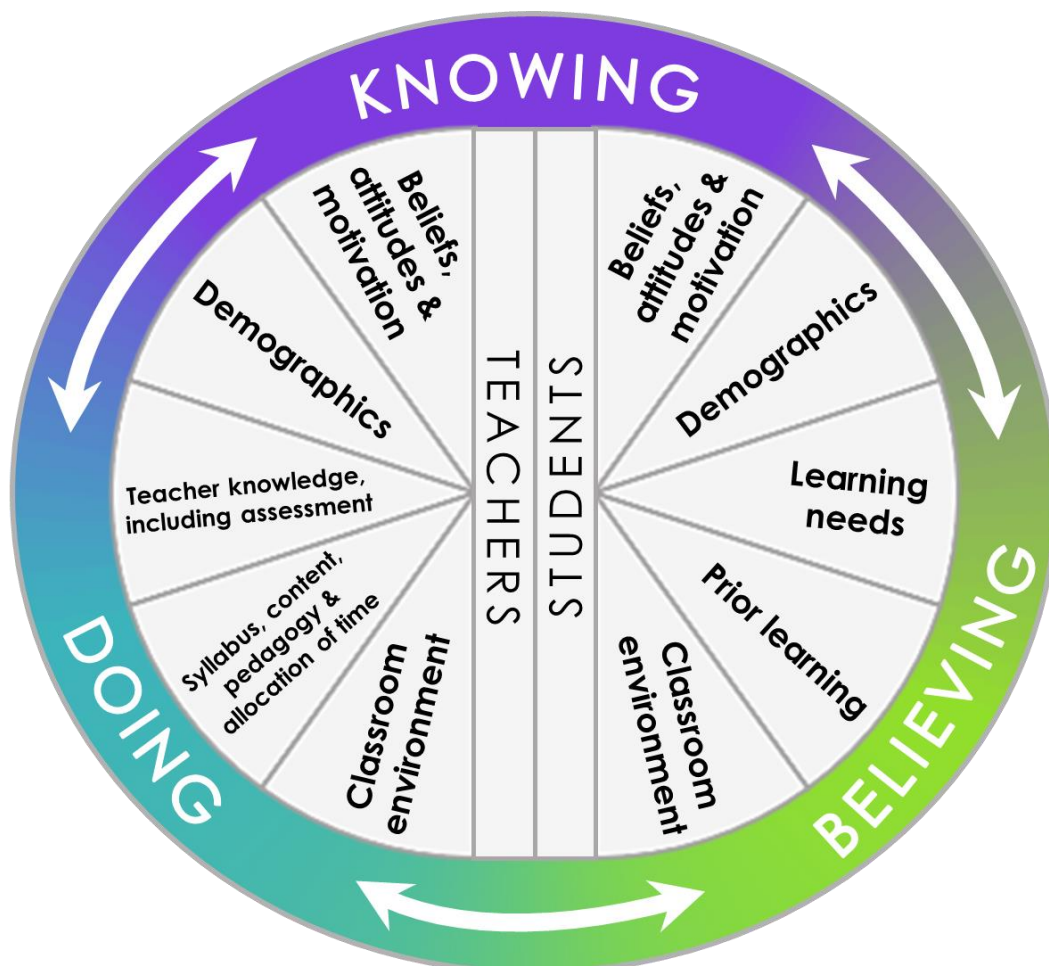
‘Transformability’ refers to the belief that students’ capacity to learn is not pre-determined but can be directly impacted by their teacher, giving all students the potential to learn successfully (Brennan et al., 2021; Losberg & Zwozdiak-Myers, 2024). This notion, which underpins the IPA, relies on teachers “presuming competence” (Biklen & Burke, 2006, p. 172) on behalf of students. It escapes the constraints imposed by previous notions of ‘fixed ability’ by considering that “how teachers respond in the present can affect any child’s capacity to learn” (Florian, 2017, p. 249). Teachers are responsible for providing an education for all and as such, student differences and difficulties in learning must be perceived as “dilemmas for teaching” (Florian & Spratt, 2013, p. 124). The individual learning needs of students are acknowledged, with the recognition that how the educational environment, including the teacher, responds to those needs has a significant impact on students’ learning trajectory. This is in contrast with “the more common practice of regarding performance difficulties as evidence of incompetence and then expecting little” (Biklen & Burke, 2006, p. 172). Thus,

whereas the increasing realisation that students are active participants in their own education may be seen to shift the focus away from teachers and towards the students alone, the hypothesis that a child's capacity to learn can be shaped by the approach of his or her instructor decisively shifts the focus to an integrated view of the roles of student and teacher.

With this integration in mind, the IPA emphasises the role of teachers as “agents of change” (Pantić, 2021, p. 136). Students already come to school with their own ‘virtual schoolbag’ (Thomson, 2002) of prior experiences and knowledge. Although their individual needs are acknowledged, it is teachers and the classroom practice that they design that *can* be influenced in order to promote inclusive pedagogy. In line with the key assumptions of the IPAA, teachers must believe in their capacity to teach all learners. Such a framework may be conceptualised in terms of students and teachers (see Figure 1.2).

Figure 1.2

Conceptualising Inclusive Education in Terms of Students and Teachers Using Rouse (2008).



There are many student-related variables which may impact students' success in education, including students' demographic characteristics such as age, gender (e.g., Below et al., 2010; Ready et al., 2005), home environments and family socioeconomic status. Students' prior knowledge or learning

is another key variable which not only impacts students' future learning but also informs teachers' pedagogy (Dochy et al., 1999; Witherby & Carpenter, 2022).

But these student-related variables are generally not within teachers' control. Teachers cannot predetermine students' demographic characteristics, prior knowledge or individual learning needs or motivations for learning. By contrast, the teacher-related variables shown in Figure 1.2 *are* within teachers' control and can be considered in order to positively impact student learning (Twyman & Heward, 2018). For example, formative assessment involves establishing learners' current understanding of syllabus content, where their learning may next be directed, and how this can be achieved (Black & Wiliam, 2009). The need to support students with pedagogy for early intervention in areas including literacy is also well established in the literature (e.g., M. S. Burns et al., 1999; Foorman et al., 2016; NELP, 2008). Teachers are responsible for undertaking this assessment and identifying students requiring such intervention.

As such, teachers, themselves, are learners. Teachers are in a position to develop their knowledge not only of the learners in their care, but also to draw on their own motivations, personal experiences and dynamic, evolving bodies of knowledge with regard to education (Karlen et al., 2023). It is through the enactment of their beliefs, skills and experience that teachers develop and refine their knowledge of their students and of teaching. This knowledge forms part of teachers' professional identities in which inclusive principles may be interwoven, depending on their qualifications and experience (Mockler, 2011; Rouse, 2008).

Further, education systems, schools, classrooms and teachers differ in terms of policy and broader mandates, syllabus requirements, school-wide leadership expectations, commercial or required programs, levels of teacher autonomy and knowledge. Indeed, these additional external variables impact the teacher-related variables included in Figure 1.2. For example, school-determined professional development may impact teacher knowledge. Similarly, the length and nature of teachers' classroom experience as a demographic variable can be a driving factor in determining inclusive classroom practice (E. Wray et al., 2022). But while broader system- and school-determined expectations may exist, teachers can effect change, to at least some extent, in their classrooms rather than focusing on these external influences or student-related variables that are not within their control.

An inclusive pedagogical approach, put simply, is driven by teachers for their students. The associated variables are embedded in the concepts of 'knowing', 'doing' and 'believing' (Rouse, 2008) which are essential for inclusive pedagogy (Florian & Spratt, 2013). Teachers must be informed about relevant teaching, assessment, behaviour and support strategies, how children learn and how best to cater for particular student needs in order to 'know' about inclusive pedagogy (Rouse, 2008). They must translate this knowledge into action by 'doing' inclusive pedagogy in their classrooms using an evidence-informed approach and this relies on them 'believing' in their capacity to successfully cater for all students (Dignath et al., 2022; Rouse, 2008). These constructs echo the elements of the 'head'

(teacher knowledge), 'heart' (teachers' ethical and moral attitudes and beliefs) and 'hands' (teachers' practical skills) framework outlined by other researchers (Sharma, 2018; Shulman, 2004).

Importantly, these three core constructs exist in a reciprocal, cyclical relationship, as represented in Figure 1.2 (Brennan et al., 2021; Rouse, 2008) and as such, they are interactive and interdependent. For example, teachers who have already established positive beliefs with regard to inclusion and are supported to make changes to classroom practice are more likely to develop new knowledge about inclusive practice (Rouse, 2008). Similarly, if teachers do not perceive themselves as capable of designing and implementing inclusive practice, opportunities to develop their knowledge and to apply it in practice may in turn positively impact their attitudes and beliefs (Rouse, 2008).

The underlying principle of these three constructs, as outlined by Rouse (2008), is "extending teachers' knowledge... encouraging them to do things differently and getting them to reconsider their attitudes and beliefs" (p. 12). While Rouse (2008) outlines this framework in the context of teacher professional development initiatives, it is equally applicable to the day-to-day experience of in-service teachers which, itself, informs the development of teachers' professional identities (Mockler, 2011). Indeed, Rouse's (2008) core constructs are frequently referred to in the literature outlining the IPA and IPAA (e.g., Brennan & King, 2022; Florian & Spratt, 2013; Florian & Spratt, 2015). The alignment of the two frameworks therefore informs the present study as the constructs of 'knowing', 'doing' and 'believing' (Rouse, 2008) mirror the key assumptions of the IPAA, as described earlier.

Central to the IPA and IPAA is the aim of "extending what is generally available to all" (Florian, 2017, p. 249). This concept is part of the Universal Design for Learning framework, which prioritises flexibility in the resources and pedagogy used in the classroom in order to maximise learning opportunities for all students (Capp, 2020; D. Rose, 2001). This focus on strengthening core, whole class or Tier 1 instruction is the basis on which the Response to Intervention (RTI) model is built (Al Otaiba et al., 2025; J. J. Hoover & Patton, 2008; Vaughn & Swanson, 2015). As part of RTI, students' responses to this high-quality core classroom practice inform future "decisions about instructional needs" (J. J. Hoover & Patton, 2008, p. 195). Teachers plan for and have high expectations of all students' success, rather than waiting for learners to fail (Florian & Spratt, 2013; Haley-Mize & Reeves, 2013; Stanford & Reeves, 2009). It is in this whole class, Tier 1 setting that the present study seeks to examine teachers' decisions for inclusive literacy practice.

Byrne (2005) draws on the concept of a 'division of labour' between teacher and student in discussing approaches specific to the teaching of reading. Which instructional practices are going to be fundamental for individual students is unknown to the teacher at the beginning of any school year. It is therefore preferable to assume that more, rather than less, is required as part of classroom practice. Byrne (2005) explains:

The worst that can happen if the procedure is in error, and children actually do make more contributions than assumed, is that things that do not need to be taught are taught. If practices that follow from assuming more on behalf of the child are implemented and it turns out that one or more of those assumptions are flawed, then teaching will have omitted things that really needed to be taught. This strikes me as a more grievous mistake than overteaching. (p. 117)

Explicit teaching and its contrast with 'inquiry based' learning, as described earlier, could be considered an example of this approach. Given its potential to support the needs of all students (Hughes et al., 2017), framing classroom practice with explicit teaching in mind would seem preferable to assuming that it is necessary only for some students and omitting strategies that could prove essential for others.

This perspective is consistent with the principles of the IPA, which represents a shift in thinking about teaching and learning as providing for most learners, to developing inclusive practice that facilitates participation and success for *all* (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). It requires that teachers make "the least dangerous assumption" (Donnellan, 1984, p. 148) when making instructional decisions. While inclusive pedagogy influences teachers' decision-making and perceptions of student learning, it does not necessitate any specific type of classroom practice (Spratt & Florian, 2014). The IPA and IPAA, therefore, offer a framework for enacting inclusive pedagogy in the classroom, within which teachers reject student labels of 'ability' and acknowledge the crucial role of their teaching in facilitating learning.

Some have queried the potential contradictions inherent in the IPA and IPAA with regard to the emphasis on student choice and the rejection of any 'ability' grouping (Koutsouris et al., 2024; Norwich & Koutsouris, 2020). The emphasis on student choice (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011) could be seen to require the exclusion of teacher-directed learning (Norwich & Koutsouris, 2020), which is essential (Alfieri et al., 2011; CESE, 2020b; Hattie, 2009; Rosenshine, 2012; Tuovinen & Sweller, 1999). Similarly, the rejection of 'ability' grouping may be perceived as a rejection of *any* student grouping, despite its benefits for targeted teaching (Koutsouris et al., 2024).

But the IPA and IPAA represent evidence-informed frameworks which promote the development of professional competence for inclusive practice, not as inflexible approaches to be applied in practice but as guides to enable critical reflection (Finkelstein et al., 2021; Luo & Li, 2024). Indeed, the promotion of inclusion may relate less to the individual classroom strategies teachers use and more to teachers' mindsets and the ways in which those strategies are enacted in practice (Florian & Beaton, 2018). For example, classroom differentiation of the learning content, process, product or environment can support inclusive practice and this can include the use of student groupings (Woodcock et al., 2022). But the execution of differentiation using 'ability' and a fixed categorisation of students as the focus has been associated with low efficacious teachers (Woodcock et al., 2022). Teachers' beliefs about students may impact the responsiveness of their teaching with regard to student needs (Hu et al., 2023).

Similarly, additional classroom support staff may assist in the successful execution of inclusive practice. But teachers' common belief that such staff are required to enable the successful participation of some students has been shown to undermine inclusive practice (Chow et al., 2024; Woodcock & Hardy, 2017; Woodcock et al., 2022). Further, an overreliance on teaching assistants who do not have teaching qualifications but may commonly be tasked with supporting students with the

highest needs has been lamented in the literature in both the fields of literacy and inclusive education (e.g., Butt & Lowe, 2012; Causton-Theoharis et al., 2007; Giangreco, 2021; Lose, 2007).

As a variable that is within their control, teachers' approaches to classroom practice, in particular, warrant investigating – for the benefit of teachers and their students. It is ultimately the teacher's responsibility to prioritise and to adapt classroom practice by differentiating to cater for *all* students (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership [AITSL], 2022; Beamish et al., 2025; Scarparolo & Porta, 2025). This requires them to believe in all students' capacity to learn, accept the significant impact of classroom practice on student learning and, most importantly, act on this knowledge accordingly.

Given the proactive approach associated with the IPA (Florian & Spratt, 2013), teachers could be expected to use this approach to guide their classroom practice. And yet the principles of the IPA (Florian & Spratt, 2013) must be considered alongside departmental and policy requirements associated with inclusive education, with which teachers must comply.

'Reasonable' Adjustments

Prior to the transition to inclusion, changes to schooling had focused on facilitating the integration and mainstreaming of students with disabilities. Integration in terms of the educational setting was prioritised, following a long history of segregated special schools to cater for students with disabilities (Forlin, 2006). The Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994), which represented a major international shift towards the principles of inclusive education, stated that “regular schools with [an] inclusive orientation are the most effective means of ...achieving education for all” (p. xi).

As an early signatory, Australia committed to this ideology as its underlying philosophy for education. Some years later, this broader conceptualisation was maintained in the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (MCEETYA, 2008). The declaration outlined goals for all students, with “no distinction...made between students with and without disability” (J. Anderson & Boyle, 2019, p. 798). These principles are mirrored in the more recent *Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration* (Education Council, 2019).

Despite the acknowledgement of this broader definition in some documentation, understandings of inclusive education have tended to focus on particular groups of students, including students with disabilities. Indeed, the *Disability Standards for Education 2005* (Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department, 2005), with which Australian teachers are mandated to comply, and subsequent reviews (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2012; Urbis, 2015), refer explicitly to students with disabilities. Similarly, the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers* (AITSL, 2022) require teachers to support the full participation of students with disabilities in order to demonstrate that they know students and how they learn. From a research perspective, authors in more recent literature commonly acknowledge the broader definition of inclusive practice but then

limit the definition to students with special educational needs in their own work (e.g., Brennan et al., 2021; Messiou, 2017).

However, the *Review of the Disability Standards for Education 2005* (Urbis, 2015) raised the issue of clarifying the range of conditions included in the definition of 'disability' and addressed by the standards and, more importantly, educators' awareness of them. Under the *Disability Standards for Education 2005* (Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department, 2005), teachers are required to make 'reasonable adjustments' to their classroom practice, environment and assessment to ensure that all students may participate in the curriculum 'on the same basis' as their peers. The *Nationally Consistent Collection of Data* (NCCD) also uses the language of 'adjustments' and requires that teachers determine the level of adjustment (supplementary, substantial or extensive) needed to support individual students' participation in the curriculum.

Importantly, the first of these NCCD 'levels' is "support provided within quality differentiated teaching practice" (Australian Government, 2020, heading 1), which one would assume is required for all students. If so, it would not seem unreasonable to expect teachers' classroom pedagogy to be informed by the principles of the IPA (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Florian & Spratt, 2013) which, as described earlier, is underpinned by an emphasis on catering for all, not most, learners. Indeed, the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers* (AITSL, 2022) refer to teachers needing to "differentiate teaching to meet the specific learning needs of students across the full range of abilities" (AITSL, 2022, Standard 1.5). The reference to 'abilities', as though there is a 'fixed' range to be catered for, is unfortunate, but this statement reinforces teachers' responsibility to respond to the needs of all learners (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). This raises the issue of distinguishing between regular classroom differentiation and 'adjustments'.

In their discussion of teachers' professional knowledge, Black-Hawkins and Florian (2012) acknowledge that some teachers are able to commit to inclusive practice in their classrooms more easily than others. Teachers' perceptions of their own capacity to cater for the learning needs of students, and of the level of differentiation required to achieve this, are varied. Students may be catered for in one classroom through differentiation embedded in the regular classroom environment but require further 'adjustments' in another teacher's classroom.

It would seem difficult, then, to determine the point at which regular classroom differentiation becomes an 'adjustment'. P. H. Johnston (2011) argues that there is "no clear line of demarcation" (p. 512) between students with disabilities and those without. Even the definition of inclusive education promoted by the NSW Department of Education refers broadly to all students accessing and fully participating in learning alongside their same aged peers, through reasonable adjustments (NSW Department of Education, 2025b).

The concept of inclusive practice is predicated on the "notion of responding to diversity among learners without recourse to categorisation" (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011, p. 814). If the purpose of inclusive practice is to provide for all learners, it would seem reasonable to apply the IPA to

educational practice related to all students, not just those with a particular identified need. The RTI model (J. J. Hoover & Patton, 2008; Vaughn & Swanson, 2015) outlines a multi-tiered approach to student support, including Tier 1 core classroom practice, Tier 2 targeted intervention, and Tier 3 individualised support. According to this model, teachers must aim to maximise optimal learning and teaching in the Tier 1, whole class environment. The IPA is aligned with this purpose in terms of teachers actively measuring their impact and adapting classroom practice according to the needs of all students. This purpose, with all students in mind, is also mirrored in the procedures for personalised learning and support which underpin inclusive education policy in NSW schools (NSW Department of Education, 2025d).

The IPA can be applied to the many educational contexts in which teaching occurs, across all learning areas (Florian, 2015). Further, there is emerging evidence that the IPA and IPAA can be of benefit to prospective, newly qualified, and more experienced teachers' endeavours to enact inclusive pedagogy in the classroom (e.g., Brennan et al., 2021; Florian, 2012), and can be used as a framework through which to make sense of inclusive classroom practice (e.g., Florian & Beaton, 2018; Klibthong & Agbenyega, 2018; Morina & Orozco, 2021). Although such research is yet to be conducted in Australia, this aligns with Australian government and NSW Department of Education priorities (e.g., CESE, 2014, 2020b; Paul et al., 2022).

With regard to literacy, the 2020 NSW Curriculum Review recommended that "oral language development, early reading and writing skills" (NESA, 2020, p. xvi), all of which are likely addressed as part of the 'literacy block' referred to in the title of this study, be prioritised as part of curriculum. Indeed, the current *NSW English K-10 Syllabus* (NESA, 2025b) reflects this prioritisation. Importantly, the consultation report which was generated prior to final publishing of the syllabus specifically notes that "advice in relation to supporting the diversity of learners was welcomed as an important aspect supporting teachers" (NESA, 2021, p. 7). Literacy education in NSW classrooms at present is therefore a crucial and topical context in which to examine inclusive pedagogy.

Given the potential benefits to teachers of applying the IPA, and the relatively recent introduction of the current English syllabus, NSW kindergarten classrooms are a significant context in which to examine inclusive literacy practice. There is a need to examine literacy pedagogy in the classroom environment in order to consider what 'high-quality' inclusive practice may look like and to inform teachers and teacher education programs (Finkelstein et al., 2021). There is consensus in the literature on the need for education to move away from being a profession that is driven by philosophical beliefs and traditional practices to one which is directly informed by research in the context of the classroom environment (Cook & Cook, 2013; de Lemos, 2002; Finkelstein et al., 2021; Hempenstall, 2006; Justice & Pullen, 2003; National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy, 2005).

In this light, 'evidence-based practices' have been defined as "instructional techniques with meaningful research supporting their effectiveness" (Cook & Cook, 2013, p. 71) which have the potential to improve student learning outcomes. However, while evidence-based practices are

significant, they are often removed from the “unpredictable noise [which] is part of the real experience of implementing instructional practices in classrooms” (Cook & Cook, 2016, p. 146). This is a function of the fact that it is teachers, not researchers, who are ultimately responsible for translating research findings into quality practice in whole classroom contexts (Justice & Pullen, 2003).

Further, it is often the case that research-based principles of practice have yet to be explored in sufficient depth in the classroom context to make them applicable for teachers (Sharples, 2013). Indeed, it has been argued that the ultimate aim for educators is to integrate their own knowledge with research evidence regarding high-quality teaching practice for the learning area (Sharples, 2013; White et al., 2018). It is by using this “professional wisdom” (B. G. Cook et al., 2008, p. 105) that teachers are able to fully adapt and implement evidence-informed practices into their own classrooms.

Thus, research which examines classroom literacy practice and the extent to which it is informed by research evidence and by the needs of students may be more valuable and compelling for teachers (Bingham & Hall-Kenyon, 2013; J. Wilson & Colmar, 2008). This kind of ‘practice-based evidence’ (Cook & Cook, 2016), as explored in the present study, is contextual and acknowledges that teachers must synthesise their knowledge “into comprehensive and flexible programs that research supports” (Spiegel, 1998, p. 123).

Chapter 1 has emphasised inclusive education in establishing the theoretical framework for the research. Chapter 2 now reviews and synthesises existing research on literacy education, before relating to the literature on inclusive education and setting up the framework of inclusive literacy education which the thesis investigates.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The introduction and theoretical framework have established inclusive education as one part of the dual focus of this research. Chapter 2 reviews existing research in the field of literacy education as well as theoretical models of practice. The review includes a consideration of opposing definitions and debates within the field that are relevant to an examination of the literacy block. The review culminates in the conceptualisation of literacy education as inclusive practice based on the current research landscape and recommendations from the literature to constructive ways forward in both fields.

The literature search undertaken for this review was extensive and the review was frequently updated to reflect newly published literature on literacy and inclusion. A range of platforms and databases was used to undertake the literature search, such as ProQuest, ERIC, Informit, Taylor & Francis online, and SAGE research methods. Key search terms related to the dual focus of the research were used across all databases, including 'literacy education', 'kindergarten literacy', 'inclusive education', 'inclusive pedagogical approach' and 'inclusive literacy'. References were sourced from a range of international journals, including the *Journal of Learning Disabilities, Reading & Writing, International Journal of Inclusive Education, Journal of Educational Psychology, The Australian Journal of Language and Literacy, Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties, Australian Educational Researcher, The Reading Teacher* and *Teaching and Teacher Education*. Articles were selected for inclusion in the review according to their relevance to the fields of literacy, inclusion or both and articles with more recent publication dates were prioritised towards the end of the literature search. Snowballing was frequently used as a strategy for gathering relevant literature from the citations of other articles.

The field of literacy education is complex. There is no doubt that translating government policy and research into the practical realities of the classroom is a challenging task. In the early years of schooling, in order to become literate, children are required to learn over 40 phonemes with 250 graphemes to represent them, using only 26 letters of the alphabet (Castles et al., 2018; CESE, 2017b; Moats, 2005/2006). They are challenged to refine their oral language, expand their vocabulary, and develop their listening and reading comprehension to become proficient and motivated readers and writers of increasingly complex texts. Classroom teachers are tasked with ensuring that all children – of diverse backgrounds and needs, in a busy classroom environment, amid interruptions and faced with the challenges of differentiation, assessment and accountability – achieve mastery of the requisite literacy knowledge and understanding.

In order to consider the Inclusive Pedagogical Approach (IPA; Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Florian & Spratt, 2013) in the context of English literacy education, the significant body of literature related to teaching and learning in early literacy must also be considered. While the IPA (Florian & Spratt, 2013) does not dictate a particular set of instructional strategies, as for any approach to

teaching practice, classroom practice should occur in the context of the evidence-base regarding literacy education. There is substantial evidence for optimal practices in literacy education, although these have tended to be investigated in isolation and without sufficient guidance for their translation into classroom practice. The literature review is organised to discuss research into literacy education first, before examining how the relevant content, practices and issues may be synthesised in the classroom context and finally, how English literacy education may be framed through the IPA (Florian & Spratt, 2013).

This critical review of theoretical models and studies on literacy education has been deliberately sequenced to match the stages of literacy development, and to elucidate the components of literacy education and associated issues that may contribute to the kindergarten literacy block examined in this study. As such, the review begins with a focus on oral language development, followed by a consideration of the knowledge base surrounding the teaching and learning of reading and writing. This involves a particular focus on reading, which has dominated the research literature, using the 'big six' (Konza, 2014; NICHD, 2000) as an organising framework to illuminate each of the core literacy components.

Importantly, the intersection of the components of literacy addressed in this review, in terms of learning and classroom practice, must be acknowledged. Concepts and strategies relevant to the teaching and learning of reading, for example, may be significant to the teaching of writing or to the enhanced development of speech and language. It is this intersection that contributes to the complexity of literacy learning and teaching.

The final section of the review culminates in the consideration of a broad framework for classroom literacy practice, as is recommended in the literature (Bingham & Hall-Kenyon, 2013; J. Wilson & Colmar, 2008) and applicable for classroom teachers, but embeds it in the IPA (Florian & Spratt, 2013) as the theoretical basis for this study.

Oral Language

Oral language is foundational as a catalyst for the development of other aspects of literacy, including reading and writing (Snowling & Hulme, 2021). It encompasses receptive and expressive vocabulary, knowledge of syntax, semantics, and pragmatics, which govern how we use language to generate meaning and communicate socially (Honig, 2007; Moats, 2020; NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2005).

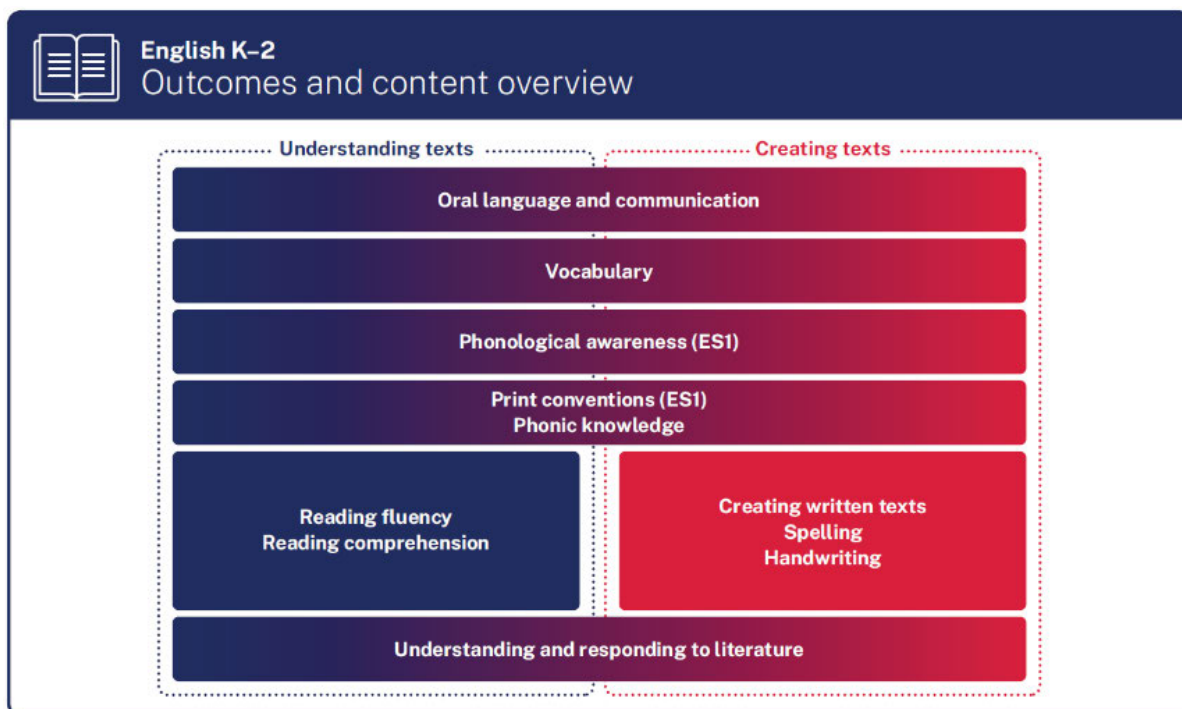
Oral language acquisition has been associated with typical stages of development. Chomsky (1965) placed emphasis on the 'pre-programmed' nature of humans in terms of language development. From birth, children are immersed in language. Humans have an "innate propensity" (Honig, 2007, p. 582) to acquire and produce language. In this way, Chomsky (1965) appeared to place importance on the 'mechanism' of language acquisition to be activated, rather than on the process of activation. Yet the impact of the environment, including social interaction, in which language develops

has also been acknowledged (R. Evans & Jones, 2007; Vygotsky, 1978). The role of the environment in oral language development therefore has implications for education.

In education, oral language has been acknowledged as an essential foundation for literacy. It is embedded throughout all aspects of the current *English K-10 Syllabus*, which states the aim of enabling students to “understand and use language effectively...[and to] appreciate, reflect on and enjoy language” (NESA, 2025c). Using and understanding language is central to all aspects of English literacy (see Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1

Overview of Current English Syllabus (Reproduced from NESA, 2025b, K-2 focus areas).



The importance of oral language in literacy development has also been well documented in the research literature. Oral language is essential for success in early reading and writing (e.g., Dickinson & Porche, 2011; Kent et al., 2014; NICHD, 2000; C. E. Snow et al., 1998). Bishop (1991) argued that the role of skills such as phonological awareness had been overemphasised as predictors of later reading proficiency and, as a result, semantic and syntactic knowledge had been overlooked. Phonological awareness is, indeed, a major predictor of reading success (e.g., Ashby et al., 2013; Castles & Coltheart, 2004; Megino-Elvira et al., 2016; Melby-Lervag et al., 2012; Schatschneider et al., 2004). But a closer examination of oral language and the aspects of literacy to which it contributes is required.

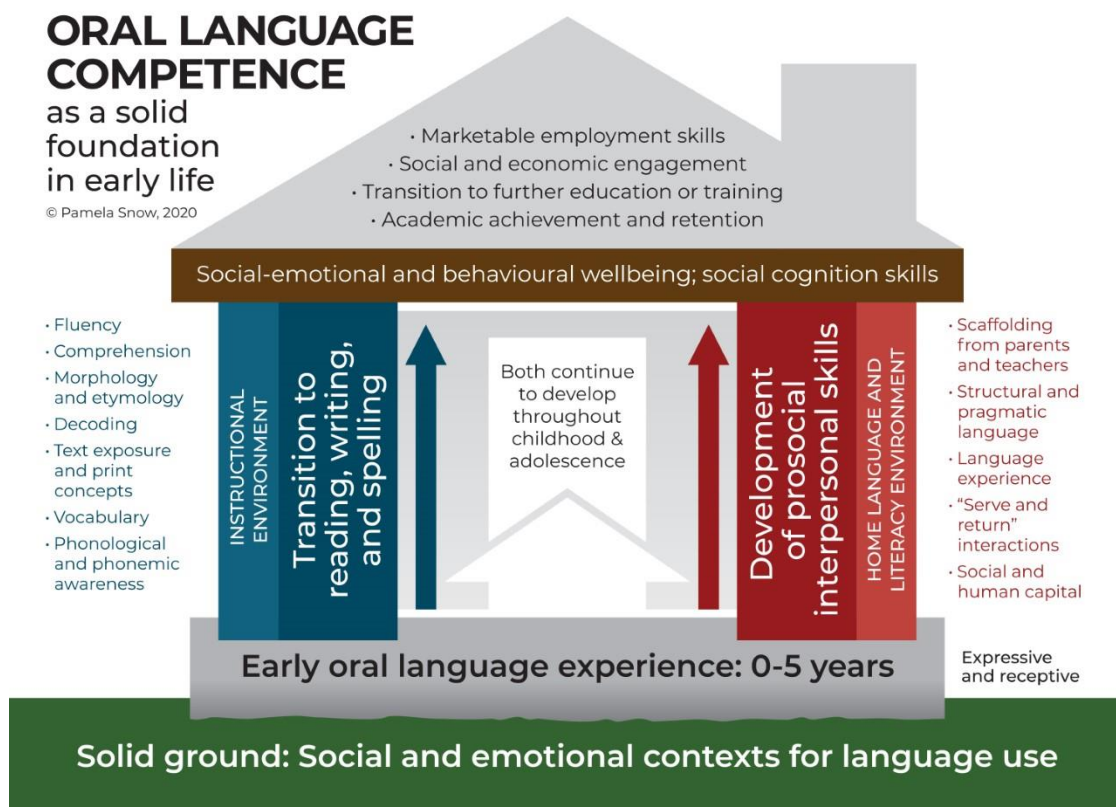
Oral language related skills include five essential domains: phonology, syntax, semantics, morphology and pragmatics (Honig, 2007). The impact of oral language, independent of other skills such as phonological awareness, has been established, especially in reading (e.g., Bishop, 1991; Catts et al., 1999; Dickinson et al., 2003; Y.-S. Kim et al., 2013; Scarborough, 1990; Share & Leikin, 2004). For

example, Foorman et al. (2015) found that oral language, including syntax, listening comprehension and vocabulary, predicted reading comprehension in grades 1 and 2. The relationship between oral language and early writing has also been investigated (e.g., Kent et al., 2014; Y.-S. Kim et al., 2011).

To conceptualise oral language competence, P. Snow (2021) refers to the ‘language house’ (see Figure 2.2) which incorporates home and early literacy experiences on one side, and the elements of literacy that can be addressed to a larger extent by classroom teaching on the other.

Figure 2.2

The Language House (Reproduced from P. Snow, 2020)



Other research has demonstrated that oral language has only an indirect influence on literacy skills such as reading (e.g., Storch & Whitehurst, 2002). The National Early Literacy Panel (NELP, 2008) reported on the skills in children from birth to five years that predicted later reading, writing, and spelling outcomes. Of the skills identified, six had strong correlations with later literacy achievement and five had only moderate correlations. Oral language was included as part of the latter category which showed weaker associations with literacy development, either because of the impact of other variables or because they had not yet been closely researched (NELP, 2008).

Chiang et al. (2017) examined students’ growth in oral language and comprehension based on classroom instructional practices. The authors identified encouraging students’ oral language as a “potentially promising practice” (Chiang et al., 2017, p. 22). This included teachers devoting substantial instructional time to discussions with students, asking open-ended questions and

providing ample wait-time for students to answer (Chiang et al., 2017). But the authors acknowledged that a causal relationship could not be drawn from the findings. Indeed, the impact of oral language in literacy acquisition (and, therefore, how to ‘teach’ it) is perhaps difficult to isolate because it is so deeply intertwined within all aspects of literacy.

Oral language is accessed and further developed in the context of all literacy activities. It is teachers’ awareness of the underlying impact of oral language that is most important for the classroom. This awareness allows them to knowingly prioritise it throughout all classroom activities (Honig, 2007; Konza, 2014). There is a need for high-quality, language-rich environments in classrooms (Wallace et al., 2022). Strategies that support language development in the classroom include modelling, expansion, different questioning types and techniques, ‘turn and talk’ and similar discussion routines, and scaffolding (Hindman et al., 2022; Pentimonti et al., 2017; Wallace et al., 2022). These are of benefit to all students, including those with specific language difficulties who may also participate in direct speech therapy (Justice et al., 2018; Pentimonti et al., 2017; Wallace et al., 2022).

Britton (1970) argued some decades ago that “reading floats on a sea of talk” (p. 164). Oral language supports early reading development and reading, in turn, promotes further oral language development through exposure to language structures and vocabulary (P. Snow, 2021). Reading is therefore the next component of literacy development which is relevant to classroom practice.

Reading

There is consensus in the literature that reading is an incredibly complex process involving the interaction of a range of skills, processes and knowledge, including word recognition, activating meaning, identifying context, background knowledge, inferencing and working memory (Castles et al., 2018). Though these processes may appear ‘inseparable’ in a skilled, fluent reader, they are not initially integrated (Storch & Whitehurst, 2002).

As in the broader field of literacy, the reading domain often involves the conflation of terms including ‘reading’, ‘decoding’, ‘word recognition’ and ‘reading comprehension’, which all denote different meanings. Moats (2020) defines decoding as the process of converting words from print to speech, and word recognition as the ability to “read single words accurately, in and out of context” (Moats, 2020, p. 306). As an example of the definitional complexity associated with these terms, the current Australian Curriculum combines two of them by referring to decoding as “a process of efficient word recognition in which readers use knowledge of the relationship between letters and sounds to work out how to say and read written words” (ACARA, 2025a, ‘decode’). This view aligns with the definitions included in the current and previous NSW English syllabus documents (NESA, 2012, 2025b). Significant literature has investigated decoding and word recognition in isolation and during the reading of connected text, the role of non-word reading in teaching and assessment and the

teaching of irregular or high-frequency words (e.g., Colenbrander et al., 2011, 2020, 2022; Gonzalez-Frey & Ehri, 2021).

Language comprehension refers to “the ability to extract and construct literal and inferred meaning from linguistic discourse represented in speech” (Tunmer & Hoover, 2019, p. 78). Research in the reading domain has examined the significance of oral language comprehension to other components of literacy, such as vocabulary and morphology (e.g., Y.-S. Kim, 2023; Silverman et al., 2020). Reading comprehension, by contrast, imposes an additional onus on the reader who must first decode the printed word. The development of reading comprehension, including the impact of oral language comprehension, has also been examined (e.g., J. S. Kim et al., 2021; Lepola et al., 2016; Smith et al., 2021).

Various models have attempted to conceptualise reading, with its complexity in mind. Models of reading may be considered to provide a summary of the skills and knowledge associated with learning to read. They may also be used by teachers as tools for guiding the teaching of reading, or literacy more broadly, and are therefore relevant to the classroom practice being investigated in the present study. Existing models of reading differ in their organisation and inherent emphases. Some models emphasise the purpose and practice of both reading and writing (Freebody, 2019; Freebody & Luke, 1990) and are deliberately unconstrained by a rigid timeline for development. Others do rely on a developmental sequence and describe significant ‘phases’ in learning to read and spell, from pre-alphabetic to automatic (Ehri, 1995, 2014).

The Dual Route Cascaded model (Coltheart et al., 2001) emphasises word recognition and word reading as a single but important aspect of learning to read. By contrast, the ‘simple view of reading’ could be seen to address both the cognitive process of word recognition, and language comprehension as the end point of learning to read (Gough & Tunmer, 1986). The ‘simple view’, which has gained renewed prominence among some researchers and educators, states that reading comprehension is the product of these two components and has been repeatedly validated in studies which confirmed these components as predictors of reading comprehension (P. F. de Jong & van der Leij, 2002; W. Hoover & Gough, 1990; Kirby & Savage, 2008; Language and Reading Research Consortium & Chiu, 2018; Rayner et al., 2016). Despite its value to both the research and education domains, this model has not avoided criticism (e.g., Catts, 2018) and subsequent iterations and applications by the original and other authors have emerged (e.g., Aaron et al., 1999; Aaron et al., 2008; Chiu et al., 2012; Li et al., 2020; Tunmer & Hoover, 2019).

Other models have elaborated on the ‘simple view’ by expanding on the major components and establishing the connections between them (e.g., ‘active view of reading’, Duke & Cartwright, 2021; ‘reading rope’, Scarborough, 2001). Many recent models have attempted to incorporate reading, spelling and writing but offer minimal practical guidance (e.g., Wasowicz, 2024; Wyse & Hacking, 2024; N. Young & Hasbrouck, 2024). As a final example from the United States, the *Wheels of Reading Improvement* (T. Shanahan, 2023b) is presented specifically as a model which addresses the

shortcomings of others by outlining actions required to improve reading achievement, rather than emphasising the processes involved in reading. This model includes 'special education' in the outer layer as a subsidiary variable which influences reading achievement. While 'special education' may include Tier 2 targeted intervention, it is isolated from other 'programs & materials' in the outer wheel. The positioning of 'special education' as a *separate* variable could suggest the provision of teaching and learning that caters for most learners (Florian, 2017; Florian & Spratt, 2013). To align with the theoretical framework for the present study, the expansion of classroom practice to cater for all learners should be embedded in a model if it is to promote inclusive practice. Such practice may include the provision of specialist or targeted teaching according to the needs of individuals or small groups of students, but an inclusive approach does not marginalise learners (Florian, 2015).

The complexity of reading is clear, given the number of ways in which researchers have attempted to conceptualise it using various models. Regardless of the strengths and drawbacks of individual models, Perfetti and Stafura (2014) argue that there can be no single theory of reading, but that there must be multiple theories related to the different aspects involved in the reading process "at various grain sizes" (p. 22). If this is the case, it could be argued that no single framework is adequate for teachers to interpret and action in their classrooms. Yet such models have been emphasised in order to address the apparent 'research to practice gap'. Further, the 'simple view' has added impetus to a recent push for the application of a 'science of reading' in classrooms.

Science of Reading

Alongside conceptual models of reading, the 'science of reading' (SOR) has gained considerable traction in recent discourse related to the teaching of reading. It has been discussed in education circles, research publications (e.g., Serry et al., 2024; Snowling & Hulme, 2005) and entire special journal issues devoted to the topic (e.g., Goodwin & Jimenez, 2020). In the last decade, it has gained momentum via mainstream media (e.g., Hanford, 2018a, 2018b, 2022). In Australia, it has spawned websites and associated social media groups for the sharing of classroom resources associated with the 'science of reading' (e.g., Reading Science in Schools, n.d.).

The International Literacy Association (ILA, n.d.) defines the SOR as "a convergence of accumulated and evolving findings from research regarding reading processes and reading instruction (pedagogy)" (Table S). This broader conceptualisation of the SOR as a body of knowledge drawn from interdisciplinary research into reading acquisition and instruction is echoed by others in the field (e.g., S. Graham, 2020; Petscher et al., 2020; Seidenberg et al., 2020; The Reading League, 2022). Its overarching purpose appears to be to ensure the consideration of evidence-based approaches to the teaching of reading. Seidenberg et al. (2020) welcome such an integration of research into education because it has long been encouraged but has proven difficult to achieve. Those who support the notion of the SOR appear to agree that "teaching in ways that accord with science will provide students the greatest opportunity to learn" (T. Shanahan, 2020a, p. 119).

But concern has been raised regarding the narrow conceptualisation of reading the SOR may promote (Kambach & Mesmer, 2024; Tierney & Pearson, 2024). Interestingly, the International Literacy Association, which does include a broader consideration of the SOR, also mentions “Decoding (reading)” (ILA, n.d., Table D). This conflation of ‘decoding’ and ‘reading’ as though they are synonymous terms is problematic, given the complexity of reading beyond simply decoding words on a page. If the SOR is “both a body of knowledge...and an interpretation of that body of knowledge” (Goodwin & Jimenez, 2020, p. 58), it is its interpretation that may be of concern. Cervetti et al. (2020) argue that discussions of the SOR, particularly with regard to the ‘simple view’ (Gough & Tunmer, 1986), have been used to overpronounce the role of decoding and word-level reading in the reading process.

Indeed, public discussions of the SOR in the media have focused in particular on the importance of decoding and concerns regarding the teaching of phonics, or lack thereof (Hanford 2018a, 2018b; T. Shanahan, 2020b). Mesmer and Kambach (2022) warn that this perpetuates the tendency of teachers to rely on social media for oversimplified interpretations of the reading research, which provides teachers with ‘buzz words’ and labels to use but does not equip them with a well-developed understanding of the research and how best to enact it in the classroom. It has also been argued that the SOR tends to oversimplify what reading is and how it should be investigated, by valuing only cognitive research and ignoring environmental factors and other research approaches which may benefit the field (T. Shanahan, 2020b; Yaden et al., 2021).

Concerns related to the SOR may also arise from a lack of clarity regarding the knowledge and proficiencies associated with learning to read, and the pedagogy designed to best facilitate this development. Even in the frequently referenced United States *Report of the National Reading Panel* (NICHD, 2000), the ‘big five’ highlighted as essential aspects of reading are inconsistent. Though certainly important, they are often incorrectly referred to collectively as recommended instructional practices (e.g., S. Graham, 2020). While the notion of developing students’ understanding of the alphabetic principle through phonics refers to a component of classroom practice, phonological awareness refers to a particular type of knowledge (Seidenberg et al., 2020). Similarly, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension refer broadly to a range of reading behaviours, components of language and levels of understanding that extend beyond reading on its own (Seidenberg et al., 2020).

This inconsistency regarding terminology illuminates the tension between content and pedagogy as a broader issue with the concept of a ‘science of reading’ and the ways in which it is interpreted. Although there is value in a commitment to accessing and drawing on research relevant to the field of reading, it is “translational research” (Seidenberg et al., 2020, p. 22) that is lacking from this field. That is, an understanding of how the principles of such research must be implemented as part of classroom pedagogy. While the interdisciplinary research associated with the teaching of reading is clearly relevant to teachers, it is yet to provide them with sufficient guidance as to the optimal enactment of that research in practice (Seidenberg et al., 2020). Such research must be conducted with

sufficient rigour, replication, and evaluation before it is interpreted to influence classroom pedagogy (Petscher et al., 2020; T. Shanahan, 2020b). In its absence, any 'program' or 'resource' can claim to address the SOR as it has become known (Seidenberg et al., 2020).

The same could be said of the 'science of learning', a broader but similarly promoted interdisciplinary body of research regarding optimal conditions for student learning in any domain. Many of the approaches associated with this 'science of learning', including interleaving, spaced and retrieval practice (Swain & Groshell, 2024; Weinstein et al., 2018), align with the principles of explicit instruction, as discussed earlier, but the problem regarding translation into classroom implementation remains (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Sherrington, 2019; Weinstein et al., 2018). It is this pedagogical 'gap' that still poses a challenge for educators and to which the present study aims to contribute, specifically with regard to literacy.

Despite the lack of translational research, there is a significant body of knowledge that offers guidance as to the key aspects of learning to read. This body of knowledge illuminates the crucial areas of reading development to be addressed via classroom practice.

The Big Six

In interpreting guidance afforded by the research literature on literacy or otherwise, educators commonly name or label clusters of ideas or overall concepts collectively for efficiency but this can run the risk of such concepts – including those associated with the teaching and learning of reading – not being appreciated in sufficient depth. Reviews of literature on the teaching of reading conducted in Australia and internationally have previously identified five components which are essential in the teaching and acquisition of reading proficiency and collectively referred to as the 'big five': the alphabetic principle; phonological awareness; fluency; comprehension; and vocabulary (M. S. Burns et al., 1999; National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy, 2005; NICHD, 2000; Rupley, 2009).

Konza (2014) argues for the expansion of the 'big five' (NICHD, 2000) to include oral language and early literacy experiences as equally foundational to literacy development. Early literacy experiences build the foundation for the literacy teaching in which students participate once they begin formal schooling. Oral language is similarly essential for success in reading and writing (Dickinson & Porche, 2011; Kent et al., 2014; C. E. Snow et al., 1998) and its inclusion as part of the 'big six' is therefore important. The 'big six' have also been referred to as the 'big six of literacy' (Literacy Hub, 2025), exemplifying the application of these components to areas of literacy beyond reading alone.

Although there is significant overlap among the included components, the 'big six' does offer a framework for ensuring that each of these essential elements is discussed (Konza, 2014). Further, the 'big six' are referred to by the NSW Department of Education in professional learning materials for teachers (NSW Department of Education, 2025e), alongside the 'simple view' (Gough & Tunmer, 1986) and 'reading rope' (Scarborough, 2001), making it a relevant framework to the educational context of

the present research. Importantly, visual depictions of the key components of the 'big six' show them in a nested, overlapping relationship with each element building on the last. Given its use as an evidence-informed framework, classroom literacy practice, as examined by the present study, can be expected to address these 'big six'.

The following section of the review examines each component of the 'big six' by synthesising relevant research and considering how it can be observed through classroom pedagogy, as recommended by the literature. As oral language was considered at the beginning of the literature review as the first stage of literacy development, the following section focuses on early literacy experiences.

Oral Language and Early Literacy Experiences. Literacy development begins long before children engage in formal schooling (Hamilton & Hayiou-Thomas, 2022; NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2005). The home literacy environment involves experimentation with and correction of oral language attempts, reading aloud, exploring literature at home or at the library, and directing children's attention to language and print features including letters and sounds (S. A. Hart et al., 2009; Puglisi et al., 2017; P. Snow, 2021). These formal and informal activities promote oral language and comprehension and relate to parents' and family members' attitudes towards literacy (Martini & Sénéchal, 2012; Puglisi et al., 2017; Skwarchuk et al., 2022). Informal activities which are not print-focused, such as shared reading with an adult, lead to improvements in oral language, including receptive vocabulary (NELP, 2008; Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2014). Formal activities such as teaching the alphabet, reading or writing in the home environment are linked to growth in reading (Hood et al., 2008; Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2014).

Upon the foundation of oral language and early literacy skills, students must build their facility with what have been referred to as 'constrained' or 'unconstrained' skills which can be addressed through classroom practice. 'Constrained' skills of the 'big six' are those which can be learned and mastered within a reasonably short time frame. Whitehurst and Lonigan (1998) referred to these as 'inside-out' skills, including phonological awareness and letter identification. By contrast, 'unconstrained' or 'outside-in' skills are learned and continue to be refined across a lifetime (Dougherty Stahl, 2011; Paris, 2005; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998).

Phonological Awareness. The first of these 'constrained' skills as part of the 'big six' is phonological awareness. Phonological awareness and phonemic awareness are distinct but often conflated terms (Piasta & Hudson, 2022). Phonological awareness is a broader term which refers to the capacity to distinguish between and manipulate units of sound, including whole words, onset and rime, syllables and phonemes (Melby-Lervag et al., 2012). Phonemic awareness is a narrower term specifically for the capacity to hear and manipulate individual speech sounds (phonemes) in words (Piasta & Hudson, 2022). It includes phoneme identification, isolation, blending, segmenting, deletion

and substitution (Rice et al., 2022). Phonological and phonemic awareness plays a significant role in reading acquisition and is predictive of long-term reading achievement (Melby-Lervag et al., 2012; NELP, 2008; NICHD, 2000; Zugarramurdi et al., 2022). Importantly, as phonological awareness can be practised and achieved in the absence of print, it reinforces the significance of and is an important part of oral language (Piasta & Hudson, 2022; Teale et al., 2020).

Some have suggested that phonological awareness progresses in distinct stages from simple to more complex skills (Melby-Lervag et al., 2012) but it has since been noted that it is an overlapping progression. It is not necessary for students to master one skill before developing another as part of phonological awareness (J. L. Anthony et al., 2003; Rice et al., 2022). Further, phonological awareness is not entirely prerequisite to the acquisition of word reading as these are reciprocal processes. While some level of phonological awareness provides an important foundation for learning to read, once students begin reading, their engagement with print further strengthens their phonological awareness skills in turn (Melby-Lervag et al., 2012).

Research supports the view that phonemic awareness instruction is most impactful when provided early in students' formal schooling (Piasta & Hudson, 2022). The meta-analysis in the *Report of the National Reading Panel* (NICHD, 2000) recommended that explicit phonemic awareness instruction begin in preschool years and extend into primary, but its actual implementation was left open to interpretation. A more recent meta-analysis suggests that phonological awareness instruction is effective in individual, small group or whole class settings, in the presence or absence of letters and regardless of the type of 'instructor' including teachers, parents or computer programs (Rice et al., 2022). The finding regarding the inclusion of letters in phonemic awareness instruction is inconsistent with other research (Clemens et al., 2021; NICHD, 2000), but there is consistency in the recommendation that just one or two phonemic skills be prioritised at a time as part of instruction (Clemens et al., 2021; NICHD, 2000; Rice et al., 2022).

Of recent interest in research and academic discussion is the need to develop 'phonemic proficiency' or 'advanced phonemic awareness' which prioritises phonemic segmentation and more challenging oral tasks involving phoneme deletion and substitution (Clemens et al., 2021; Kilpatrick, 2020). It is suggested that such proficiency is essential for establishing an understanding of the alphabetic principle. As a by-product of this debate, uncertainty has been raised about the need for phonemic awareness tasks to be approached in the presence of letters for manipulation, given that 'advanced phonemic awareness' is facilitated in the absence of print. This notion has been popularised through researcher recommendations and commercial programs in which phonemic awareness is addressed only through oral manipulation tasks, never with print (Clemens et al., 2021; Heggerty & VanHekken, 2020; Kilpatrick, 2018, 2020).

While it is recommended that teachers prioritise developing students' *phonemic*, not phonological, sensitivity, particularly with blending and segmenting tasks, from the first year of schooling (Brady, 2020; NICHD, 2000), focusing on 'advanced phonemic awareness' tasks does not

lead to improvements in reading development and lacks empirical support (Clemens et al., 2021). Further, once students develop some awareness of the alphabetic code, engagement in phonemic awareness tasks with letters for manipulation is preferable, as reading outcomes are stronger when phonemic awareness is taught with print (Brady, 2020; Clemens et al., 2021; Erbeli et al., 2024; NICHD, 2000). Developing students' understanding and application of the alphabetic principle is therefore crucial as the next component of the 'big six' and must be included in an inclusive pedagogical approach to classroom literacy practice examined in this research.

The Alphabetic Principle. The alphabetic principle refers to the notion that the letters of our alphabet represent the sounds in spoken words and is the basis of our writing system (Castles et al., 2018; Feez, 2019; Moats, 2020). Once students have acquired a basic understanding of the alphabetic principle, they can begin to make sense of specific grapheme-phoneme correspondences (GPCs) and apply this knowledge to reading and spelling (Castles et al., 2018).

The notion of orthographic depth is often mentioned in support of the complexity of acquiring (and therefore teaching) reading and writing proficiency in English. Orthographic depth refers to the consistency and reliability of GPCs in a language. On this basis, English is considered to be a 'deep' orthography given the large number of possible pronunciations for the same spelling patterns, as opposed to 'shallow' orthographies, such as Italian, with more consistent correspondences (Castles et al., 2018; Moats, 2020; Schmalz et al., 2015). Despite this, the English writing system is highly predictable in that it does feature many patterns and conventions of spelling (Moats, 2020). In fact, 50% of common English words can be spelled using just grapheme-phoneme correspondence (GPC) knowledge. A further 36% can be spelled with only one error using GPC rules, and 10% can be spelled with additional consideration of etymology and morphology (Moats, 2020). As such, only 4% of English words are truly irregular (Moats, 2020).

Given its complexity, fluent decoding does develop at a slower rate in opaque orthographies, in which the relationship between letters and sounds is characterised by many inconsistencies and exceptions, such as English (Vaessen et al., 2010). But the regularity and predictability of spelling patterns must not be overlooked, not least by educators tasked with unlocking these patterns for students. It must also be noted that spellings in a morphophonemic orthography such as English are not simply 'alphabetic' but also maintain morphological and etymological significance (Gray et al., 2018; Moats, 2020).

Importantly, the nature of learning to recognise and use the alphabetic system is not determined by some pedagogical philosophy or preference but by the alphabetic system itself (Castles et al., 2018). In an alphabetic system such as English, students must learn to associate the sounds (phonemes) of the language with letters or groups of letters (graphemes) in order to decode (and encode) independently. As students transition to skilled word reading, they become equipped to activate self-teaching, as theorised by the self-teaching hypothesis (Share, 1995). The self-teaching hypothesis

posits that as students engage in decoding print through repeated exposure, this eventually enables them to generalise their decoding skills and self-teach during independent reading. Consistent with this theory is the notion of 'set for variability' which involves students' decoding attempts resulting in a mispronunciation which can be corrected by matching this approximation to a known word using oral vocabulary knowledge (Tunmer & Chapman, 2012; Wegener et al., 2022). This is important because it exemplifies the relationship between oral vocabulary and word reading and therefore the reciprocal links between elements of the 'big six' (Konza, 2014).

But before students can generalise their skills through self-teaching, they must develop accurate and automatic word recognition. This is achieved through the process of orthographic mapping (Ehri, 2005, 2014, 2020, 2022; Kilpatrick, 2020; Miles & Ehri, 2019) which is the cognitive process that enables long-term, instant and effortless retrieval of words for reading. Word reading engages different regions of the brain and begins with the visual input of letters on a page. Using the brain's specialised visual word form area, or 'letter box', the shapes on the page are converted to letters and letter strings (Dehaene, 2009). The word is then associated with its meaning and pronunciation via regions in the left hemisphere of the brain which is responsible for phonological, semantic and articulatory processing (Dehaene, 2009). Grapheme-phoneme correspondence or conversion is essential for this process and therefore in teaching. As readers are repeatedly exposed to print, this process becomes increasingly efficient to the extent that all words are eventually recognised by 'sight'.

Fluency. Alongside explicit teaching of phonemic awareness and the alphabetic principle, classroom practice must address the other 'unconstrained skills' involved in reading development. The first of these as part of the 'big six' is fluency, a moderately constrained skill, which has been referred to as a 'bridge' between decoding and comprehension (Paris, 2005; Pikulski & Chard, 2005). Indeed, fluency has been found repeatedly to correlate with reading comprehension (Hudson et al., 2020; NICHD, 2000; Pikulski & Chard, 2005; Rasinski et al., 2009; Sabatini et al., 2019; Silverman et al., 2013). Fluent reading is characterised by accurate and automatic word recognition, an appropriate rate, and suitable expression or prosody.

With regard to accuracy, fluency at the grapheme-phoneme, word and text level is necessary (Y.-S. Kim, 2015; Y.-S. Kim & Wagner, 2015). Automaticity with word recognition frees up the reader's cognitive load to be devoted fully to comprehension: the ultimate goal of reading (Y.-S. Kim, 2015; Rasinski, 2017; Rasinski et al., 2020). The difference between accurate and automatic word recognition is significant, as accurate reading is not necessarily automatic. Automatic word recognition requires that readers access words via a lexical route (Coltheart et al., 2001) without the need for any overt decoding. It is this rapid word recognition, alongside comprehension, that often distinguishes good from struggling readers (Hudson et al., 2020; Kuhn et al., 2010; Stanovich, 1980).

Reading rate is often used as a measure of automaticity (Kuhn et al., 2010; Rasinski, 2017) and included in progress monitoring assessments which are widely, freely available for classroom use (e.g.,

Good et al., 2019; University of Oregon, n.d.). While oral reading rate does positively impact reading comprehension, teachers also need to devote time to building students' word knowledge, vocabulary and background knowledge, rather than just prioritising speed (O'Connor, 2018). Further, fast reading does not necessarily represent fluent reading (Konza, 2014). Nonetheless, oral reading fluency (ORF), with its emphasis on measuring words read correctly per minute (WCPM), has become widely used (Hasbrouck & Tindal, 2017). Assessment of ORF requires students to read aloud from an unseen passage for one minute, from which the WCPM score is calculated.

Despite its validation as an indicator of reading development (Fuchs et al., 2001; Hasbrouck & Tindal, 2017), the reliability and validity of ORF scores has been questioned by some (Chaparro et al., 2018; Kara et al., 2023). In addition, students with an adequate ORF score may still struggle with comprehension and those with low fluency scores may in fact manage the comprehension demands of text reasonably well (Amendum et al., 2021). An overreliance on just one measure in isolation, albeit easy to administer, is problematic.

Importantly, reading rate does not capture the prosodic component of reading fluency which is essential and also suggestive of comprehension (Rasinski et al., 2009; Sabatini et al., 2019). While automaticity and rate may be the most quantifiable elements of fluency, they must not be overemphasised at the expense of prosody (Kuhn et al., 2010). Prosody includes expression, pitch, tone, intonation, phrasing and emphasis as features of fluent reading that mirrors everyday speech (Hudson et al., 2020; Kuhn et al., 2010; Sáez et al., 2025). Prosodic reading involves adjusting for different sentence types and lengths, responding to punctuation and incorporating appropriate pauses (Kuhn et al., 2010). Significantly, some have noted the reciprocal relationship between fluency and reading comprehension: an understanding of the text being read enables prosodic reading, while expressive reading simultaneously allows the reader to make better sense of and reflect the meaning of the text being read (Kuhn et al., 2010; Pikulski & Chard, 2005). With this in mind, the assessment of prosody has tended to focus on scales, guides or rubrics to be used alongside measures such as ORF in the literature (e.g., Rasinski & Smith, 2018; Rasinski et al., 2009) and in education domains (NSW Department of Education, 2022b). The assessment of fluency, therefore, must be multifaceted in order to address all relevant aspects and their impact on reading development (Kuhn et al., 2010; Sáez et al., 2025).

Despite evidence for the significance of fluency, concern has been raised in the literature regarding the lack of fluency instruction occurring in classrooms (Hudson et al., 2020; Rasinski et al., 2020; Van den Hurk et al., 2017). Classroom practices including repeated reading, assisted reading using audiobooks, modelling, readers theatre, choral reading and paired reading have been found to have a positive impact on fluency development (Paige et al., 2021; Stevens et al., 2017; Topping, 2014; C. Young & Rasinski, 2009). Perhaps the most explored strategy in fluency instruction has been repeated reading, which has a significant amount of empirical support (e.g., Lee & Yoon, 2017; NICHD, 2000; Paige et al., 2021). Although it has been suggested that repeated reading is not achievable with

grade one students because of their developing alphabetic knowledge (Aldhanhani & Abu-Ayyash, 2020), this would seem achievable in practice, particularly with decodable texts. Paired reading has been found to be effective (e.g., Topping, 2014) and repeated reading in a paired setting, with a more or equally proficient peer, has also been found to be a suitable intervention (Stevens et al., 2017). Repeated reading, particularly in this paired context, would address the fluency needs of all, not just some, students.

There is, ultimately, consensus in the literature regarding the need for teachers to recognise the importance of explicitly teaching fluency rather than assuming that it will develop automatically once students have adequate decoding skills (Van den Hurk et al., 2017). Fluency instruction should include modelling what fluent reading sounds like, daily opportunities for students to apply this in their own wide reading practice, scaffolding with more challenging text and the explicit demonstration of prosodic elements (Aldhanhani & Abu-Ayyash, 2020; Kuhn, 2020).

Be it accurate or automatic, fluent decoding at the word- and text-level does not support comprehension if the words being read are not in the reader's lexicon. It is a reader's vocabulary knowledge that facilitates phonic decoding with regard to the 'set for variability' (Tunmer & Chapman, 2012; Wegener et al., 2022) as readers develop more efficient word recognition (Solity, 2022). Vocabulary is therefore significant in reading development and supports decoding and fluency on the way to text comprehension.

Vocabulary. The acquisition of vocabulary is lifelong and has therefore been referred to as an 'unconstrained' skill (Dougherty Stahl, 2011; Paris, 2005). Despite this, vocabulary is not a singular 'skill': it refers to a component of language which includes knowledge of words according to their morphological structure, usage, definitions and semantic relationships. One's knowledge of words, including their pronunciations and meanings, is distinct from one's metalinguistic knowledge about words and their application in different contexts (Kieffer & Lesaux, 2012). Oral vocabulary is defined as knowledge about spoken words (Wegener et al., 2022) and the correlation between spoken word knowledge and word reading has been acknowledged (Scarborough, 2001; Share, 1995; Wegener et al., 2022).

Vocabulary knowledge is highly predictive of later reading achievement, even in more transparent orthographies than English, and plays a significant role in reading comprehension (Christ & Wang, 2011; Crosson et al., 2021; B. Hart & Risley, 2003; Kambach & Mesmer, 2024; Kargiotidis et al., 2023; Perfetti & Stafura, 2014). Vocabulary learning occurs according to children's environments, exposure and experiences. In their seminal research, B. Hart and Risley (1992, 2003) indicated an association between socioeconomic status and children's vocabulary knowledge, with the key finding that children from high-income families were exposed to upwards of 30 million more words than those from low-income families. Subsequent studies have produced similar results (e.g., Gilkerson et al., 2017; Hoff, 2003; Hoff-Ginsberg, 1998; Huttenlocher et al., 2010; M. L. Rowe, 2008) but concern has

been raised about their interpretation in practice. A widespread focus on the '30-million-word gap' has led to a fixation on quantity with regard to new vocabulary, without consideration of quality and context in terms of children's exposure to and application of new words (Teale et al., 2020). The quality, complexity and diversity of vocabulary to which children are exposed matters (N. J. Anderson et al., 2021; Hamilton & Hayiou-Thomas, 2022; Ricketts et al., 2020).

With regard to vocabulary quantity, it is not just a matter of 'knowing' a number of words or not; word knowledge is complex (Beck et al., 2013). As such, the extent of word knowledge has been conceptualised in stages which include having no knowledge of a word, having a general sense or context-bound understanding of the word, and having a rich, context-free understanding of a word and its application (Beck et al., 1987; Dale, 1965). In relation to quality, word type must also be considered. In order to conceptualise the types of words children add to their oral vocabularies, Beck et al. (1987) developed the three-tier framework. Although established some decades ago, this framework has been referred to in more recent literature (e.g., Beck et al., 2013; T. B. Johnston, 2025; McCutchen et al., 2022). 'Tier one' includes words that are likely to be effortlessly learned from everyday experiences and conversations, while 'tier three' words are those which are topic-specific, less frequently encountered and therefore less useful in speaking, reading and writing. 'Tier two' words are used across domains and found frequently in written text but are less likely to be used in everyday conversation, as in 'tier one' (Beck et al., 2013).

Importantly, wide reading alone cannot be relied upon to develop children's word knowledge, especially of 'tier two' words, and classroom instruction is therefore implicated in the process of vocabulary growth (Beck et al., 2013; Kindle, 2009). While there is a place for both incidental and explicit approaches to vocabulary learning and instruction, direct and explicit instruction leads to deeper, long-term word knowledge and is particularly important for low progress readers (e.g., Damhuis et al., 2014; Dickinson et al., 2019; Lemov et al., 2016; McGregor et al., 2021). Further, students require multiple exposures in different contexts and representations to properly develop rich word knowledge (Beck et al., 2013).

Developing deep vocabulary knowledge requires robust, explicit teaching. While the three-tiered framework (Beck et al., 1987) is helpful for organising vocabulary according to its type and usage, it also provides guidance as to the kinds of words that must be included in instruction (Beck et al., 2013). Beck et al. (2013) recommend prioritising 'tier two' words in instruction as these are high utility words that can enhance students' receptive and expressive oral and written language. Robust vocabulary instruction involves discussing the meanings of words and their connotations, including child-friendly definitions, synonyms and examples, as observed in read-alouds (Kindle, 2009), followed by additional activities that allow for further word exploration and application (Beck et al., 2013; Lemov et al., 2016).

It has been suggested that embedding at least some of this follow-up in the context of writing has a particularly positive impact on students understanding and retaining new vocabulary (Beck et

al., 2013; Hochman & Wexler, 2017; Lemov et al., 2016). It is preferable for instruction to facilitate deep knowledge of words, including their meanings and application across contexts, rather than increasing the quantity of words students know with only a shallow understanding (Kieffer & Lesaux, 2012; NICHD, 2000). Beck et al. (2013) recommend introducing between three and five words at once in a lesson, and between five and nine words across a week or fortnight, with repeated exposure and follow-up activities included in classroom practice.

With regard to the classroom environment, there is empirical support for strategies including the use of visuals to support vocabulary instruction and creating vocabulary displays or collections of targeted words to enable repeated exposure and quick review activities (e.g., August et al., 2018; Beck et al., 2013; Biemiller & Boote, 2006; Gallagher & Anderson, 2016; Manyak et al., 2014; Manyak et al., 2021). Further, the general promotion of 'word consciousness' among students has been referred to in the literature. Directing and reinforcing students' attention to words in a classroom culture of 'word consciousness' provides students with motivation and enthusiasm for learning new words and has been shown to have a positive impact on students' general vocabulary knowledge (Gallagher & Anderson, 2016; Manyak & Manyak, 2021; Neugebauer et al., 2017).

Despite the importance of explicit vocabulary instruction, incidental or implicit learning of vocabulary is essential if children are to add the necessary 3,000 or more words per year to their reading vocabularies (Nagy et al., 1987). Students must learn many more words than can be addressed through explicit classroom instruction alone (Manyak & Manyak, 2021; Manyak et al., 2021; Wright & Cervetti, 2017). As such, morphological awareness is an important aspect of vocabulary that can support learners to make sense of unfamiliar words in reading (Behzadnia et al., 2024; Crosson et al., 2021; Manyak et al., 2018; Manyak et al., 2021).

Morphology refers to the analysis of word parts, or morphemes, with regard to grammar and meaning (Freeman et al., 2019; Kieffer & Lesaux, 2012). Students can use their knowledge of morphemes, including prefixes and suffixes, base words and roots, to infer the meanings of untaught vocabulary words (Crosson et al., 2021; Manyak et al., 2018; McCutchen & Logan, 2011). Morphological instruction can also contribute to students' overall 'word consciousness' and positively impact spelling and writing (Colenbrander et al., 2024; Freeman et al., 2019; McCutchen et al., 2022). Some have advocated for the teaching of GPCs in the context of morphology through structured word inquiry (Bowers & Bowers, 2017), but there is no empirical evidence of the significance or superiority of this approach (J. S. Bowers, 2021; Buckingham, 2020).

In the *Report of the National Reading Panel* (NICHD, 2000), vocabulary instruction was considered within the domain of comprehension. According to the 'simple view' (Gough & Tunmer, 1986), reading comprehension is largely predicted by decoding and listening comprehension, which include the other aspects of the 'big six' discussed previously. Comprehension is therefore referred to as the 'end goal' of reading acquisition and teaching (Smith et al., 2021) but this development is neither linear nor unidirectional. For example, decoding is more closely related to reading

comprehension in the earlier stages of reading acquisition, while language comprehension becomes a stronger predictor once fluent, efficient decoding has been achieved (Catts, 2018; Elleman & Oslund, 2019). Further, the relationships between phonological awareness and word recognition (Melby-Lervag et al., 2012), word recognition and vocabulary (Tunmer & Chapman, 2012; Wegener et al., 2022), and fluency and comprehension (Kuhn et al., 2010; Pikulski & Chard, 2005) are reciprocal.

Reading Comprehension. Reading comprehension is not a singular entity, ability or skill; it is a dynamic process which involves the coordination of a range of linguistic and cognitive processes including word recognition and working memory, involving the text itself and its features, and interacting with the reader's background knowledge, vocabulary and motivation for reading (Castles et al., 2018; Clemens & Fuchs, 2021; Dixon & Oakhill, 2024; Elleman & Oslund, 2019; C. Snow, 2002). It is therefore context-dependent and not limited to the cognitive domain (Elleman & Oslund, 2019). Alongside the overall models of reading discussed earlier, theoretical models of the components and processes specifically relevant to comprehension have been developed, including the direct and inferential mediation model (Ahmed et al., 2016), the construction-integration model (C-I; Kintsch, 1988) and the broader Reading Systems Framework (Perfetti & Stafura, 2014).

The C-I model has become a dominant paradigm for explaining comprehension processes and pedagogy (Pearson & Cervetti, 2016). It posits that reading comprehension involves the construction of an overall mental model of a text, following the integration of information from the text and the reader's related knowledge (Elleman & Oslund, 2019; Kintsch, 1988). This process relies on working memory for recalling information from the text, and long-term memory for accessing relevant background knowledge (Smith et al., 2021). The relative importance of inferencing (e.g., Barth et al., 2015; Cain & Oakhill, 1999; Kendeou et al., 2014; Oakhill & Cain, 2007), background knowledge (e.g., Connor et al., 2017; Filderman et al., 2022; Hwang & Duke, 2020; Smith et al., 2021), vocabulary (see earlier discussion; e.g., Dujardin et al., 2023; Wright & Cervetti, 2017) and comprehension monitoring (e.g., Oakhill & Cain, 2007; Oakhill et al., 2003; Oakhill et al. 2005; T. Shanahan et al., 2010) in this construction of a mental or 'situation' model has been acknowledged in the literature.

Background knowledge has been referred to as all the knowledge a reader brings to a text, which plays a critical role in helping or hindering reading comprehension (Hwang & Duke, 2020; Smith et al., 2021). Some have considered background knowledge by distinguishing between episodic, declarative and procedural knowledge (Smith et al., 2021) while others have regarded background knowledge in terms of one's knowledge of the meanings of words, information and situations (Hwang & Duke, 2020). These aspects of background knowledge, which includes domain, world and cultural knowledge, affect the process of reading comprehension (Cervetti & Wright, 2020; Hwang & Duke, 2020; Smith et al., 2021). When readers lack this knowledge required for comprehension, they generate a much less detailed and less effective mental model. While background knowledge does not account, on its own, for all variations in reading comprehension, it can be addressed through

classroom instruction. It has been recommended in the literature that educators teach domain-specific knowledge to enable comprehension of a broad range of texts (Elleman & Compton, 2017; Hirsch, 2003; Smith et al., 2021; Wexler, 2020; Willingham, 2006-2007).

Teachers' apparent adherence to a rigid literacy block which only includes the core English curriculum, and the notion that students only switch to 'reading to learn' with a proper focus on meaning-making in the later primary grades, have prevented the incorporation of this domain knowledge into classroom teaching (Cervetti & Wright, 2020; Connor et al., 2017). As such, there has been a further push in the literature for the integration of literacy and content area instruction, with some evidence of its success in generating positive outcomes in reading comprehension and content-area knowledge building (e.g., Cabell & Hwang, 2020; Cervetti & Wright, 2020; Cervetti et al., 2016; Connor et al., 2017; Elleman & Oslund, 2019; Hirsch, 2003; J. S. Kim et al., 2021; Wexler, 2019). Despite this, in practice, educators tend to focus on activating prior knowledge rather than on students constructing new knowledge (Cabell & Hwang, 2020; Cervetti & Wright, 2020). Concern has also been raised in the literature with regard to teachers' lack of knowledge about reading comprehension and how best to address it in classroom practice (Hudson, 2022; Jakobson et al., 2022).

The difficulty in qualifying or quantifying reading comprehension lies in its nature as an internal process (B. Adams et al., 2023). While other literacy processes, such as decoding, can be clearly successfully or unsuccessfully taught and demonstrated, successful reading comprehension is not inherently 'visible' and it therefore requires further tangible tasks or outputs to determine how well a text has been understood. As such, reading comprehension can only be observed indirectly (Pearson & Cervetti, 2016). Some have argued that as a result of the publication and promotion of documents such as the *Report of the National Reading Panel* (NICHD, 2000), comprehension came to be seen as a natural consequence of 'teaching the code', rather than as a priority for instruction itself (Pearson & Cervetti, 2016). This raises the question of whether comprehension can be 'taught' and how it is to be interpreted as part of instruction.

Comprehension is not a single skill or activity, but a multifaceted cognitive task, making it difficult to assess and teach (Catts, 2018; Lervag & Melby-Lervag, 2022). Assessments, including standardised and commercially developed tests, that purport to measure comprehension differ enormously in terms of the construct or skill examined and the measures used (Castles et al., 2018; Clemens & Fuchs, 2021; Keenan & Meenan, 2014; Keenan et al., 2008). If reading comprehension is not a singular skill or task, it cannot be measured by a single assessment in the way that the 'constrained' skills of the 'big six' can be assessed individually (Castles et al., 2018; Clemens & Fuchs, 2021).

In the context of reading comprehension as the final component of the 'big six' to be addressed, it is worth considering the assessment of reading more broadly. Given the complexity of reading comprehension, let alone the complexity of all components of the 'big six', it would seem impossible to implement any kind of assessment that claims to measure reading overall. Reading is a complex process involving essential components, including decoding and fluency, which must be coordinated

and integrated into a successful, dynamic reading process. Indeed, Wexler (2020) asserts that the notion of a student's 'reading ability' is a myth. This is contrary to the persistent and pervasive use of the 'running record' (Clay, 2000) as an assessment of reading which has long been referred to in the literature and interpreted by teachers as a measure of overall 'reading ability', removing the need for any other assessment (Barone et al., 2019; D'Agostino et al., 2021; Gillett & Ellingson, 2017; Harmey & Kabuto, 2018). Students' capacity to access and comprehend new material by constructing a mental model of the text is dependent on their facility with each of the skills and processes associated with the 'big six'. There must therefore be a repertoire of assessments from which teachers draw to assess each of these components appropriately, determine progress and, most importantly, use this to inform classroom practice to cater for all students.

Beyond assessment, research on the teaching of comprehension has been problematic. The quality and varied methodology of studies related to comprehension instruction was called into question in the *Report of the National Reading Panel* (NICHD, 2000). Nonetheless, one of the most active topics of research with ongoing empirical support has been strategy instruction (NICHD, 2000; Willingham, 2006-2007). Numerous studies have explored the nature and benefits of instruction in comprehension strategies including 'finding the main idea', 'inferencing' and 'summarising' (Wexler, 2020; Willingham, 2006-2007). Strategy instruction has been shown to improve reading comprehension for typically developing and struggling readers (e.g., Elleman, 2017; Mahdavi & Tensfeldt, 2013; NICHD, 2000; Okkinga et al., 2018) and it has been translated into widely used, teacher-friendly formats such as the 'super six' (Oczkus, 2004).

While some strategies, such as comprehension monitoring, summarising and using graphic organisers, have strong empirical support, research for others such as 'listening actively' is less conclusive (Willingham, 2006-2007). Some research has demonstrated the superiority of teaching multiple comprehension strategies simultaneously, rather than explicitly teaching them one at a time (e.g., Reutzel et al., 2005). Reciprocal teaching has been suggested as an approach which enables this simultaneous teaching and application of multiple strategies, with a focus on metacognitive awareness, although it is best suited to later primary or older students (O'Hare et al., 2019; Oakhill et al., 2023; Okkinga et al., 2018; T. Shanahan et al., 2010).

Recent discussion in the literature has questioned the allocation of too much time to strategy instruction, at the expense of developing other components of comprehension, such as background knowledge (Elleman & Compton, 2017). Teachers may otherwise neglect comprehension instruction entirely (Klingner et al., 2010), misuse or overuse strategy instruction which may enable only low-level engagement with text (Capin et al., 2025; Compton et al., 2014). This leads to the focus being on the strategies themselves as an end goal, rather than their use as tools for making sense of text in the way that accomplished readers do (Duke et al., 2021; Elleman & Compton, 2017; Magnusson et al., 2019). Successful implementation of strategy instruction appears to be contingent on the choice of strategies, associated pedagogy and length of instruction. While strategies such as questioning,

visualising, monitoring, inferring and retelling have been recommended (e.g., T. Shanahan et al., 2010), this varies across the literature and there is still no clarity as to which strategies ought to be prioritised with certain age groups (Elleman & Oslund, 2019). It has been suggested that whichever strategies are selected, they should be explicitly modelled as part of a gradual release of responsibility to provide students with opportunities to enact them independently (Elleman & Oslund, 2019). Importantly, while there may be initial value in teaching appropriate comprehension strategies, long-term teaching does not yield any additional benefits (Hirsch, 2003; Rosenshine & Meister, 1994).

The actual classroom experience requires that teachers synthesise these recommendations and translate them into actionable, resourced and inclusive teaching and learning programs and there is more to literacy practice than reading. Both the *Report of the National Early Literacy Panel* (NELP, 2008) and the *Report of the National Reading Panel* (NICHHD, 2000) identified writing as an additional component, alongside the 'big six', that is crucial to early literacy development and pedagogy (Teale et al., 2020). More recent models have also emphasised the integration of components relevant to both reading and writing (Wyse & Hacking, 2024) and writing instruction has been shown to benefit student reading outcomes (e.g., E. Shanahan et al., 2025). As such, a comprehensive 'literacy block', as mentioned in the title of this study, must address writing as a key component of literacy practice.

Writing

While reading has been the dominant focus of significant research for the last several decades amid a 'reading-centric' view of literacy in education (Berninger et al., 2009), writing plays a vital role in students' literacy development. Although there is some reciprocity between reading and writing, they are not mirror images of one another: a proficient reader may not necessarily thrive in writing and robust reading pedagogy does not necessarily lead to writing proficiency (Berninger et al., 2009). Writing is a distinct, complex process involving linguistic, cognitive and metacognitive competencies (D. Jones & Christensen, 1999; Y.-S. Kim & Schatschneider, 2017).

Compared to reading, there is a notable lack of research outlining and validating models of writing (Ahmed et al., 2022). Some have looked to the reading research literature to conceptualise the 'writing rope' (Sedita, 2019, 2022). One well-known model, The Simple View of Writing (SVW; Berninger et al., 2002), later revised to The Not-So-Simple View of Writing (NSVW; Berninger & Winn, 2006), has gained prominence in research and education circles. The 'not-so-simple' update expanded the original framework of transcription skills (such as spelling and handwriting) and text composition to also include the role of executive functions and working memory in the writing process (Berninger & Winn, 2006; Cordeiro et al., 2020; Y.-S. Kim & Schatschneider, 2017; Rocha et al., 2022).

Transcription Skills

The mastery of transcription skills in the early years of schooling is paramount (S. Graham, Harris, & Adkins, 2018). If not executed with adequate automaticity, basic transcription skills such as

spelling and handwriting can impede written expression (Troia et al., 2017). There is evidence that explicit instruction in handwriting and spelling leads to improvements in writing quality (e.g., S. Graham et al., 2012; Santangelo & Graham, 2016). Just as fluent reading is characterised by accurate and automatic word recognition, fluency is essential for writing development (Latif, 2013).

Despite definitional confusion in the literature regarding writing fluency, it has been referred to as a writer's capacity to produce texts in large chunks (Latif, 2013). With regard to handwriting specifically, fluency refers to the rate of letter formation, while legibility refers to the accuracy of that letter formation (Feng et al., 2019). Handwriting automaticity accounts for most of the variance in children's written expression (Feng et al., 2019; D. Jones & Christensen, 1999). Despite this, recent research suggests that handwriting and typing instruction are underemphasised in Australian classrooms (Malpique et al., 2023). Although this research involved a relatively small sample size and only self-reported data, similar results have been reported elsewhere with significant variation in the frequency of handwriting instruction across classrooms (e.g., Malpique et al., 2017; Wyatt-Smith et al., 2018). This is concerning given that transcription skills, including handwriting, constrain text composition (Y.-S. Kim, 2024; Limpo & Alves, 2018; Puranik & Al Otaiba, 2012; Salas & Silvente, 2020).

While the need for explicit instruction in handwriting has been established in the literature, there is less clarity as to specific instructional practices (Malpique et al., 2017). Handwriting develops sequentially as children adjust to letter placement on handwriting lines and incorporating spaces between letters before developing directionality, letter knowledge and spacing between words (E. Hunter & Potvin, 2020; Puranik & Lonigan, 2011). As such, handwriting instruction should mimic this sequential nature of development (Fancher et al., 2018). This includes prioritising legibility as part of explicit instruction and emphasising repetitive practice with feedback, with a gradual removal of adult support as successful, independent handwriting is developed (Hoy et al., 2011).

Although there is still more to be learned from research with regard to classroom implementation in different contexts and with students beyond the primary grades (S. Graham, 2018), the literature does offer some guidance as to optimal handwriting instruction in the early years: the context of the present study. There is evidence for the benefits of modelling formation and teaching letters with visual cues or motion models, using technology as part of handwriting instruction, and providing corrective feedback and opportunities for self-evaluation of handwriting (e.g., Fancher et al., 2018; S. Graham, 2018; Santangelo & Graham, 2016). S. Graham (2018) recommends the use of letter tracing as an instructional practice, but this has been questioned in other research (Kersey & James, 2013).

Associations between the transcription skills relevant to writing development have been acknowledged. Handwriting fluency has been associated with improved spelling (Pritchard et al., 2021; Ray et al., 2022) as handwriting may support the development of orthographic knowledge required for encoding. Many of the linguistic competencies that are required for reading are also necessary for spelling (Galuschka et al., 2020). Orthographic knowledge is essential for both spelling

and reading development (Mather & Jaffe, 2021) and early spelling performance is a predictor of later success in learning to read (Treiman et al., 2019).

Spelling. Spelling is a creative process that involves “symbolizing the linguistic structure of words” (Treiman & Bourassa, 2000, p. 2) using letters, according to the specific conventions of the language (Madelaine, 2023). The components of spelling include phonology, orthography and morphology, with etymology also useful in informing spelling choices, and these areas of knowledge are coordinated to support spelling (Apel et al., 2012; Madelaine, 2023). The coordination and integration of this knowledge from the beginning stages of spelling development have been explained by Triple Word Form Theory (Daffern, 2017). Spelling is critical for literacy acquisition (Joshi et al., 2008-2009; Madelaine, 2023) but there is considerable disagreement in the literature about the acquisition of spelling competence and how best to promote it (S. Graham & Santangelo, 2014).

Advocates for the notion that spelling is ‘caught’ (e.g., Krashen, 1989; Wilde, 1990) argue that spelling knowledge is acquired during the acts of reading and writing (S. Graham & Santangelo, 2014). By contrast, support in the literature for formal spelling instruction (e.g., Joshi et al., 2008-2009; Madelaine, 2023; Moats 2005/2006) suggests that students require direct and systematic instruction in spelling. This formal instruction includes teaching students how to spell particular words through repeated, direct practice, understanding skills, rules, spelling patterns and strategies for spelling unfamiliar words, and exploring spelling through word study activities (S. Graham & Santangelo, 2014). Although there is some empirical support for informal, incidental approaches to the teaching of spelling (e.g., Krashen, 1989), a more recent meta-analysis refuted the claim that spelling should not be taught directly or systematically (S. Graham & Santangelo, 2014) and this has been replicated in subsequent research (e.g., Burton et al., 2021; Galuschka et al., 2020).

Despite this, the popularity of teaching strategies such as ‘look cover write check’ and ‘rainbow writing’ have led to the misconception that spelling is a visual skill and further that it is illogical, irregular and can only be learned through rote memorisation (Adoniou, 2014). On the contrary, there are many patterns and principles on which the English spelling system relies which can form the basis of explicit teaching (Joshi et al., 2008-2009; Moats, 2005/2006, 2020). Direct instruction hastens the process of unlocking the writing system (Treiman, 2018a; Treiman & Kessler, 2006) which otherwise develops slowly, if at all, for some students through implicit learning.

It has been recommended that spelling instruction move sequentially from a focus on phoneme awareness, letter knowledge and GPCs, to the exploration of more complex spellings, multisyllabic words, affixes and roots with instruction in etymology (Moats, 2005/2006, 2020). Similar sequences for spelling instruction have been suggested elsewhere in the literature (e.g., Adoniou, 2014; Joshi et al., 2008-2009) and these mirror the ‘phases’ described elsewhere in the typical development of reading and spelling knowledge (Ehri, 1995, 2014). Phonemic, morphemic and whole word approaches to explicit spelling instruction, including segmenting and sorting words according to

spelling patterns or affixes, self-correcting spelling attempts, and examining groups of words that follow the same spelling pattern, have been recommended in the literature (Ehri et al., 2001; Goodwin & Ahn, 2013; Madelaine, 2023; Pan et al., 2021). Nonetheless, the efficacy of common implementations of these approaches is yet to be fully established (Pan et al., 2021).

Text Composition

All students, particularly those with learning difficulties, require explicit instruction not only in transcription processes including handwriting and spelling, but also in higher-order skills such as composition, which does not develop incidentally (Ahmed et al., 2022; Troia et al., 2017). Recent research in Australia has indicated that primary teachers emphasise foundational and transcription-related skills such as spelling in their classroom instruction rather than composition and process writing skills (Malpique et al., 2023), although there is still a lack of clarity as to what the optimal teaching of composition skills looks like in practice (Koster et al., 2015). It may be that successful implementation of 'quality' writing instruction is context-dependent and contingent on variables including the classroom environment (S. Graham, 2018; S. Graham & Rijlaarsdam, 2016; Rietdijk et al., 2018).

There is evidence for the benefits of strategy instruction, including planning, drafting and structuring different text types or genres (S. Graham & Alves, 2021; S. Graham et al., 2012; S. Graham et al., 2016). Reading is therefore heavily implicated in the writing process given the need for rereading, revising and editing (S. Graham & Hebert, 2011). Alongside this, it has been recommended with empirical support that students be taught self-regulation procedures such as goal setting and self-assessment to enable them to use these strategies independently (S. Graham et al., 2012; S. Graham et al., 2016; Koster et al., 2015).

It has also been suggested that aligning transcription instruction with instruction in self-regulation strategies is of benefit to students' writing composition (Limpo & Alves, 2018), exemplifying the relationship between the components of the NSVW (Berninger & Winn, 2006). Other recommended strategies for writing pedagogy include scaffolding writing tasks (S. Graham et al., 2012), the use of checklists to enable self-assessment (Troia et al., 2017), and teaching text types and structures (Koster et al., 2015). Instructional time spent on writing has also been noted as crucial to successful writing instruction (S. Graham et al., 2016; Wyatt-Smith et al., 2018). Increasing the amount of time available for primary students to write has been found to have a positive effect on the quality of students' writing (S. Graham et al., 2012; S. Graham et al., 2016).

Despite these recommendations, research has demonstrated that teachers infrequently implement evidence-based writing instruction in their classrooms (e.g., Brindle et al., 2016; Malpique et al., 2023; McLean, 2022) and that teachers, including those in NSW, feel unprepared to teach writing effectively (Wyatt-Smith et al., 2018). Teachers may rely on 'teaching lore' which includes teaching practices related to writing that they experienced as students themselves, practices they have trialled

or observed among colleagues, and potentially those derived from research (S. Graham & Alves, 2021; S. Graham et al., 2016).

The challenge for teachers is to determine which aspects of teaching 'lore' and of centrally provided curriculum resources are valid and worth pursuing in classroom practice (Brosseau & Poulton, 2024; S. Graham & Alves, 2021; S. Graham et al., 2016). The same could be said for any practices related to the teaching of literacy and this trend has been acknowledged in the literature (Fellowes & Oakley, 2020; T. Shanahan, 2020a; T. Young, 2022). This is not helped by the fact that there is still uncertainty regarding the optimal combination and frequency of writing practices recommended by research (S. Graham et al., 2012). In the absence of this guidance for writing or any other aspect of literacy practice (Dewitz & Graves, 2021), teachers are tasked with interpreting research to enable its enactment in the classroom.

Scientific findings do not teach children to be literate (Piasta & Hudson, 2022) – teachers do. The challenge involved in translating research findings into classroom practice which addresses not one but all necessary components of literacy should not be overlooked. Addressing the 'big six' does not involve discrete parts of the school day being devoted to each element, but the synthesis of this content and pedagogy into daily classroom practice. As a result, the 'literacy block' has become emblematic of the early literacy classroom and it is this holistic context that may align with the IPA (Florian & Spratt, 2013) as part of the present study.

The Literacy Block

Designing effective core literacy practice that caters for the diversity of student learning needs in the early years of schooling is essential (Al Otaiba et al., 2016). Indeed, the *NSW School Excellence Framework* (NSW Department of Education, 2024) identifies 'effective classroom practice' for all students as a cornerstone of quality education provision. The 'core literacy block' typically integrates word study, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension through whole class, guided and small group activities (Reed, 2024; Sisson & Sisson, 2016; Swain & Pearson, 2024).

Researchers have lamented the rigid use of such a 'block' which is limited to literacy activities and excludes knowledge building or integration with other learning areas (e.g., Connor et al., 2017; A. Ryan & Lipp, 2025). Although this reflects the American context, this is not dissimilar to Australian classrooms (e.g., Meeks et al., 2020; Nicholas et al., 2021) in which it is common to observe a morning literacy session or block as daily practice. While teachers in Australia are mandated to teach the content outlined by the relevant syllabus documents for their state or territory, they are tasked with determining how this is addressed in the classroom.

Whether addressed during a 'block' or throughout a school day or week, the research literature does offer guidance as to the essential components of literacy which must be addressed as part of classroom practice. As noted earlier, the 'big six' (Konza, 2014; NICHD, 2000) offers teachers a framework of these components, beyond reading alone (Seidenberg et al., 2020). Both the *Report of*

the National Early Literacy Panel (NELP, 2008) and the *Report of the National Reading Panel* (NICHD, 2000) identified writing as an additional component that is crucial to early literacy development and pedagogy (Teale et al., 2020). More recent models have also emphasised the integration of components relevant to both reading and writing (Wyse & Hacking, 2024). The 'big six' (Konza, 2014; NICHD, 2000), with the addition of writing, can therefore be used as an evidence-informed framework, alongside the syllabus mandated for implementation, with which to examine the literature regarding literacy acquisition and optimal practice.

Table 2.1 summarises the intersections of syllabus, research and practice relevant to kindergarten teachers in NSW, the context of the present study, with regard to the teaching of literacy through the English curriculum area. This includes reference to both the current NSW English syllabus (NESA, 2025b) and to the English syllabus relevant to participants in the present study at the time of data collection (NESA, 2012).

Importantly, the interpretation of syllabus requirements and practices promoted within the literature to inform classroom practice is contingent on individual teachers' enactment of this practice with students. It is the teacher's responsibility to make sense of these intersections – alongside other competing influences including personal preference, traditional practices or those popularised by social media and commercial programs – and to design practices specific to their classroom context and the needs of individual students. This responsibility includes determining the allocation of time to teaching and activities that address each of the essential components in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1*Intersections of the Kindergarten Syllabus, the 'Big Six' with the Addition of Writing, and Relevant Principles and Practices from the Research Literature*

Objectives of the previous English syllabus (NESA, 2012)	Focus areas of the current English syllabus (NESA, 2025b)	Aspects of the 'big six' (Konza, 2014; NICHHD, 2000) with the addition of writing	Examples of relevant research literature	Recommended allocations of time and examples of key practices drawn from research
Speaking and listening Thinking imaginatively and creatively Expressing themselves Reflecting on learning	Oral language and communication	Oral language and early literacy experiences	Dickinson et al., 2010; Hindman et al., 2022; NELP, 2008; Puglisi et al., 2017; Wallace et al., 2022	Language-rich classroom environment; formal and informal activities; daily opportunities for oral language modelling and expansion, questioning, discussion routines and scaffolding; explicit vocabulary and morphology instruction (see Vocabulary and Writing)
Speaking and listening Reading and viewing	Phonological awareness	Phonological awareness, including whole words, onset and rime, syllables and phonemes	Brady, 2020; Clemens et al., 2021; Erbeli et al., 2024; Piasta & Hudson, 2022; Rice et al., 2022; Swain & Pearson, 2024; Teale et al., 2020	Emphasis on phonemic awareness, including blending and segmenting; 2-3 min daily (optimal dosage of 10 hours of early instruction); practice preferable with letters for manipulation; individual, small group or whole class instruction; prioritise one or two phonemic skills at a time
Speaking and listening Reading and viewing Spelling	Print conventions Phonic knowledge	Alphabetic principle for decoding and encoding	Birch et al., 2022; Castles et al., 2018; Dehaene, 2009; Ehri, 2020, 2022; Gonzalez-Frey & Ehri, 2021; Mather & Jaffe, 2021; Moats, 2020	Explicit, systematic phonics; 30 min daily practice for reading and spelling at the grapheme, word, sentence and text levels; promote orthographic mapping and knowledge of GPCs; 2-6 GPCs introduced per week with review; connected phonation for decoding; decodable texts for initial reading practice
Speaking and listening Reading and viewing	Reading fluency	Fluency, including accuracy, automaticity and prosody	Aldhanhani & Abu-Ayyash, 2020; Hasbrouck & Tindal, 2017; Hudson et al., 2020; Kuhn, 2020; Lee & Yoon, 2017; Paige et al., 2021; Rasinski et al., 2009; Topping, 2014	Daily opportunities for repeated reading; assisted reading using audiobooks; modelling; readers' theatre; choral reading; paired reading; oral reading fluency (ORF) measures alongside prosody rubrics
Speaking and listening Reading and viewing Expressing themselves	Oral language and communication Vocabulary	Vocabulary, including morphological awareness	Beck et al., 2013; Crosson et al., 2021; Kargiotidis et al., 2023; Lemov et al., 2016; Manyak et al., 2021	Introduction of three to five 'tier two' words per week with repeated exposure and review; discussing child-friendly definitions of words with examples; read-alouds; explicit morphology instruction including affixes and base words; weekly opportunities for incidental word exploration and application
Reading and viewing Grammar, punctuation and vocabulary Thinking imaginatively and creatively	Reading comprehension Understanding and responding to literature	Reading comprehension	Cabell & Hwang, 2020; Capin et al., 2025; Castles et al., 2018; Clemens & Fuchs, 2021; Dujardin et al., 2023; Duke et al., 2021; Filderman et al., 2022; Jensen & Elbro, 2022; Smith et al., 2021; Sun et al., 2021	Inferencing; developing background knowledge and vocabulary to enable construction of a mental or 'situation' model; initial, short-term strategy instruction; 20 min daily opportunities for shared reading or read alouds; assessment involving multiple choice questions, cloze tasks and ORF
Writing and representing Handwriting and using digital technologies Spelling Grammar, punctuation and vocabulary Thinking imaginatively and creatively	Creating written texts Print conventions Phonic knowledge Spelling Handwriting	Writing, including text composition and transcription skills such as spelling and handwriting	Ahmed et al., 2022; Feng et al., 2019; Graham & Alves, 2021; Hunter & Potvin, 2020; Madelaine, 2023; Malpique et al., 2017; McLean, 2022; Pan et al., 2021; Robinson-Kooi & Hammond, 2020; Sedita, 2022; Swain & Pearson, 2024	Explicit, sequential handwriting instruction (10-15 min daily) in letter placement, directionality and spacing; modelling with visual cues; providing corrective feedback; direct, systematic instruction in spelling; repeated practice with spelling patterns; word study including sorting; strategy instruction including planning and structuring text types; dictation to apply learned grammar and spelling; 20-50 min daily writing time to include sentence, paragraph and genre exploration

Issues Impacting Teachers

While intersections between syllabus, research and practice may arise for kindergarten teachers in NSW, there are also many longstanding issues and tensions that exist which are relevant to the consideration of how the literacy block is designed in practice. These issues are now considered under seven key headings: the great debate; ‘effective’ teachers of literacy; teacher knowledge; decodable or predictable; allocation of time; differentiation; and teacher autonomy. Importantly, these issues have been deliberately sequenced from those which are considered to be more research- or system-related (including literacy debates and expectations of ‘effectiveness’), to those which are more directly relevant to teachers and their students, and therefore to the present study focus (e.g., the allocation of time and differentiation).

The Great Debate. Children must ‘crack the code’ in order to read (and spell) in an alphabetic language such as English, but the type of instruction needed to foster this learning has led to significant disagreement and inconsistencies in the research literature and in practice. The discourse surrounding early literacy practice has often been distracted by isolated, longstanding debates specific to reading which have pitted teacher-directed, explicit instruction in phonics against whole language or child-centred instruction (Castles et al., 2018; Chiatovich & Stipek, 2016).

The focus of phonics instruction is on moving sequentially from simple to more complex skills in order to elucidate the alphabetic code: the relationship between phonemes and graphemes (Chard et al., 2000). Its underlying, long-term goal is to enable learners to decipher untaught spelling-sound patterns (Chapman et al., 2018; Perfetti, 1985). Indeed, “explicit teaching feeds the process of implicit learning” (Dykstra, 2018, p. 21).

The so-called alternative ‘whole language’ approach to the teaching of reading emerged in the 1970s with an emphasis on instruction involving words embedded in meaningful text before the incidental teaching of smaller units, based on the assumption that children would deduce the alphabetic code for themselves (J. S. Bowers, 2020; Chiatovich & Stipek, 2016; Hempenstall, 2005; van Kraayenoord & Paris, 1994). Reading was therefore described as a “psycholinguistic guessing game” (Goodman, 1967, p. 127) which develops in a way that is akin to oral language development (Goodman, 1965, 1967; Goodman et al., 2016). This philosophy has been associated with the ‘three cueing system’ which focuses on the use of semantic, syntactic and graphophonic cues in equal measure to enable skilled reading (Beatty & Care, 2009; Goodman & Goodman, 2019). The belief that readers use multiple ‘cueing systems’ equally has had a substantial and longstanding influence on the teaching of reading in Australia and elsewhere (C. E. Snow & Juel, 2005).

Although the whole language philosophy may appear attractive (Bowey, 2006) – not least because its focus on language, meaning and comprehension mirrors the anticipated outcome of reading pedagogy – it is limited by flawed assumptions. In particular, it presumes that skilled readers give little attention to phonic strategies, instead relying on whole word recognition. However, skilled

readers do indeed employ automatic decoding which does involve rapid processing of almost all of the print (i.e., graphophonic information) and this is a reliable indicator of superior reading proficiency (Castles et al., 2018; Dehaene, 2009; Moats, 2020; Rayner et al., 2016). Teaching based solely on a whole language approach, which encourages equal use of all three sources of information or ‘cueing systems’ (Rodgers, 2017), has therefore been repeatedly questioned and, to some, discredited (NICHD, 2000). Some children will indeed “quickly induce the orthography” (C. E. Snow & Juel, 2005, p. 512) regardless of teaching approach, and their learning in reading will accelerate without much difficulty. But if this approach alone informs literacy pedagogy, it will be inadequate for many children (Bowey, 2006; CESE, 2017b; Spiegel, 1998; J. Wilson & Colmar, 2008). On its own, it is an approach that caters for some, not all, students (Florian & Spratt, 2013).

The particular importance of phonics has been acknowledged in Australia and internationally. In 2005, the Australian literacy report, *Teaching Reading* (National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy, 2005), observed that “explicit and direct instruction in phonics is an essential component of a comprehensive and integrated reading program” (J. Wilson & Colmar, 2008, p. 92). This observation reflected the findings of the United Kingdom’s *National Literacy Strategy* (Department for Education and Skills, 1998) and the United States *Report of the National Reading Panel* (NICHD, 2000).

Despite some queries regarding the robustness of the evidence base (e.g., J. S. Bowers, 2020, 2021), there is an empirical basis for systematic phonics instruction which involves the teaching of GPCs in a planned, cumulative sequence (Buckingham, 2020; Castles et al., 2018; Dehaene, 2009; Ehri et al., 2001; Fletcher et al., 2021; McArthur et al., 2018; Moats, 1999; NICHD, 2000). Further, a large body of evidence has emphasised the role of phonological and phonemic awareness as major predictors of reading achievement (Ashby et al., 2013; Castles & Coltheart, 2004; Juel, 1988; Megino-Elvira et al., 2016; Melby-Lervag et al., 2012; Schatschneider et al., 2004).

Importantly, phonics instruction should occur not in isolation but alongside meaning-based instruction in morphology, vocabulary and comprehension. Indeed, there is a sense among researchers that the focus of educational research in this domain should shift to prioritise how teachers can interpret the evidence-base as part of integrated instruction to best support the needs of all students in practice (Fletcher et al., 2021).

Building on that background, research now tends to focus not simply on the merits of phonics instruction, but on which type of phonics instruction is optimal (Campbell, 2015; Lewis & Ellis, 2006). A distinction has been made between two different forms of phonics instruction and their relative effectiveness: synthetic phonics, which focuses on blending individual phonemes, and analytic phonics, which begins at the word level (Campbell, 2015; Wyse et al., 2018). The highly influential *Rose Review into Early Reading* (J. Rose, 2006) cited a longitudinal study by R. S. Johnston and Watson (2005) which sought to investigate and compare the effects of teaching synthetic and analytic phonics on learning to read. Results of the initial and follow up studies (R. S. Johnston et al., 2012) suggested the superiority of synthetic phonics teaching over that of analytic phonics for long-term reading and spelling

achievement. However, inferring causation given the range of other factors that may have contributed to participating students' reading development is problematic and makes "drawing robust conclusions from these data difficult" (Ellis & Moss, 2014, p. 249). Indeed, Castles et al. (2018) argue that "the evidence is not yet sufficient to conclude that a synthetic phonics approach should be preferred over an analytic one" (p. 13). There is recent evidence for the superiority of connected, rather than segmented, phonation in teaching decoding; both hallmarks of synthetic phonics instruction (Gonzalez-Frey & Ehri, 2021). But similar conclusions have previously been drawn (NICHD, 2000; Torgerson et al., 2006), suggesting a need for further research specifically on this issue (Fletcher et al., 2021).

Although the merits of phonics instruction are now well established, it would be a mistake to perceive them as singularly determinative. There is considerable evidence for the role of oral language and vocabulary as major predictors of reading success (e.g., Dickinson et al., 2010; Fielding-Barnsley & Hay, 2012; Hairrell et al., 2011; B. Hart & Risley, 2003; NICHD, 2000). It has also been suggested that "over-teaching of phonics, with little or no emphasis on meaning, is ineffective" (Emmitt et al., 2013, p. 5). There is criticism of the use of phonics instruction – or any other singular approach – in isolation (Mantei et al., 2022; Meyer, 2002; Wyse et al., 2018). For example, phonics instruction often lacks the teaching of morphology which is beneficial for reading and writing acquisition (P. N. Bowers et al., 2010; Fletcher et al., 2021; Treiman, 2018b).

The proposition that phonics should not be taught in isolation underlines the problems inherent in viewing phonics and whole language teaching approaches as "mutually incompatible" (Hamston & Scull, 2007, p.11). Phonics involves the explicit teaching of how to decode and encode words to ensure print accuracy as only one aspect of literacy teaching. The whole language approach, on the other hand, deals with this aspect implicitly and, beyond this, encourages the development of language and comprehension through literature as a much broader approach to the teaching of literacy. Positioning these two approaches as binary opposites creates a 'false dichotomy' (Hamston & Scull, 2007; Mills, 2005). It perpetuates the myth that phonics instruction is sufficient and occurs on its own, without the use of children's literature or time spent building oral language, meaning and comprehension (Chall, 1987). This way of thinking neglects the reality that classrooms require "differentiated and multifaceted teaching emphases" (Hamston & Scull, 2007, p. 2) which are determined according to students' contributions to the learning process (Byrne, 2005).

Whether because of the challenges in designing integrated early literacy programs or otherwise, there has been a tendency among teachers and researchers to view the teaching of literacy through a selective lens. Some tend to fetishise phonics while others overlook the value of such explicit instruction, especially for students who are struggling with literacy acquisition (NICHD, 2000; C. E. Snow et al., 1998; T. Shanahan, 2023a). Indeed, C. E. Snow and Juel (2005) argue that those on both 'sides' of this longstanding and highly politicised debate tend to "overemphasize their own favourite aspects" (p. 518) of literacy practice to ensure that they are not overlooked. In public domains, this is

often interpreted as proponents of either 'side' advocating for one approach (e.g., phonics) to be prioritised in isolation and for other elements (i.e., meaning and comprehension) to be disregarded.

While emphasising the importance of phonics and phonemic awareness within early years' literacy programs is a priority, there is a critical need to incorporate it within a literacy program that promotes the other key components of quality literacy practice (i.e., fluency, comprehension and vocabulary; Mantei et al., 2022; Spear-Swerling & Zibulsky, 2014; T. Shanahan, 2023a). Phonics could and "should not be taught in total isolation from other literacy practices" (Bowey, 2006, p. 84). Those promoting the explicit teaching of phonics would not "exclude authentic children's literature from the kindergarten or first-grade classroom" (C. E. Snow & Juel, 2005, p. 518). Indeed, it is problematic to even suggest that a teacher is using a 'phonics' or a 'whole language' approach because teaching cannot be defined in such narrow terms (Ewing, 2018); no dichotomy (false or otherwise) could reasonably be perceived.

The teaching of literacy, as in any other domain, is highly variable, ever-changing and (one hopes) responsive to students' learning needs. To focus on the use of any singular approach would be to lose sight of students who enter the classroom with different levels and complexities of literacy knowledge and proficiency (Florian & Spratt, 2013). In any case, it is teachers, not programs, regardless of their focus or orientation, that teach children to be literate (Flanigan et al., 2022; Lose, 2007). Teachers must be thoughtful adapters with expertise in literacy which they can deploy in different ways, based on their pedagogic reasoning to meet the needs of students, without mindlessly adhering to programs or types of pedagogy (Duffy & Kear, 2007; Enow, 2023; Flanigan et al., 2022; Shulman, 1987).

'Effective' Literacy Teachers. Establishing the qualities of a 'good' or 'effective' teacher, in any domain, is challenging (Korthagen, 2004). Understandings of 'effectiveness' may vary according to the pedagogical contexts in which teaching occurs (Klaassen, 2002; Korthagen, 2004). Many studies examining the 'effective' teaching of literacy, specifically, are in the context of early childhood (e.g., Cutler et al., 2023), prior to formal instruction beginning in kindergarten. Attempts to understand what makes a 'good' teacher, in the context of literacy and otherwise, have involved lists of teaching behaviours corresponding to student achievement (Korthagen, 2004). Discussions of teacher effectiveness tend to focus on more "concrete competencies" (Korthagen, 2004, p. 79). Although it has been argued that "a good teacher cannot simply be described in terms of certain isolated competencies" (Korthagen, 2004, p. 79), many studies have assumed this conceptualisation of effective literacy teachers.

Some research has operated on the premise that educators' content knowledge with regard to literacy is indicative of their selection and implementation of quality classroom literacy practices (e.g., Piasta et al., 2020). Others have investigated the self-reported literacy teaching practices of teachers nominated as effective according to student achievement (Pressley et al., 1996). 'Effective' teachers of

literacy have generally been identified as successfully managing the classroom environment and behaviours (Pressley et al., 2001; Stronge et al., 2011); having superior, context-specific subject knowledge (Flynn, 2007; Medwell et al., 1999); modelling and teaching both word-level and higher order skills (Pressley et al., 1996; D. Wray et al., 2000); benefiting from long-term professional development and reflection (Poulson & Avramidis, 2003); and using a range of small group and whole class instructional approaches (Hough et al., 2013; Topping & Ferguson, 2005). Despite the general consistency in the above characteristics of 'effective' literacy teachers, the research described thus far has been conducted only in the United Kingdom and the United States. The *In Teachers' Hands* (Louden et al., 2005) and *Teaching for Growth* (Louden et al., 2008) projects have contributed to this field from the Australian perspective. Both studies examined teachers' 'effectiveness', with similar results.

Teacher Knowledge. One of these considerations of 'effectiveness' that has been emphasised in the literature related to literacy practice is teachers' own literacy-specific knowledge. Concern has repeatedly been raised with regard to the insufficiency of pre-service and in-service teachers' knowledge for the teaching of literacy (e.g., Carson & Bayetto, 2018; Moats, 1994; Tortorelli et al., 2021), including in Australia (Mahar & Richdale, 2008; Stark et al., 2016). Further, teachers' self-reported knowledge often does not correlate with their actual knowledge (Hammond, 2015; Macken-Horarik et al., 2018; Meeks & Kemp, 2017) and they may sometimes be unaware of gaps in their own professional knowledge (Kruger & Dunning, 1999).

Research indicating that Australian teachers lack the necessary knowledge for early literacy is often accompanied by calls for amending or improving pre-service teacher education or in-service teacher professional development (e.g., Sellings et al., 2018; Stark et al., 2016). But there is more to early literacy education than teachers' knowledge on its own: teachers must be equipped to enact that knowledge in efficient, inclusive and research-informed ways in the dynamic ecosystem of a classroom. Improving teacher knowledge does not necessarily equate to improved practice (Arrow et al., 2019; Parrila et al., 2024). Some researchers have instead emphasised 'craft knowledge' (Black-Hawkins & Florian, 2012; Florian & Beaton, 2018; McIntyre, 2009) or 'professional or practical wisdom' (B. G. Cook et al., 2008) which experienced teachers use to successfully integrate student needs, curriculum requirements and practical considerations to design and undertake responsive, context-specific classroom practice.

Decodable or Predictable. Beyond arbitrary expectations of teacher 'effectiveness' and knowledge, another issue that has more recently emerged from the literature is that of resourcing. Specifically, as part of their execution of the literacy block, teachers must make decisions regarding the selection of decodable or predictable texts for student reading practice. 'Decodable' or phonically controlled texts are those which are restricted to words primarily containing GPCs students have learned, alongside some irregular or high-frequency words (Castles et al., 2018). The sequence of

introduction of these texts can therefore mirror the sequence of systematic introduction of GPCs as part of phonics instruction, as has been recommended in the literature (Buckingham, 2020; Castles et al., 2018; Fletcher et al., 2021). Importantly, the use of decodable texts for student independent reading does not preclude the necessary incorporation of a range of text types and other complex literature in the classroom to ensure students' exposure to a broad reading 'diet' (Pennell et al., 2024).

By contrast, 'levelled' or 'predictable' texts are sequenced numerically or alphabetically according to themes, word patterns, vocabulary introduction and length (Hiebert, 2024; Pitcher & Fang, 2007) but without attention to the cumulative introduction of GPCs as in decodables. The levelling of these texts can be inconsistent and misleading and yet teachers tend to rely on these 'levels' to make instructional decisions (Pitcher & Fang, 2007). Programs and assessments reliant on 'levelled' texts are unreliable for measuring students' reading progress (Birch et al., 2022; M. K. Burns et al., 2015; Castles et al., 2018; Hoffman, 2017). Further, accessing levelled text in the early stages of reading acquisition may draw students' attention away from decoding and therefore impede accuracy (Hiebert, 2024). Given that accurate and automatic word recognition is achieved through the process of orthographic mapping (Ehri, 2005, 2014, 2020, 2022; Kilpatrick, 2020; Miles & Ehri, 2019), this is problematic. The association of student reading progress with a number or 'level' is also misleading as it provides no insight into students' reading behaviours.

Supplying students with texts for independent reading practice which do not promote repetition and reinforcement of their knowledge of the alphabetic principle developed during classroom teaching would seem counterintuitive. Indeed, there is evidence of the benefits of decodable text in the earliest stages of learning to read (Birch et al., 2022; Castles et al., 2018). Once students have developed some foundational skills for reading and assuming they have adequate knowledge of GPCs for accessing a wider range of texts with accuracy, it is necessary for them to be exposed to more complex vocabulary and sentence structures than decodable texts can provide. Although it has been suggested that traditionally 'levelled' texts can be reorganised according to vocabulary, themes and knowledge areas to promote student access that is not prescribed by a level, this approach requires further research (Hiebert, 2024).

But the point at which this transition should occur from decodables to other literature remains an ongoing challenge for researchers (Elson et al., 2024; Petscher et al., 2020) and therefore for teachers attempting to determine which reading material is most appropriate for their students. A recent meta-analysis indicated no difference between the impacts of decodable and non-decodable texts on student outcomes (Pugh et al., 2023), but the studies included in this research were specifically in the context of intervention and not in whole class teaching which caters for all students. One small meta-analysis considered the use of decodable text and found a small positive effect on word reading, but the literature available for this review was limited (Murphy Odo, 2024).

Some have advised that access to decodable texts for independent reading is appropriate until Year 2 (Moats, 2020). One recent study conducted in Western Australia indicated that participating

classroom teachers held misconceptions about the different text types and their purposes and were uncertain about how and when they should be used (Pogorzelski et al., 2021). Importantly, the results also pointed to teachers' conflation of approaches. A large proportion of participants reported prompting students to 'sound out' words but also encouraging the use of illustrations or just the first sound for decoding. This was coupled with having students access both decodable and predictable texts, despite whole class teaching emphasising GPCs and orthographic mapping via phonics (Pogorzelski et al., 2021). Understanding how in-service teachers manage the transition from decodable to other texts, while cognisant of the needs of all students, is an important part of the present study's focus on classroom literacy practice, particularly given that the current *NSW English K-10 Syllabus* (NESA, 2025b) includes decodables as a required resource.

Allocation of Time. In their design and execution of a literacy block, teachers are tasked with determining the allocation of time to components of practice. While the allocation of finite learning time is significant, it may vary according to the needs of students which must always be considered through ongoing progress monitoring (Reynolds et al., 2023). Further, while teaching practice may emphasise a particular component at a time according to the needs of students, this emphasis does not preclude the sustained connection between all components of literacy with regard to learning and teaching (Wyse & Hacking, 2024).

T. Shanahan (2023a) asserts that "research has found that teaching phonemic awareness, phonics, text-reading fluency, reading comprehension strategies, and written language features, such as vocabulary or text structure, are all beneficial" (p. 280) but teachers are tasked with determining how best to address these components in their classrooms. Some discussions in the literature have previously focused on 'balanced' literacy (Bingham & Hall-Kenyon, 2013; Spiegel, 1998) and even a more recent meta-analysis examined the benefits of programs which 'balance' both reading and writing instruction (S. Graham, Liu et al., 2018). There is no need for teachers to strive for 'balance' for balance's sake in their design of core literacy practice. Indeed, classroom time may not always be devoted equally to components of literacy, depending on students' development and learning needs (Castles et al., 2018). It is the well-trained teacher's appreciation of all students' needs that is important, not the 'balance' of the choice of available strategies that meet the needs of 'most' students (Florian & Spratt, 2013). But the allocation of time is nonetheless important.

The amount of teaching time is a powerful tool for facilitating student learning (e.g., Gay et al., 2021; Hattie, 2009). Researchers commonly lament the allocation of inadequate time by teachers to components of literacy, such as handwriting and writing (McLean, 2022; Wyatt-Smith et al., 2018), and 'time' has long been referred to as a key variable to be optimised in order to improve student achievement (Carroll, 1989). Some have distinguished between categories of time with regard to schooling and classroom practice: 'instructional time' or the overall time available in a school day which is predetermined; 'allocated time' which teachers are responsible for determining; 'engaged

time' during which students are actively involved in learning; and 'actual learning time' in which students are sufficiently challenged to learn successfully (Berliner, 1990; M. K. Burns et al., 2022; Cotton, 1989; Gromada & Shewbridge, 2016). Suggestions for more effective use of allocated time, such as reducing transitions between tasks, have previously been made in the literature (Cotton, 1989) but more recent studies specific to literacy (Louden et al., 2008) have noted 'transition' as a necessary component of literacy practice, albeit referred to as 'minimal' and 'productive'.

It is recommended that teachers in NSW allocate 50% of their teaching week to the English and mathematics curriculum areas (NESA, 2025a, K-6 KLA time allocation advice) but they are responsible for determining which components of literacy, pedagogies and activities are included. Some international research has considered teachers' allocation of time, specifically in the context of literacy practice (e.g., Cunningham et al., 2009; Spear-Swerling & Zibulsky, 2014). Teachers must strive for efficient and effective use of the allocated time: scheduling certain amounts of time for components of literacy does not necessarily equate to actual teaching. Determining a class timetable and curating effective, inclusive and student-driven learning experiences are not the same thing.

For example, in their observational study of writing instruction in kindergarten classrooms, Guo et al. (2023) noted that while the overall time spent on writing, including teaching and student independent practice, aligned with research recommendations, the actual nature of that time may have underemphasised grammar and sentence construction which are integral for writing achievement. Similarly, Puranik et al. (2014) observed that most instructional time devoted to 'writing' involved students writing independently and not the teaching of writing. The duration and nature of allocated time is therefore important.

There is ultimately a need for teachers to maximise any classroom time by being constructively critical about what is included. Lemov (2021) recommends 'working the clock' by emphasising time management in all classroom activities in order to allocate it most effectively and efficiently. This is in contrast to the arbitrary and inflexible allocation of time which emphasises the 'coverage' of content, without any critical evaluation or adaptation of strategies to meet the needs of all learners (Mitton-Kukner & Orr, 2018; Poulton, 2025; Poulton & Mockler, 2024). It is the former approach, which maximises learning time, towards which teachers should strive. In this context, teachers can engage in 'expert noticing' (P. Ross & Gibson, 2010) which allows them to make frequent and informed modifications to teaching and learning according to students' responses (Hu et al., 2023).

Differentiation. With regard to modifications, some literature has considered teachers' approaches to differentiation. Despite definitional inconsistencies in the literature, differentiation is ultimately characterised by flexibility in response to diverse student needs (Ardenlid et al., 2025; L. J. Graham et al., 2021). Teachers can differentiate content, classroom processes, expected learning products and the learning environment according to student needs (Tomlinson, 2006). This conceptualisation of differentiation has been framed as being 'student-focused' as it involves teachers

using their professional judgement and assessments to determine student progress and plan accordingly. Others have raised concern that typical approaches to differentiation tend to be teacher-led and result in the grouping of students into more or less 'able' (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). Indeed, some publications on the topic refer to 'mixed-ability' classrooms and the reference to 'ability' would appear to work against the apparent flexibility inherent in differentiation (Tomlinson, 2004).

Differentiation has nonetheless been considered a key dimension of effective classroom literacy practice. It is characterised by teachers recognising student needs and providing opportunities for individual and small group support (Ardenlid et al., 2025; Loudon et al., 2008; Puzio et al., 2020). The responsive teaching that can occur within differentiated and individualised practice involves direct teacher interaction which increases student engagement and achievement (Lindner & Schwab, 2020; MacSuga-Gage & Gage, 2015; Wanzek et al., 2014). Further, the opportunities to respond that are afforded to students within this responsive teaching have been shown to have positive outcomes for all students, including students with disabilities (e.g., M. K. Burns et al., 2022; Lekwa et al., 2019; MacSuga-Gage & Simonsen, 2015; Sayeski et al., 2019). Within a differentiated approach, small group teaching has been shown to have a positive impact on student outcomes in the context of intervention (e.g., Vaughn et al., 2003), and the National Reading Panel (NICHD, 2000) reported superior student outcomes from small group, or Tier 2, teaching related to phonological awareness and phonics.

But an overemphasis on small groups may come at the expense of equitable learning opportunities and engagement for some students. The RTI model (J. J. Hoover & Patton, 2008; Vaughn & Swanson, 2015) suggests maximising optimal teaching and learning in the Tier 1, whole class setting. Despite this, research has demonstrated the prevalence of Tier 2, small group interventions in Australian schools (Quick, 2020). An overemphasis on small group teaching may indicate some inadequacy at the whole class level, leading to the need for additional Tier 2 or small group intervention (de Bruin et al., 2023). Indeed, student reading outcomes from Tier 1 whole class practice have been shown to be comparable to those drawn from Tier 2 interventions (Neitzel et al., 2022), suggesting that Tier 1 may be strengthened to prevent the need for additional interventions. Small group teaching can also be challenging for teachers to execute successfully because of the pressure to maintain the attention of students directly in front of them, and because of its reliance on independence among the other students in the classroom (Conradi Smith et al., 2022; Twyman & Heward, 2018). Teaching assistants have commonly been found in the literature to be deployed to assist in alleviating some of the pressure associated with differentiation in the Tier 1, whole class context (e.g., Carter et al., 2022; Giangreco, 2021).

Further, the small group support commonly associated with the literacy block usually refers to guided reading. The wide variation in children's literacy upon school entry makes it challenging for teachers to design teaching and learning successfully (Ruotsalainen et al., 2022). As such, guided reading involves assigning texts to students based on their percentages of accuracy and comprehension to determine an independent, instructional or frustration 'level' (Betts, 1946; Ford &

Opitz, 2008; Nicholas et al., 2021; T. Young, 2022). This practice has been used for some decades and remains pervasive in classrooms despite such levelled grouping limiting students' growth and access to higher level texts, and emerging evidence for other successful approaches to small group instruction for reading (T. Young, 2022). With regard to inclusive practice, the reliance on 'levels' for organising guided reading is akin to the categorisation of students according to perceptions of 'ability' which has been observed in recent research and demonstrated to undermine inclusive principles (Losberg & Zwozdiak-Myers, 2024; Reed, 2024; Woodcock et al., 2022).

But differentiation can be appropriate if student needs and groupings are considered flexibly (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). The success of classroom practice, be it whole class or small group, is contingent on a range of variables and it is ultimately the teacher's "detailed understanding of the multi-faceted nature of literacy and of the needs of a particular group of children" (Medwell et al., 1999, p. 48) that allows classroom practices to be effective. In this vein, Tickle (1999) prioritises teachers' "personal commitment and interpersonal involvement" (p. 136) rather than relying solely on content knowledge and classroom practices as indicators. Given that assessing student needs for the purpose of differentiation and enacting craft knowledge require some level of teacher agency (P. Jones et al., 2025), teacher autonomy is another of the "complex variables" (Ding & Sherman, 2006, p. 45) impacting on teachers and the literacy education they provide.

Teacher Autonomy. Teacher autonomy refers to teachers' capacity to determine their own approaches to classroom practice which is afforded by educational systems, structures and broader curriculum requirements (Simpson et al., 2018). Within this capacity, teacher agency refers to teachers' processes and decision-making in enacting that autonomy by applying their professional judgement and undertaking critical reflection (Chung, 2023; Ketonen & Nieminen, 2025; Poulton, 2020; Simpson et al., 2018). The amount of autonomy that should be afforded to teachers, from fully scripted lessons to entirely teacher-driven practice, has been considered in the literature (Grant et al., 2020; Jerrim et al., 2023). Teachers' autonomy over their own pedagogical decisions fosters the motivation to reflect on their practice and to remain in the profession (Gawne, 2023; Grant et al., 2020). The provision of too much autonomy can prove burdensome for teachers (Ketonen & Nieminen, 2025) while a lack of autonomy may lead to frustration (Daliri-Ngametua & Hardy, 2022; Gawne, 2023) but this may depend on teachers' levels of experience (L. J. Graham et al., 2020). Beginning teachers may seek more detailed guidance while experienced teachers may feel more confident and independent in enacting their professional autonomy (L. J. Graham et al., 2020).

And yet, broader leadership and whole school priorities may represent enablers or barriers to that agency. Accordingly, the significance of leadership and whole school effectiveness has been noted in the literature (e.g., te Riele et al., 2022). Kindall et al. (2018) reported on the impact of school principals on novice teachers' capacity to effectively teach literacy. The results emphasised the impact of the principal's knowledge and skill level on teachers' successful delivery of effective literacy practice

and mirror the findings of other research (Blasé & Blasé, 2000; Kindall et al., 2018). It is this interaction which enhances teachers' reflective behaviour and promotes professional growth (Blasé & Blasé, 2000). Further, teachers' enactment of changes in their classroom practice may depend upon their perceptions of time and resourcing (Gregoire, 2003; Poulton & Mockler, 2024), both of which may vary according to school priorities.

Beyond priorities and directives at the school level which may impact on teacher agency, broader system- and state-wide policy measures may also be impactful (Deuchar, 2025). A recent emphasis on explicit teaching, in both NSW and Victoria, demonstrates an attempt at overt policy control over classroom practice (NSW Department of Education, 2025c; State Government of Victoria, 2024). The emphasis on explicit teaching responds to findings from the research literature which demonstrate its benefits, including its capacity to prevent cognitive overload by structuring learning from simple to complex (Alfieri et al., 2011; CESE, 2020b; Hattie, 2009; Rosenshine, 2012; Tuovinen & Sweller, 1999).

But the emergence of this directive for teachers in NSW and Victorian schools may also suggest an underlying assumption that such practice was not already evident in many classrooms. Such an assumption fails to acknowledge primary teachers' breadth of knowledge "derived from cumulative experience and expertise" (E. Ross, 2024, p. 52), which they use to interpret such directives and syllabus requirements, and devalues the professional judgements teachers are capable of making (Daliri-Ngametua & Hardy, 2022; Hardy, 2025). As such, this emphasis represents an intervention into teachers' agency for choice of pedagogy which is relevant to their context and students. Such agency in enacting classroom practices – explicit or otherwise – is expected to align with policy directives and syllabus requirements, account for the specific needs of students in the classroom environment and be informed by research findings and available guidance in the literature. Teachers are responsible for creating this alignment in their classroom practice.

The success and nature of literacy education in any given classroom is contingent on a range of complex variables, some of which are outside the teacher's control (Ding & Sherman, 2006; Stronge et al., 2011). Although impacted by whole school- or system-related directives and other issues outlined here, it is teachers who can effect change, to at least some extent, at the classroom level.

In their study of teachers' engagement with inclusive pedagogy, Florian and Spratt (2013) focused on three principles of an inclusive pedagogical approach, including a teacher's belief that they are capable of teaching all children. These "invisible complexities" (Nind et al., 2016, p. 159) and the ways in which they are enacted and manifested in the classroom must be considered. In the final section of the chapter, a synthesis of imperatives emerging from the review of inclusive education and literacy education is presented. The benefits of merging the two focal points are highlighted, providing a rationale for the study.

Literacy Education as Inclusive Practice

Given the tremendous variations from school to school and implementation to implementation, we should be very clear that the prescription of a method can never in itself guarantee the best of all possible outcomes. However well-defined the method might be, however stellar its documented research outcomes, classroom successes (and failures) depend on much more than the written agenda held out to the teacher. (M. J. Adams, 1990, p. 38-39)

Variation in the literacy practices used in early years classrooms is to be expected, given that students begin literacy learning from a range of different starting points and understandings developed prior to school (Ruotsalainen et al., 2022). Indeed, emphases on more ‘constrained’ skills such as phonemic awareness in kindergarten have been reported in the literature, compared to a focus on ‘unconstrained’ skills in the primary grades (e.g., Bingham & Hall-Kenyon, 2012). The notion of critical literacy aligns with this expected variation in the context of developing students’ and teachers’ critical orientations to texts and practices, as a way of “being and doing in the world” (Vasquez et al., 2019, p. 308). Such a framework emphasises the empowerment of students, and teachers, as critical thinkers and therefore aligns with inclusive education in its promotion of literacy for all learners.

But the substantial evidence base regarding optimal practice in literacy education, as outlined in this chapter, certainly supports standardising at least some classroom literacy practices and somewhat reducing such variation. For example, there is consensus in the literature on the necessity of explicit, systematic instruction in the essential components of literacy. However, there is also a need for a “comprehensive and educationally accessible framework of literacy instruction” (J. Wilson & Colmar, 2008, p. 101) which moves beyond the ‘local’ knowledge (Fitzgerald, 1999) associated with literacy to consider how the key elements are integrated and how teachers curate the classroom literacy experience. A deeper understanding of teachers’ underlying knowledge, approaches to implementation which caters for the diverse needs of students, and inherent beliefs on which their practice is based, is missing from the literature as research on this topic has yet to be undertaken in the Australian context.

The Current Research Landscape

While literacy education is evidently an active area of research inquiry spanning both quantitative and qualitative methods (Teale et al., 2020), literature in the field of literacy education frequently defines ‘literacy’ in narrow terms and tends to isolate only some aspects of literacy acquisition. In Australia and internationally, prior research has focused on specific pedagogical practices relevant to literacy, as discussed earlier, including reading (e.g., de Graaff et al., 2009), writing (e.g., Guo et al., 2023; Malpique et al., 2017) and spelling (e.g., McNeill & Kirk, 2014). Research has also investigated intervention programs to improve teacher knowledge (Goldfeld et al., 2022; Neuman & Cunningham, 2009; Scarparolo & Hammond, 2018) or to address the needs of students struggling to acquire certain literacy skills (Ecalte et al., 2015; Galuschka et al., 2020; Wheldall et al., 2016).

With regard to research related to teachers, some studies have compared their pedagogical approaches to literacy with student achievement (e.g., Piasta et al., 2009; Xue & Meisels, 2004). Others have considered teacher knowledge, beliefs or orientations to literacy (e.g., Arya et al., 2024; Broemmel et al., 2021; Lammert et al., 2022; Parsons et al., 2017; Tschannen-Moran & Johnson, 2011), though these frequently centre on reading (e.g., Hammond, 2015; Jordan et al., 2018; Moats, 1994; Spear-Swerling et al., 2005) or focus on pre-service, not in-service, teachers (e.g., Meeks et al., 2020). In this study, in-service teachers' approaches to classroom literacy practice were therefore prioritised.

There has also been a more recent epistemic tendency towards prioritising cognitive research to the exclusion of other methods which may benefit the field (T. Shanahan, 2020b; Yaden et al., 2021). Within this emphasis, there has been a particular focus on intervention studies which examine student growth in a singular domain of literacy without consideration of a coordinated approach to the successful teaching and learning of literacy more broadly in the classroom context (Teale et al., 2020). This focus has included the promotion of randomised controlled trials (RCTs; Connolly et al., 2018). Despite concerns that such methods fail to appreciate the social complexities of literacy and of education research and that they devalue other, qualitative methods (McPherson et al., 2020; Parra & Edwards, 2024), there is supporting evidence that RCTs can be applicable to education contexts (Connolly et al., 2018).

Nonetheless, a focus only on a singular domain of literacy in the context of intervention is not applicable to classroom teachers seeking to address all literacy domains with a unique group of students in a whole class context (Derewianka et al., 2024). Experiential and contextual evidence demonstrating the connection of syllabus, research and practice is lacking in the research literature but could be of value to teachers in determining their approaches to literacy practice (Cook & Cook, 2016).

Hence in this study, classroom practice addressing all literacy domains in the whole class context was considered. Recent research has considered teachers' approaches to core literacy practice across grade levels, but not in the Australian context (e.g., Ahmadi, 2021; Reed, 2024). A recent Australian study claiming to examine the 'literacy block' maintains an emphasis on reading comprehension and relies on self-reported practice from a teacher survey without observational data to clarify execution (Smith et al., 2023, 2025). Further, the study sought responses from teachers across grades and throughout states and territories, all of which have varied interpretations of the Australian curriculum, system-wide mandates and specific requirements.

With regard to the emphasis on inclusive pedagogy in the present study through the IPA (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Florian & Spratt, 2013), although there is emerging evidence of its benefit as a framework for examining inclusive practice among novice and experienced teachers (e.g., Brennan et al., 2021; Florian, 2012), its application in empirical research has been minimal. Studies using the IPA as a framework for exploring inclusive practice have occurred overseas in early childhood (Klibthong & Agbenyega, 2018), primary (Brennan & King, 2022; Brennan et al., 2021) or tertiary settings (Moosa

& Bekker, 2021) and none have occurred specifically in the context of English literacy education. The methodologies involved in existing research using the IPA have included the collection of observational data and semi-structured interviews with a small number of participants, as in the present study. None have also included initial self-reported data using a survey of a larger sample of teachers. Further, existing research has commonly relied on participants undertaking professional learning in inclusive pedagogy and examining the subsequent execution of this pedagogy in the classroom. Research has yet to consider existing practice with regard to an inclusive pedagogical approach to literacy education: the aim of the present study.

While the IPA (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Florian & Spratt, 2013) has commonly been used as a framework for considering inclusive pedagogies (Koutsouris et al., 2024), it has been suggested that many conceptualisations of inclusive pedagogy, including the IPA, are “idealistically driven and...detached from reality” (Koutsouris et al., 2024, p. 279). As noted earlier, the emphases on student choice and on the rejection of ‘ability’ grouping associated with the IPA may represent contradictions which are challenging for teachers to overcome in practice (see Theoretical Framework; Koutsouris et al., 2024; Norwich & Koutsouris, 2020). Similarly, the inherent tension between promoting student commonality, and recognising student difference and diversity, may be difficult for teachers to negotiate in practice and has been queried in the literature (Koutsouris et al., 2024; Norwich & Koutsouris, 2020; Pozo-Armentia et al., 2020). This tension is evident in the IPA and IPAA (Florian & Spratt, 2015), and in other similar inclusive frameworks such as the Universal Design for Learning (Capp, 2020; D. Rose, 2001). Further, it has been acknowledged that such models are commonly used but can be considered under researched with regard to their efficacy (Loreman, 2017).

Nonetheless, the IPA and IPAA are frameworks which have emerged from research evidence in the inclusive education domain (Loreman, 2017). The IPA has more commonly been applied in the context of primary education which aligns with the focus of this thesis (Koutsouris et al., 2024). Further, the purposeful alignment of the IPA with the three constructs (‘knowing’, ‘doing’ and ‘believing’) articulated by Rouse (2008) in the present study overcomes the potential contradictions identified in the IPA. While such criticisms with regard to student choice and groupings emphasise the ‘doing’ of inclusive practice (Koutsouris et al., 2024; Norwich & Koutsouris, 2020), the use of all three constructs to frame the key assumptions of the IPA and IPAA deliberately broadens that emphasis to include teachers’ ‘knowing’ and ‘believing’ as equally relevant to inclusive practice and therefore to research investigating its development (Rouse, 2008).

Some research has attempted to define literacy and to examine the nature of literacy practice more broadly in the classroom setting, with some consideration of inclusion: the *In Teachers’ Hands* (Louden et al., 2005) and *Teaching for Growth* (Louden et al., 2008) projects are the most substantial studies of this kind in the Australian context. Both considered literacy beyond skill acquisition.

However, there are several critical issues with the Louden et al. studies which this research project has addressed in terms of location, participant age group and context, and methodological focus.

Firstly, both studies were conducted in Western Australia. Despite a national curriculum, NSW also operates a state-based syllabus (the *English K-10 Syllabus*; NESA, 2025b) that aligns with but is distinct from this national curriculum, making NSW a distinctive context in which to consider teachers' approaches to literacy education. Secondly, both studies considered students in their first, second and third years of school. And yet the first year is unique in that it represents students' "swift transition to visible pedagogic practices" (Kervin et al., 2017, p. 482) that occurs as they move from preschool settings to formal literacy education. As such, the focus of the present study was limited to students in their first year of formal schooling in NSW.

Thirdly and most importantly, the methodological approach of these studies must be noted. The studies rely on the *Classroom Literacy Observation Schedule – Revised* (CLOS-R; Louden et al., 2008) and its original iteration (Louden et al., 2005) which features 27 'effective' literacy practices organised according to five dimensions: respect, knowledge, orchestration, support and differentiation. The schedule was used with the purpose of making some discernment between the frequency of literacy practices used by 'less effective', 'effective' and 'more effective' classroom teachers (Louden et al., 2005; Louden et al., 2008). Significantly, this labelling of 'effectiveness' was determined according to value-added analysis of student literacy performance at the beginning and end of a calendar year. Teachers whose students had achieved lower than expected learning gains on this assessment were classified as 'less effective' while those whose students made greater gains than anticipated were deemed 'more effective' (Louden et al., 2008). Although the present study collected evidence using the CLOS-R to examine and quantify literacy practices, it did not assess the 'effectiveness' of the teachers who were observed.

With the methodological approach in mind, despite the definitional language used to outline the five domains of the CLOS-R suggesting some potential emphasis on the principles of inclusive education, the domains and underlying practices are insufficient for interrogating inclusive practice with any nuance. 'Respect' refers to the teacher's rapport with students and a sense of credibility and citizenship among the teacher and students which lends itself to an orderly flow and positive learning environment (Louden et al., 2008). The 'knowledge' dimension refers to the explicitness and explanatory nature of the literacy instruction which addresses both oral and written language competencies, equips students with a metalanguage for discussing literacy concepts and relies on the teacher selecting activities of substance, not 'busy work' (Louden et al., 2008). 'Orchestration' includes the organisation of a predictable, structured literacy environment and an awareness of the pace of learning and smooth transitions between activities (Louden et al., 2008). In this context, the teacher's successful 'support' of students via scaffolding and timely feedback must recognise individual student needs through appropriate 'differentiation'.

Within the 'support' and 'differentiation' dimensions, the studies considered 'inclusion' in terms of particular practices but did not account for teachers' overall "inclusive pedagogy that responds to the individuality of all the children in their classrooms" (Florian & Spratt, 2013, p. 133) and which cannot be determined by a simple 'checklist' of isolated components. While the practices themselves can be evidence-informed in isolation, their actual execution matters. For example, 'inclusion' as a practice, according to the CLOS-R (Louden et al., 2008), can be evidenced by the teacher providing small group opportunities for targeted teaching based on student needs. But small group opportunities for teaching and learning, if overrepresented in teaching sessions, could indicate an inefficient allocation of time and come at the expense of any targeted teacher interaction for many students.

Further, while a scale such as the CLOS-R (Louden et al., 2008) can be useful as a guide as to effective, evidence-informed literacy practice, issues with the notion of frequency and the overlap among the identified practices cannot be overlooked. Any observation of any occurrence of the 27 practices suggests at least some alignment of practice with the source research literature (Louden et al., 2008) but this itself is limited. Although it represented a thorough synthesis at the time of publishing, the literature on which the CLOS-R relies (Louden et al., 2008, p. 21) was all published prior to 2007. Any subsequent application of the scale requires a thorough consideration of more recent research literature, particularly given the progress made in education research in the last decade and significant updates to syllabus design in some Australian states.

The authors noted that practices were observed more frequently in 'more effective' teachers' classrooms (Louden et al., 2008), but infrequent use of a practice within a limited set of observations cannot be equated with ineffectiveness, even if the selection of observations is considered to be generally representative of a teacher's classroom practice. The absence of a practice in a set of observations does not suggest absence altogether. Classroom observations may provide insight into teachers' general approach, but literacy practice is dynamic and varies throughout and across sessions, days and weeks of teaching and learning. Some practices may be interspersed more or less frequently throughout a day, week, term or year depending on the focus or priorities for teaching and learning. Many of the practices identified in the CLOS-R (2008) also overlap. For example, the 'Explanation text' (Louden et al., 2008, p. 109) and 'Oral language' (Louden et al., 2008, p. 110) practices both mention the teacher providing opportunities to guide students in comprehending texts. Similarly, both the 'scaffolding' (Louden et al., 2008, p.112) and 'inclusion' (Louden et al., 2008, p.113) practices refer to the teacher making modifications according to the needs of students.

Hence, the present study aimed to investigate approaches to whole class literacy pedagogy for evidence of inclusive practice with students in their first year of formal schooling, without assigning a label of 'effectiveness' to participating teachers and, importantly, with a detailed and nuanced interrogation of observed practices. While the CLOS-R (Louden et al., 2008) was used alongside current research literature as a guide to categorise and quantify classroom literacy practices for the purpose of analysis, it was embedded in the context of inclusive principles drawn from Rouse (2008)

and Florian and Spratt (2013) to mitigate the limitations of the schedule's use in isolation. The triangulation of both quantitative and qualitative data in order to corroborate findings and deepen the understanding that already emerges from the literature on literacy practice and on inclusive education (Leko et al., 2023; Love et al., 2022) is paramount.

The Impetus for the Study

As there is an apparent need to revisit the principles of the Salamanca Statement to improve inclusive education in Australia (J. Anderson & Boyle, 2019; Commonwealth of Australia, 2023), examining existing practice in the classroom environment may be of benefit in informing teachers and teacher education programs (Finkelstein et al., 2021). Improvement in student achievement is a priority for all classroom teachers in literacy education, which remains a highly contested area (United Nations, 2015) and therefore represents a significant context in which to explore inclusion. Further, research in the literacy domain requires an approach that is inclusive of both the key practices related to literacy and the role of the teacher and students in facilitating these practices.

The IPA (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Florian & Spratt, 2013) addresses the complexity of this context by allowing for an interrogation of classroom practice that moves beyond the intersection framework outlined in Table 2.1 and which may offer new insights not yet gleaned from literacy-specific research. There is emerging evidence that the IPA and IPAA can be of benefit to prospective, newly qualified, and more experienced teachers' endeavours to enact inclusive pedagogy in the classroom (e.g., Brennan et al., 2021) and that it can be used as a framework through which to make sense of inclusive classroom practice (e.g., Florian & Beaton, 2018; J. Kim et al., 2022; Klibthong & Agbenyega, 2018; Morina & Orozco, 2021; Pantić et al., 2022).

Research has yet to consider existing practice with regard to an inclusive pedagogical approach to literacy education. While there exists substantial evidence as to optimal practices in literacy education (see Table 2.1), research is yet to provide sufficient guidance as to the enactment of these practices in the classroom (Seidenberg et al., 2020). Teachers' current approaches to classroom literacy as 'practice-based evidence' (Cook & Cook, 2016) must be properly understood if their alignment with research and potential areas for improvement are to be considered. The 'big six' (Konza, 2014; NICHD, 2000), with the addition of writing, is therefore a framework with which to examine the 'syllabus, content, pedagogy and allocation of time' variable identified for teachers in Figure 1.2 in Chapter 1. As a variable within teachers' control, it can be applied within the context of the IPA (Florian & Spratt, 2013) to consider teachers' approaches to literacy practice through an inclusive lens, as shown in Figure 2.3.

Figure 2.3

'Syllabus, Content, Pedagogy and Allocation of Time' Relevant to Literacy Education Through the English Curriculum Area within the Constructs Identified by Rouse (2008)



Importantly, although the 'big six' (Konza, 2014; NICHD, 2000), with the addition of writing, is used as a framework for considering inclusive practice, the underlying components are not considered to be isolated but to be interconnected and overlapping with regard to actual classroom practice.

Indeed, Florian and Spratt (2013) refer to the IPA in this way:

Whilst an analytical framework, by its very nature, seeks to fragment practice into its constituent parts, in ways that can be captured by research methods, the actual practice itself is a complex interaction between the layers identified in the framework. (p. 128)

Examining classroom practice related to literacy – or to any other key learning area – from an inclusive pedagogical perspective, as described earlier, prioritises the role of teachers as catalysts for educational change who can, to some extent, determine their own impact on the students they teach. Although students' individual needs are acknowledged by the IPA, it is teachers and the classroom practice they design that can be influenced in order to promote inclusive pedagogy. As a variable that is within their control, teachers' approaches to classroom literacy practice warrant investigation.

Conclusion

The field of literacy education is complex. The literature demonstrates that aspects of literacy education have been explored in depth from multiple research perspectives but an examination of the application of this research from the teacher perspective has been limited. Further, the Inclusive Pedagogical Approach (IPA; Florian & Spratt, 2013) has not yet been applied as a paradigm for the implementation of literacy education as inclusive practice in Australian classrooms. Individual studies within the research literature thus far have not been inclusive of all key elements of classroom literacy practice, nor have they applied inclusion as a lens through which to consider literacy education. Given the potential benefits to teachers of applying the IPA, and the implementation of the current *English K-10 Syllabus* (NESA, 2025b) since 2023, NSW kindergarten classrooms are a significant context in which to consider teachers' approaches to inclusive literacy practice.

The aim of this research was therefore to use the IPA (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Florian & Spratt, 2013) as a paradigm for examining classroom literacy practices specifically through the English curriculum area in NSW. The design and implementation of this research by a "practitioner researcher" (Menter et al., 2011, p. 9) allows for detailed and informed interrogation of educational practices (Justice & Pullen, 2003).

This study examined the initial overarching question:

1. What are kindergarten teachers' approaches to literacy pedagogy?

Alongside this, the study examined the following sub-questions with a focus on the enactment of the IPA:

2. To what extent does early literacy practice align with an Inclusive Pedagogical Approach (Florian & Spratt, 2013) in terms of teachers:
 - a. Knowing?
 - b. Doing?
 - c. Believing?

Importantly, the inner circle of Figure 2.3, which includes the 'big six' with the addition of writing, directly reflects the first research question. The outer circle directly reflects the second research question by representing the IPA as an additional layer of the framework to enable a more critical drawing of meta-inferences from the data. Further, there is a paradox inherent in the framework itself, as represented in Figure 2.3. That is, zooming *out* to consider the second research question with regard to the IPA elucidates more than just a magnified consideration of literacy practice via the inner circle. Although such a consideration of literacy practice could be deeply fascinating on its own, the application of the added layer of the IPA via the mixed methods approach selected for this study represents a purposeful combining of the two fields of literacy education and inclusive education. It is this purposeful combining of the fields which addresses the second research question and allows for a more compelling and revealing interrogation of the two important areas than a consideration of either field on its own.

Section One has elucidated consideration of the conceptualisation of inclusive literacy education. Section Two now examines inclusive literacy education using data drawn from kindergarten teachers and their classrooms.

Section Two: *Examining* Inclusive Literacy Education

Chapter 3

Methodology

The following chapter outlines the methodology undertaken in this research. It begins with an outline of how the methodology aligns with the theoretical paradigm of this study. This is followed by a description of the research design and an outline of the phases of the research study, including measures and procedures relevant to each phase.

As discussed earlier, the definition of 'literacy' that emerges from the literature is one which encompasses the cognitive and sociocultural influences which can be "integrated into a unitary theoretical framework for literacy instruction and research" (Davidson, 2010, p. 255). The definition of literacy adopted for the purpose of this study, and appreciated as a "dynamic process" (Florian & Spratt, 2013, p. 122) through the Inclusive Pedagogical Approach (IPA; Florian & Spratt, 2013), is that of ACARA (n.d.-a):

Students become literate as they develop the knowledge, skills and dispositions to interpret and use language confidently for learning and communicating in and out of school and for participating effectively in society. Literacy involves students listening to, reading, viewing, speaking, writing and creating oral, print, visual and digital texts, and using and modifying language for different purposes in a range of contexts. (para. 1)

As described earlier, the IPA (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Florian & Spratt, 2013) represents the theoretical paradigm for this research. Inclusive practice that aligns with this approach is dependent on the teacher 'knowing' about relevant policy, pedagogy and support strategies, 'doing' inclusive practice based on this knowledge and 'believing' in their capacity to successfully teach all students (Rouse, 2008). The present study examined classroom practice specific to the teaching of literacy through the English curriculum area for evidence of such an inclusive approach.

Importantly, each of these three constructs interacts in the context of the many variables which impact teachers and students in the classroom environment. The relationship between 'knowing', 'doing' and 'believing' in teachers' enactment of inclusion is reciprocal (Brennan & King, 2022). For example, teachers may develop their knowledge of inclusive literacy practice which, in turn, leads to changes in their practice and beliefs about student capacity (Kang & Cheng, 2014). Conversely, a teacher may believe in the principles of inclusion but lack the knowledge to successfully enact it and therefore be reluctant to implement it in the classroom.

The challenge of determining whether classroom practice represents an inclusive pedagogical approach has previously been acknowledged (Florian & Spratt, 2013). To find evidence, pedagogy must be adequately explored with regard to each of the three constructs of 'knowing', 'doing' and 'believing'. For example, observations of classroom practice ('doing') alone would not provide sufficient insight into the classroom teacher's reasoning, decision-making processes and 'believing' relevant to their classroom interactions (Florian & Spratt, 2013). Similarly, an outline of teachers' 'knowing' about inclusive literacy practice does not account for its enactment in the classroom. As such, research that aligns with the IPA must investigate each construct in isolation with sufficient

rigour. Further, the triangulation of data gathered to examine each construct allows for a more detailed exploration of classroom practice and the knowledge and beliefs that underpin it. Given the cyclical relationship between 'knowing', 'doing' and 'believing' with regard to inclusive practice (Brennan & King, 2022; Rouse, 2008), the exploration of the IPA in the present study required the following research design.

Research Design

A mixed method, exploratory, sequential design was used for this research project (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Leko et al., 2023; Teddlie & Sammons, 2010). A mixed methods design was deliberately chosen to align with the epistemological stance of the researcher, and with the theoretical paradigm of the study, as described above. The sociocultural perspective adopted in this study considers the active construction of knowledge which is context-dependent but not limited to certain instructional strategies (Collins, 2013; Howell & Nolet, 2000; Piaget, 1954; Schuh, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978). Further, this research operates through an inclusive lens, and the development of inclusive practice is context-specific (Finkelstein et al., 2021; Florian, 2014). Given the contextual nature of the construction of literacy knowledge and inclusive practice, the mixed methods research design is therefore framed by sociocultural theory as the quantitative and qualitative data provide different insights into the dynamic contexts of students and teachers.

Historically, there has been tension between researchers who favour either quantitative or qualitative methods and the philosophical stances underpinning them. It has been argued that these paradigms are incompatible (Howe, 1988) and must not be combined.

However, mixed methods research emerged in the 1950s and began to be formally applied in the 1980s as a 'third paradigm' in research, including in the field of education (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Johnson et al., 2007; McKim, 2017). It moves beyond longstanding debates characterised by the assumption that quantitative and qualitative methods are divergent (Niglas, 2010; Sammons, 2010). Indeed, mixed methods research has been "deemed more appropriate for the study of educational institutions and processes" (Sammons, 2010, p. 700-701) that are dynamic and contingent on multiple variables. This is particularly the case in the field of literacy which itself has been marked by similar dichotomies and persistent debate (Hamston & Scull, 2007; Spiegel, 1998). While purely quantitative methodologies may contribute to the evidence base in education, they do not generate "understanding of educational effectiveness of value to practitioners" (Sammons, 2010, p. 701). Similarly, while qualitative research can be useful in isolation, it may lack generalisability and credibility (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

The combination of these approaches through mixed methods research has "the potential to generate new insights" (Sammons, 2010, p. 699) which may not be gained from either method on its own. An important benefit of mixed methods research lies in its potential to provide a broader picture of phenomena by triangulating different data to corroborate findings and deepen understanding

(Johnson et al., 2007; McKim, 2017). It moves beyond the constraints of multiple-methods research by not simply analysing both quantitative and qualitative data in isolation but by purposefully integrating the data and allowing for meta-inferences to be drawn across the selected data collection methods (Leko et al., 2023; Love et al., 2022). This integration is particularly significant in the context of education and aligns with the IPA, given the complexities of students' and teachers' experiences in the classroom.

The limitations of purely quantitative methods, which cannot capture the nuance of the classroom experience, have been acknowledged by the authors of recent empirical research related to areas of literacy including reading (e.g., Serry et al., 2022; Smith et al., 2025) and writing (e.g., Malpique et al., 2023). These examples relied on self-reported quantitative data from classroom teachers without accompanying observational data to replicate, confirm or challenge findings. Some studies which have combined both quantitative and qualitative methods have focused on a singular aspect, such as handwriting (e.g., E. Hunter & Potvin, 2020). Others have used mixed methods and considered literacy practice more broadly (e.g., Parrila et al., 2024; Piasta et al., 2020; Reed, 2024; Ruotsalainen et al., 2022; Wright et al., 2024) but not in just the first year of formal schooling and not in the Australian context.

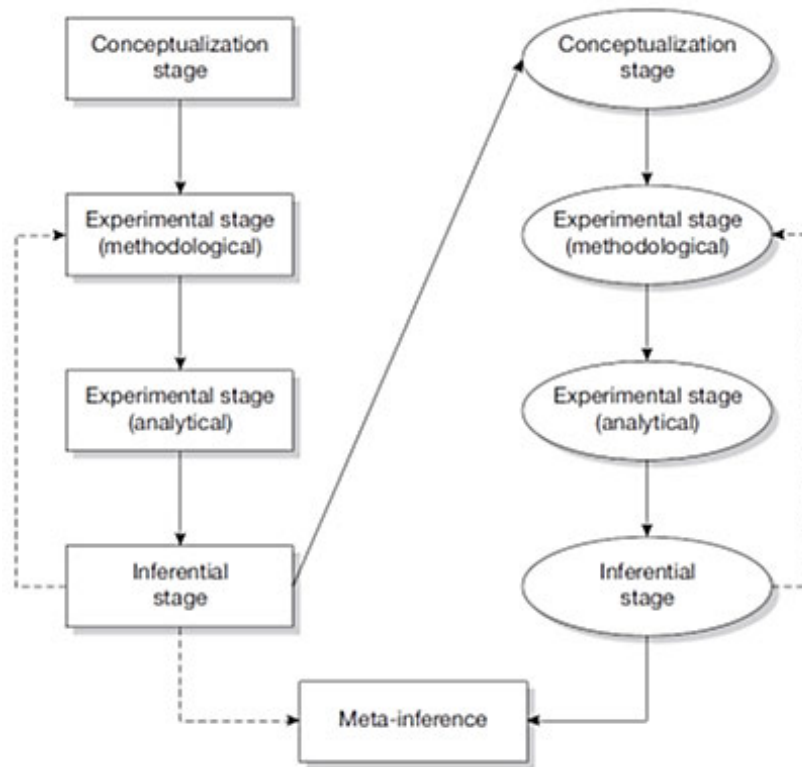
With this in mind, the present study aimed to examine inclusive literacy pedagogy specifically in an Australian context using a mixed methods approach. Given that research in this field has yet to consider literacy education more broadly through an inclusive pedagogical lens, the present study was necessarily exploratory in nature. Exploratory research has been described as examining novel areas in a descriptive way, not with a view to drawing conclusions but with the aim of gaining insight into a context or issue and laying a foundation for future research (Haile, 2023; Swedberg, 2020). The flexibility and adaptability of this approach is applicable to the context of literacy education, given the nuance necessary in interpreting findings related to teachers and teaching, and the contextual and unpredictable 'noise' of the real classroom experience (Cook & Cook, 2016). The aim of the present study was not to generate generalisable results but to explore inclusive literacy pedagogy in a way that may provide 'practice-based evidence' alongside the guidance of evidence elicited from the literature, which may be more applicable to classroom teachers. Practice-based evidence has been described as being a useful follow-up to efficacy studies by examining the actual implementation of practices in the classroom context (Cook & Cook, 2016).

The main study was conducted in two successive phases involving quantitative and qualitative data collection (see Figure 3.1). The first, quantitative phase involved teacher questionnaires which elicited demographic information, definitions of literacy, descriptions of the literacy block and levels of agreement with statements related to inclusive literacy practice. It allowed the researcher to gain an insight into participants' 'knowing' about inclusive literacy pedagogy. This phase also informed the "purposeful sampling" (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p. 82) of participants for further qualitative exploration. The second phase involving classroom observations and semi-structured interviews

provided additional insight into participants ‘doing’ and ‘believing’ in inclusive literacy practice and therefore enabled the researcher to “strengthen the explanatory power of the research” (Biesta, 2017, p. 161).

Figure 3.1

Illustration of Sequential Mixed Methods Design (Reproduced from Teddlie & Sammons, 2010, p. 120).

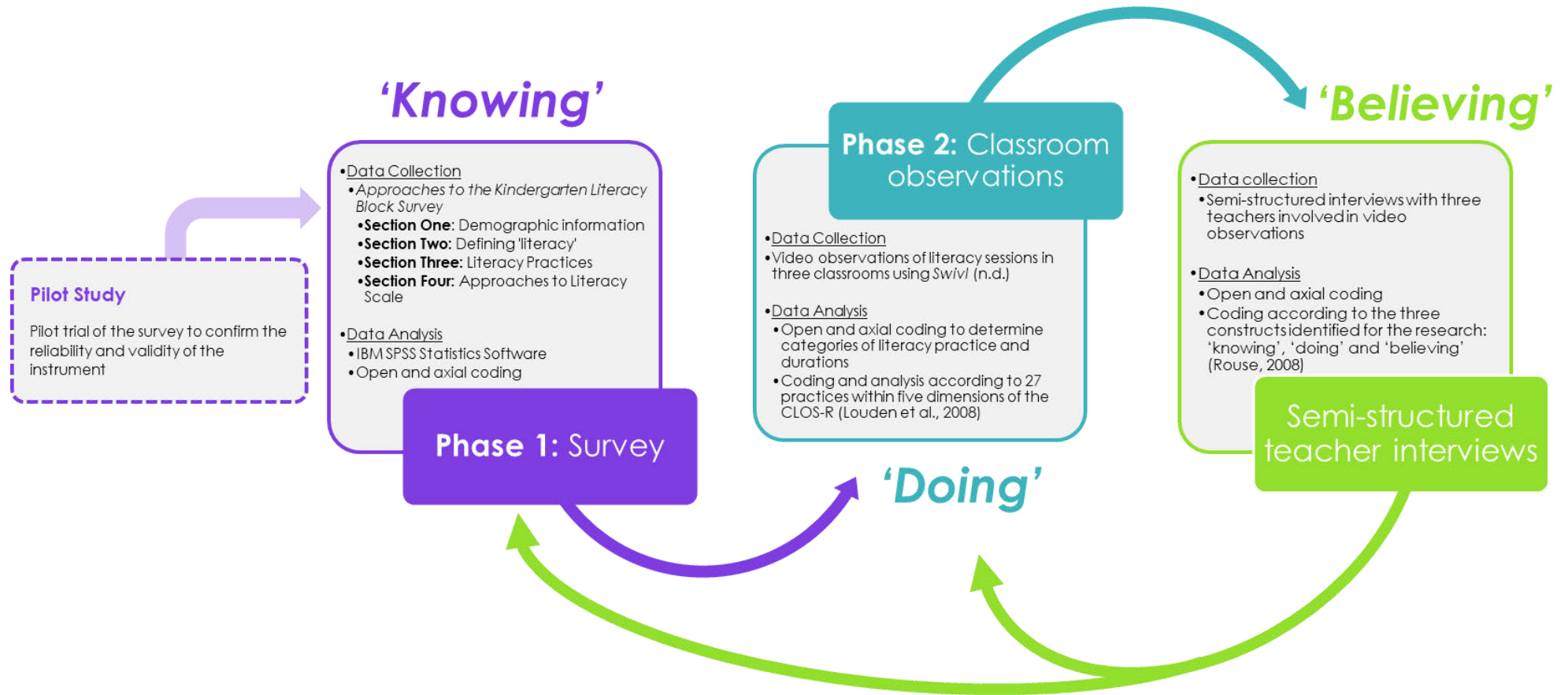


The two-phase approach allowed “both quantitative and qualitative methods [to] corroborate, elaborate and initiate findings from the other method” (Rossman & Wilson, 1985, p. 633). A broader consideration of the data gleaned from both phases of the study provided a “unified understanding” (Creswell & Garrett, 2008, p. 32) of participants’ approaches to classroom literacy practice and their alignment with an inclusive pedagogical framework. While all data collection methods provided some insight into all three research constructs (‘knowing’, ‘doing’ and ‘believing’; Rouse, 2008), each method elicited information and understanding particularly relevant to one of the constructs (see Figure 3.2).

Although this study does not allow the researcher to generalise about the practices and pedagogical approaches – inclusive or otherwise – of kindergarten teachers, it provides an understanding of teachers’ knowledge, practice and beliefs with regard to inclusive literacy practice. Florian (2014) recommends a move towards theorising practice by exploring teachers’ “principles, assumptions and actions” (p. 293) in inclusive pedagogy. The complexity of this context, especially in relation to literacy, cannot be properly understood using a single method (Florian & Spratt, 2013). The choice of a mixed methods, exploratory approach therefore acknowledges the “realities of classrooms and teachers” (Cook & Cook, 2016, p. 146).

Figure 3.2

Visual Overview of the Mixed Methods Research Design



It has been argued that potential hinderances to validity and reliability in research can never be entirely mitigated and researchers must instead strive to remain cognisant of these conditions throughout the research process (L. Cohen et al., 2011). Given the complexity of the inclusive literacy context, maintaining reliability and validity in this mixed methods research study was an important consideration (L. Cohen et al., 2011). With regard to the overall research design, the two-phase approach involving both quantitative and qualitative methods, as outlined below, served to increase the validity and credibility of the study (Jick, 1979; Rossman & Wilson, 1985; Schoonenboom, 2022). Importantly, the triangulation of data from contrasting data collection methods enhanced the validity of the study (L. Cohen et al., 2011). Specific measures were undertaken to address validity and reliability concerns in relation to certain data collection points which are detailed throughout the following sections.

Participants

In-service kindergarten teachers from Sydney, New South Wales (NSW), Australia, were invited to participate in the research. In NSW, kindergarten is the first year of formal education involving children of 5 or 6 years of age. The school year in NSW schools is divided into four terms which run from the end of January to mid-December.

In NSW, primary schools which include kindergarten teachers and students operate within three different school sectors. The Department of Education is responsible for government or public schools which are available for all students from the local area to attend. Catholic schools in NSW operate under a Catholic Schools NSW office within a Diocese or as an independent Catholic school. Independent or non-government schools are governed by their own independent board and may or may not have a religious affiliation.

Participants in the main study sample for Phase One ($n = 266$) and Phase Two ($n = 3$) of the project were kindergarten teachers drawn from government primary schools and primary schools in two Catholic dioceses in Sydney, NSW. In total, during main study data collection in 2022, there were 2,151 government schools in NSW (ACARA, n.d.-b), including infants, primary, secondary, central and community schools, schools for specific purposes, hospital schools and those facilitating distance education. Of these, 526 schools with kindergarten students were identified within a 25km radius in the centre of Sydney for the present study. There were 597 Catholic schools in NSW, including primary, secondary, combined and special schools (ACARA, n.d.-b). Of these, 154 schools with kindergarten students were identified within a 25km radius of Sydney for the present study.

Phase One Data Collection

The purpose of Phase One was to gather an initial understanding of kindergarten classroom teachers' conceptualisations of literacy practice. The focus of this phase was on teachers 'knowing' (Rouse, 2008) about literacy, how it develops and relevant pedagogies. A survey instrument was

designed for the purpose of this phase of the study. The following section outlines the survey design, including piloting, followed by the data collection procedure and approach to analysis.

Survey Instrument

Data collection for this research took place between May, 2021 and October, 2022. This timing was significant because it just preceded the mandatory implementation of the current K-2 English syllabus (NESA, 2025b) in NSW which began from 2023 onwards. The syllabus was developed following a NSW Government Curriculum Review in 2018. The current syllabus is described as emphasising essential content, knowledge and skills (NESA, 2025a) and it prioritises the explicit inclusion of writing to align with recommendations from research and the curriculum review. The change to this new syllabus represented a significant transition for NSW schools and teachers. Participating teachers at the time of data collection would therefore have been aware of the impending implementation of the new syllabus and some participants' schools may have already been trialling its implementation. Their responses may therefore have reflected recent amendments to their classroom literacy practice according to the requirements of the new syllabus and the emphasis on explicit teaching (NSW Department of Education, 2025c).

The survey instrument designed for the purpose of this study was piloted with a small number of teachers ($n = 14$) from independent schools. This process was used to confirm the internal reliability of the instrument and helped to establish the face validity of the questionnaire (M. S. Allen et al., 2023). Although the pilot study was limited by sample size, the results led to changes to the survey instrument used in the main study. An outline of the pilot study procedure, results and analysis that informed the redesign of the survey can be found in Appendix B. The pilot study survey instrument can be found in Appendix C.

The final survey instrument used for the main study is included in Appendix D and was divided into four sections. Section One collected participants' demographic information, including their age, gender, qualifications and years of teaching. Section Two asked participants to define 'literacy' in their own words. Teachers' definitions and perceptions of literacy have been shown to reflect their pedagogical approaches (Opoku-Amankwa & Brew-Hammond, 2011).

Section Three provided the ACARA (n.d.-a) definition of 'literacy' and featured an open-ended question based on the *Language Arts Activity Grid* developed by Cunningham et al. (2009). Although designed originally to ascertain teachers' beliefs about reading instruction specifically, it was adapted for the survey to gather information about literacy practice more broadly (Spear-Swerling & Zibulsky, 2014). Participants were asked to outline their approach to the literacy session in as much detail as possible, including pedagogies, specific practices, materials or activities and timings.

The allocation of time within participants' literacy sessions was considered important to provide insight into their knowledge and inherent beliefs about literacy practice (Cunningham et al., 2009). Teacher knowledge has previously been found to predict teachers' allocation of classroom time

(Spear-Swerling & Zibulsky, 2014). The allocation of time by teachers and students' actual engagement in learning are not necessarily directly proportional (Gromada & Shewbridge, 2016). An underemphasis or overemphasis on any one component of literacy practice could reveal an inefficient use of time and the omission of practices which could benefit students (Spear-Swerling & Zibulsky, 2014).

Section Four asked participants to respond to questions to determine their approach to early literacy practice, with regard to all three constructs, using a 7-point Likert scale from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. It has been suggested that Likert scales should have no fewer than 7 categories to increase reliability (I. E. Allen & Seaman, 2007; L. Cohen et al., 2011). Seven-point scales are useful because they allow for a "degree of sensitivity and differentiation of response whilst still generating numbers" (L. Cohen et al., 2011, p. 386).

Some items were drawn from existing measures of teacher knowledge (Lenski et al., 1998) and literacy practices (Louden et al., 2008). Both sources reported strong internal reliability of their measures (Lenski et al., 1998; Loudon et al., 2008). Items 1, 7, 8, 11, 12 and 14 were adapted directly from items in the *Literacy Orientation Survey* (Lenski et al., 1998). Other items in the survey were newly developed by the researcher based on the *Classroom Literacy Observation Schedule – Revised* (CLOS-R; Loudon et al., 2008) and Florian and Spratt's (2013) discussion of the IPA, in consultation with an expert in the field.

Although the survey instrument overall was designed to elicit teachers' 'knowing' about inclusive literacy pedagogy, select items in Section Four intentionally related more strongly to one of the three constructs identified for the research. For example, items in Section 4a, including Item 1, '*Reading and writing are related processes*', elicited participants' knowledge related to inclusive literacy practice and the processes involved. Items in Section 4b, including Item 9, '*I use a variety of student groupings to teach reading and writing, including whole class, guided and independent*', addressed participants' approaches to 'doing' inclusive literacy practice in the classroom and what informs their pedagogical decisions. Items in Section 4c focused on participants 'believing' in students' capacity to become literate, including Item 19, '*Children's home literacy environment impacts their literacy development*'.

Procedure. The main study survey instrument distributed to kindergarten teachers in identified schools was accessed through Research Electronic Data Capture (REDCap) at the University of Sydney. Online surveys are an efficient way of gathering data which allows for a "high response rate" (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019, p. 393). Although Tymms (2017) notes the potential for bias because of the necessity of technology, participants were all teaching in primary schools with a very high likelihood of access to computers or other devices.

An open access master dataset of NSW government school locations, names, general email addresses and student enrolment types and numbers was retrieved ahead of survey distribution (NSW

Department of Education, 2025f). The data were sorted by level of schooling to gather only primary schools that would have kindergarten teachers and then sorted by postcode. A list of postcodes within a 25km radius in Sydney was generated and sorted from smallest to largest. This list was crosschecked with the NSW schools data set to narrow down the list of primary schools only within this radius ($N = 526$) that were expected to have kindergarten teachers as potential participants. An open access master dataset of NSW government school enrolments in 2022 was examined and a total of 30,044 kindergarten enrolments within the study radius was calculated. In 2022, the average kindergarten class size in NSW was 18.4 students (NSW Department of Education, 2022a) and this figure was used to determine the likely approximate population of kindergarten teachers in the study radius, assuming a minimum 1:1 ratio of teachers to classes ($N = 1,632$). A total of 114 teachers from the government school sector reached full main study survey completion. This total represented 6.9% of the approximate population of kindergarten teachers in the study radius.

The same procedure was followed for the Catholic primary schools with kindergarten teachers invited to participate. A list of schools within a 25km radius of Sydney was generated using the school search functions on the respective dioceses websites. Data regarding kindergarten enrolments in NSW Catholic schools at the time of data collection were not publicly available. Ratios from the NSW Department of Education data were therefore used to determine population. According to the number of kindergarten enrolments in public schools ($N = 30,044$) and the number of schools in the study radius ($N = 526$), there was an average of 57 kindergarten students per government school. Using this average and the number of Catholic schools identified in the radius ($N = 154$), a total of 8,778 kindergarten student enrolments was possible. NSW Catholic schools aim to maintain a maximum of 30 kindergarten students per class (Fair Work Commission, 2023) and this figure was used to determine the likely approximate population of kindergarten teachers in the study radius, assuming a minimum 1:1 ratio of teachers to classes ($N = 292$). A small number of kindergarten teachers from the Catholic school sector ($n = 14$) reached full survey completion, representing 4.7% of the population.

Using a random number sequence generator and each school's spreadsheet row number, schools were randomly selected to be emailed during 2021-2022 to invite kindergarten teachers to participate. Schools were emailed multiple times, within ethical boundaries, throughout this period if no response was received. Snowball sampling was also used to increase the number of survey responses, and participants were encouraged to distribute the survey link via their own channels, including social media, to other potential participants. This snowball sampling resulted in survey completion by a small number of teachers working in independent schools ($n = 12$). Female teacher representation in the sample was consistent with the general profile of the profession. In 2022 during survey distribution, over 84% of teachers in NSW government primary schools and 88% of teachers in Catholic primary schools were female (ACARA, n.d.-c).

Participants in the main study survey were given the option to complete the survey anonymously or to provide a name and email address if they chose to volunteer to participate in Phase

Two of the research. From a total of 481 responses captured, 266 responses included demographic information as a minimum but a total of 140 teachers reached full survey completion. The sample size of kindergarten teachers who participated in Phase One ($n = 140$) was dependent on the number of teachers who volunteered to complete the online survey. As volunteering for participation in Phase Two of the study required full survey completion, this sample ($n = 140$) was eligible for Phase Two participation.

Data Analysis. Data in Sections One and Four of the survey were analysed using the IBM SPSS Statistics software. Frequency descriptives were used to examine the demographic profile of sample participants. Participants' years of teaching experience were categorised as beginning (0-3), transitioning (4-5) and experienced (5+) as in L. J. Graham et al. (2020). Categorising teaching experience has varied significantly across the literature with terms such as 'beginner' and 'early career' used interchangeably and 'experienced' referring to different types and ranges of experience (Gore et al., 2024; L. J. Graham et al., 2020). The beginning category reflects the experience of teachers in the first few years after graduation while the 4-5 years category represents the transition from novice to more experienced teacher and isolates the years when teacher attrition commonly occurs (Chingos & Peterson, 2011; L. J. Graham et al., 2020).

The final three questions in Section One of the survey asked participants to outline any literacy-specific qualifications or professional learning they had undertaken and to identify any commercial programs they were required to implement in their literacy teaching. As participants provided open-ended responses, these items were examined and coded. Frequencies were generated for particular professional experience examples and commercial programs commonly cited by participants.

Descriptive analysis was undertaken to compare participants' responses to Likert items in Section Four. Given the higher internal consistency without reverse coding of Likert scale items in the pilot study (see Table B3 in Appendix B), items were not reverse coded in the main study analysis. This decision aligned with recommendations in the literature which caution against reverse coding, given that positively and negatively worded items may not be measuring the same trait (Weems & Onwuegbuzie, 2001; Weems et al., 2006). It also addressed the researcher's concern that given the educational context of the study, participants' responses required interrogation with much more nuance than simply reverse coding for an 'inclusion' score.

Factor analysis of the 27 Likert scale items was undertaken to confirm the constructs and justify the selection of survey items for each construct to be included when generating a construct score per participant. Factor analysis is commonly used in the field of education to establish underlying constructs and correlations among variables (Pallant, 2020; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013; Williams et al., 2010).

Following factor analysis, a domain or construct score was generated for each participant (see Chapter 4 Phase One Findings). Participants' demographic information, including age and years of

teaching experience, were used as extraneous variables which may have impacted participants' responses (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Using responses from 5-7 as representing 'agreement' for each item in the Likert scale, the overall percentage agreement for each item was generated and particular items were examined more closely.

Responses in Section Two were examined, coded and used to determine participants' definitions of literacy from a cognitive, sociocultural or integrated paradigm. The data were first open coded to allow for "all potentials and possibilities" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 160). This was followed by thematic coding to relate the open codes to each other to generate themes in participants' definitions of literacy. Thematic analysis is commonly used in educational research (Kushnir, 2025). Reflexive thematic analysis was used in this phase of data analysis given its flexibility and iterative development of themes, and the emphasis on the researcher's active role in the analytic process (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Responses in Section Three were first considered with regard to the frequency of vocabulary used by participants in describing their typical literacy practice. After this initial interaction with the data, open-ended responses were analysed using open and thematic coding to determine "categories of instructional practice" (Cunningham et al., 2009, p. 422). This process involved "letting the data and interpretation of it guide analysis" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 160). It acknowledged that effective literacy practices may be organised and manifested differently in different classrooms (C. E. Snow & Juel, 2005) and variation is to be expected.

The researcher looked for trends in participant responses in terms of the literacy session structure; the domains, competencies or pedagogies included; the time allocated to certain components; and insights into teachers' decision-making. Data from Section Three were considered within four identified themes: the 'who', 'what', 'how' and 'why' of classroom literacy practice, as described by respondents. Similar categories of teacher knowledge have been identified in previous research (Adoniou, 2015). Figure 3.3 shows the four themes with an illustrative example from participant responses for each theme. A selection of participants' full responses, of a range of lengths and levels of detail, with examples of this coding for themes has been included in Appendix E.

Figure 3.3

Visual Illustration of Four Themes Identified for Coding with Participant Examples

Who	What	How	Why
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •"Heggerty activities and/or Kilpatrick 1 minute drills" •"Occupational Therapists or Classroom Teachers" •"beginning to use the principles behind The Writing Revolution" •"We follow the Five from Five program" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •"develop/practice new skill using decodable texts" •"instructional powerpoints and workbook activities. Students always use mini-whiteboards to respond and interact with the instruction" •"Small group guided reading session" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •"my groups are based on phonics needs, or writing needs. They can be flexible as needed" •"each sound is given 1 hour of targeted teaching per week" •"Writing sessions can take anywhere from thirty to sixty minutes" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •"I am guided by the ES1 syllabus, students needs and learning requirements, weekly programs developed by the ES1 team" •"I use data such as decoding assessments, Phonological awareness assessments, running records..."

This approach to coding was particularly important given the researcher’s background as a teacher of literacy to young children. Researchers necessarily bring “biases, beliefs, and assumptions” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 80) to the research. Rather than allowing potential bias to dictate interpretations of the data, the researcher’s experience enabled more detailed interrogation of results. The researcher needed nonetheless to “think clearly and analytically” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 81) about participants’ responses and maintained a journal of thoughts, questions and responses throughout the process of data analysis.

Phase Two Data Collection

Phase Two involved the collection of classroom video observations and semi-structured teacher interviews. From the sample of volunteer participants for Phase Two ($n = 31$), the researcher selected three participants. Given that multiple video observations were to be collected from each participating school, three participants was deemed suitable to enable the researcher to adequately interrogate the data. The three participating teachers were selected based on their school locations which were in different parts of Sydney but accessible to the researcher and research assistant. Given the focus on a small number of case study classrooms and teachers, this phase of the research was context-sensitive (Ruddin, 2006).

Classroom Observations

Discrepancies between teachers’ self-reported and actual knowledge for literacy teaching have previously been reported in the literature (Carson & Bayetto, 2018; R. A. Cohen et al., 2017; Meeks & Kemp, 2017; Stark et al., 2016) but teachers’ enactment of that knowledge is equally important. The Phase One survey may also have only gleaned what participants deemed to be the most socially desirable responses (Helmès & Holden, 2003). Classroom observations therefore helped to illustrate

the case study classroom settings including student and teacher experiences “with all their inherent complexities and challenges” (Cook & Cook, 2016, p. 146). The focus was on teachers ‘doing’ (Rouse, 2008) literacy practice by “turning knowledge into action” (Rouse, 2008, p. 13).

Participants may not be able to fully “articulate the subtleties of what goes on in interactions between themselves” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 30) and students. Video observations therefore provided this insight and allowed the researcher to reflect on the data in more detail (Menter et al., 2011). *Swivl* (n.d.) is a device which connects to an iPad and “rotates 360 degrees as it follows a digital signal emitted from a transmitter worn by a presenter” (Franklin et al., 2017, p. 185). With permission from the school principal and the parents and carers of participating students, a pilot of the video technology was conducted in a primary teacher’s classroom in 2022. This allowed the researcher and research assistant to check the setup and battery life of the device and to experiment with the suitable positioning of the device in the classroom.

Video observations of participants’ literacy sessions were collected 3-5 times at each of the three case study schools in May and October of 2022 using *Swivl* (n.d.). Following an initial visit by the researcher and research assistant to each of the three schools, video observation data collection was undertaken by the research assistant. Timetabling and lengths of video observations were negotiated with individual participants during the initial visit to aim for a similar amount of data collection from each classroom. Importantly, the data were gathered during different periods of the school year according to teacher availability and this timing may have impacted the video collected, given the difference in students’ progress at various stages of the kindergarten year. Videos were gathered from two of the schools in Term 2 in May while data were collected from the third school at the beginning of Term 4 in October.

While the length of each observation varied between visits and schools according to teacher availability, the timing of all observations targeted class literacy sessions as the focus for this phase. Video data were collected when the participating teachers indicated they were engaging in literacy teaching and were therefore comparable across the three schools. The observational data may have been susceptible to the Hawthorne effect (D. L. Cook, 1962). Participating teachers’ and students’ behaviour during the literacy sessions may have differed from usual practices due to the presence of a video camera. The collection of multiple video observations in each classroom was therefore important in mitigating this potential limitation and maintaining the “construct validity” (Hedges, 2017, p. 32) of this phase of the research.

Notably, the Louden et al. (2008) study involved the selection of just two hours of footage per participating teacher which was deemed to be representative of their typical literacy practice and coded using the CLOS-R (Louden et al., 2008). In this study, while different lengths of footage were gathered from each of the three participating teachers’ classrooms due to timetabling, the researcher felt that each of the video observations offered different insights into their literacy practices. The participating teachers themselves mentioned to the researcher during the initial visit and semi-

structured interviews that certain aspects of literacy practice may be prioritised in particular sessions or on certain days of the week.

Further, the CLOS-R (Louden et al., 2008) which was used in analysis features teaching practices such as 'persistence' which the authors acknowledge requires multiple episodes to be observed as it involves the revisiting and reinforcement of literacy learning to enable mastery (Louden et al., 2008). This could not be appreciated if just some excerpts of footage became the focus of analysis. Therefore, making any kind of selection of footage may have come at the expense of the observation of a broader range of literacy practices included by each classroom teacher. All 13 videos gathered from the three case study schools were therefore considered for analysis.

Retaining all 13 videos was also important as it allowed the researcher to gather a picture of the participating teachers' typical allocations of time to certain components of literacy practice. Given the differences in practices included in each of the videos collected from each school, this may not have been possible had only some footage been selected. The allocation of time, which is determined by teachers, is an important tool for supporting student learning (Carroll, 1989; Gay et al., 2021; Hattie, 2009) and therefore warranted consideration as part of the examination of an inclusive pedagogical approach (Florian & Spratt, 2013).

In total, the researcher collected five videos (8 h and 23 min), five videos (6 h and 24 min), and three videos (5 h and 6 min) of observation footage from the three case study schools. To comply with ethical boundaries, only footage that involved the regular classroom teacher was retained for analysis. Some footage (53 min, 67 min and 42 min, respectively) which involved videoing of other staff members was therefore excluded from analysis.

For analysis, a total of 450 minutes (Augustine School), 317 minutes (Kings School) and 264 minutes (Riverbank School) of footage was retained. Although there was a disparity in the lengths of footage analysed from each school, the participating teachers had selected appropriate times for data collection to occur. The available footage was therefore considered to be representative of their individual approaches to literacy practice and accordingly, there was some evidence of repetition across the footage within each school. The potential impact of the frequencies of practices identified during analysis as a result of the different lengths of footage is acknowledged as a limitation.

Data Analysis. Initial viewing of the video data from all three schools was undertaken to develop a running, timestamped schedule of the observed literacy sessions. The video observations were analysed using open and thematic coding in order to determine categories of literacy practice addressed in the three participating teachers' classrooms.

Seven main categories of literacy practices were identified in the footage and are included with example practices in Table 3.1. From the Phase One survey data, phonological awareness instruction was considered separate from phonics as participants frequently specified a commercial program being used to address it in isolation. In the video observations, phonological awareness (PA) was often

observed to occur in the context of phonics with print involved, or it was absorbed into a tight sequence of routines involving slides on the interactive whiteboard (IWB). ‘PA/Phonics/Spelling’ was therefore considered as one category for the observations and this included word- and sentence-level decoding and encoding in isolation with a focus on GPCs and/or word recognition.

Table 3.1

Categories and Associated Practices Identified in the Video Footage

Category	Practices included
Morning Routine	Roll marking and other class-specific routines to begin the school day
PA/Phonics/Spelling	Phonological awareness activities Focus on GPCs and/or word recognition Word- and sentence-level decoding and encoding
Modelled/Independent Writing	Sentence- or text-level writing Writing process Text composition, sometimes based on a stimulus text
Handwriting	Explicit teaching of letter formation Independent practice
Modelled/Shared Reading	Discussion of background knowledge before or after text reading Student responses via oral discussion or drawing
Independent Literacy Activities	Independent student activities addressing other categories, including spelling games, word or text reading or handwriting practice Simultaneous small group reading with teacher
Other	Student news ‘Crunch and sip’ break Movement break

This analysis also involved generating an approximate duration of allocated time for each of these categories of practice in each case study classroom. As in participants’ open-ended survey responses outlining the design of their literacy block, the allocation of time in practice was considered important for elucidating the teachers’ knowledge and inherent beliefs about literacy practice (Cunningham et al., 2009; Spear-Swerling & Zibulsky, 2014). Determining the allocated time in actual classrooms, including evidence of any emphases or omissions, allowed the video data to contradict or corroborate participants’ self-reported approaches from the survey. Importantly, if there was evidence of any category across multiple video observations, the average duration of allocated time was

calculated. Each of the teachers' observed literacy sessions included a combination of some of the categories of practices in Table 3.1.

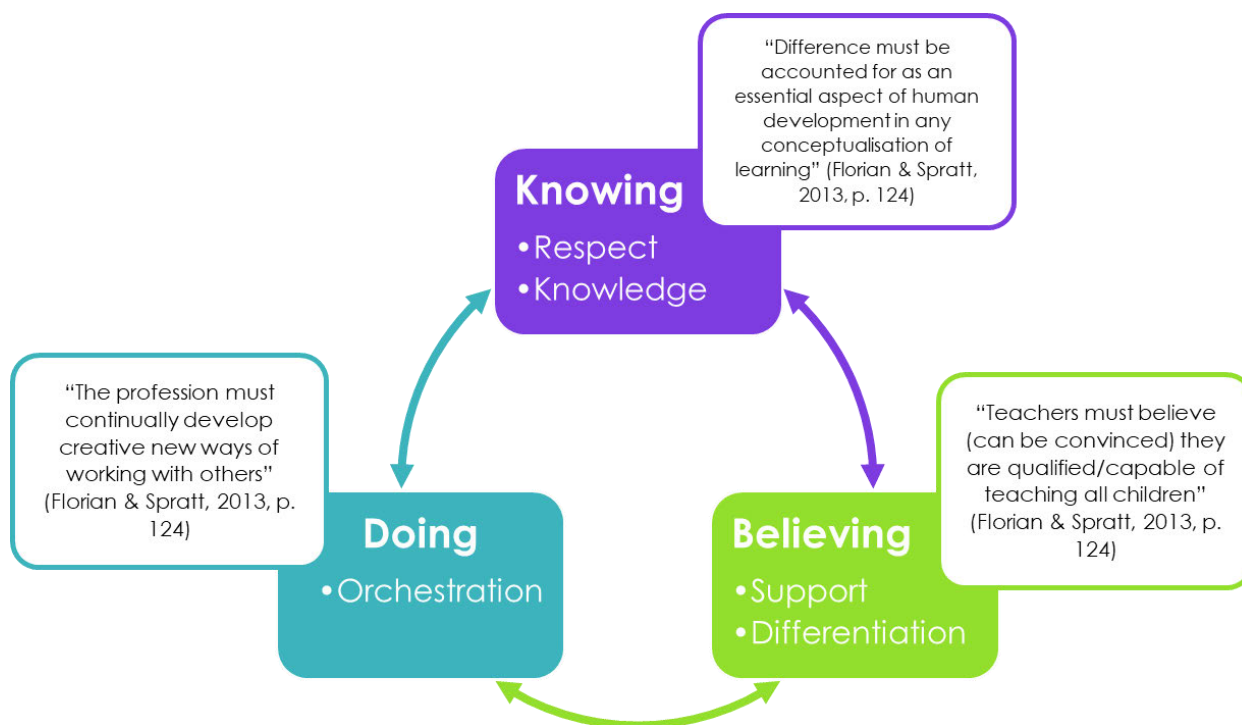
After the initial reflexive thematic analysis to determine categories of practice (Braun & Clarke, 2021), the video observations were coded and analysed using the *Classroom Literacy Observation Schedule – Revised* (CLOS-R; Louden et al., 2008) which considers 27 effective literacy practices according to five dimensions: respect, knowledge, orchestration, support and differentiation (see Appendix F). The CLOS-R (Louden et al., 2008) has been validated through Rasch analysis which demonstrated that it had strong reliability and validity. To address the limitations of the scale with regard to its application in examining *inclusive* literacy practice, as outlined in the review of the literature, the five dimensions can be purposefully combined with Rouse's (2008) framework of 'knowing', 'doing' and 'believing'.

The 'respect' and 'knowledge' dimensions can be aligned with the construct of 'knowing' identified for the present study, given that addressing them is contingent on the teacher 'knowing' their students and being cognisant of and flexible in the use of teaching and classroom organisation strategies (Rouse, 2008). Alongside this, the teacher's 'orchestration' of literacy teaching involves the execution, or 'doing', of that knowledge in the classroom (Rouse, 2008). Practices relevant to the 'support' and 'differentiation' dimensions are contingent on the teacher 'believing' in all students' capacity to learn (Louden et al., 2008; Rouse, 2008). This framework of 'knowing', 'doing' and 'believing' can be further embedded in the key principles of the IPA (Florian & Spratt, 2013) which mirror these three essential constructs for inclusive pedagogy (see Figure 3.4).

Analytic Procedure. The video data were rewatched multiple times by the researcher and coded according to the CLOS-R coding manual (Louden et al., 2008) which provided further insight as to specific examples of practices representing each of the five dimensions. Importantly, initial viewings for timestamping and categorising literacy practices involved viewing all videos from one school consecutively but the researcher deliberately watched a mix of videos out of order from each school during subsequent viewings to ensure consistency of coding across the three settings. The rewatching and coding of the footage undertaken during this process allowed the researcher to closely examine the classroom practices observed in the literacy sessions. Each video was coded by the researcher for frequency of the 27 CLOS-R (Louden et al., 2008) teaching practices.

Figure 3.4

Adapted from Florian and Spratt (2013), Rouse (2008) and CLOS-R (Louden et al., 2008)



This process of coding and discussion for consistency continued for two more 20-minute excerpts: one from each of the other two case study schools until 100% inter rater agreement was reached. An example of the researcher and research assistant coding comparisons for discussion can be found in Appendix G. The research assistant subsequently coded a 20-minute excerpt from each of the remaining ten videos. Overall, an excerpt of approximately 20 minutes in length from each of the 13 videos was coded by the research assistant. Importantly, the excerpts were randomly selected from the footage to ensure that they represented the beginning, middle or end of the participants' literacy sessions. Of the total 1,031 minutes available for analysis, approximately 25% of the footage was coded by the research assistant and this included 20% or more of the footage from each of the three schools. Following this process, the researcher viewed all 13 videos in their entirety for a final check of the coding. A total frequency of each practice across all observations for each school was then determined.

Importantly, the total frequencies of CLOS-R practices for Riverbank School were calculated based on only approximately 4 hours of footage, compared to the 7 hours and 5 hours of footage coded from Augustine School and Kings School, respectively. The focus of analysis was on the potential emphases on certain practices within each school, based on their overall frequencies, and what such emphases may suggest about participating teachers' knowledge of and approaches to classroom literacy teaching. The focus was not on a direct comparison of the three schools or equating the frequencies of practices with a determination of 'effectiveness' as in the Loudon et al. (2008) study. Each of the individual sessions recorded at each school was a similar length, between 1 to 2 hours.

Nonetheless, the researcher was cognisant of the variation in the nature and frequencies of practices between the three classrooms and their concurrence, or lack thereof, in light of the differences in footage lengths during the process of analysis.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Conducting classroom observations on their own often does not elucidate teachers' ways of thinking or decision-making (Schachter et al., 2021). Indeed, observers of classroom practice "lack knowledge about the context of teachers' actions" (Florian & Spratt, 2013, p. 126). In particular, determining the extent to which teachers' literacy practice is driven by an inclusive pedagogical approach is challenging (Florian & Spratt, 2013). Interviews following the classroom observations therefore provided greater depth and understanding of the "pedagogical principles" (Florian & Spratt, 2013, p. 126), beliefs and values that underpinned participating teachers' classroom practice (Alexander, 2001).

Semi-structured, face-to-face interviews were conducted in 2022 with each of the three teachers whose classroom literacy practice was observed. This type of interview is flexible in that "the researcher has a sketch map of the territory to be explored, but the freedom to explore it as he or she will" (Menter et al., 2011, p. 131). The semi-structured interview protocol can be found in Appendix H. Participating teachers were asked in advance to prepare to discuss three case study children from their class as part of the interview: one child nominated by the teacher as being 'on track' with literacy acquisition; a child requiring support in literacy; and a child requiring extension or acceleration. This preparation ahead of the interview allowed for discussion of how and why teachers respond to student needs in certain ways, therefore providing insight into their ways of 'believing' (Rouse, 2008) in inclusive literacy education. Interviews were audio recorded to allow for subsequent transcription and analysis.

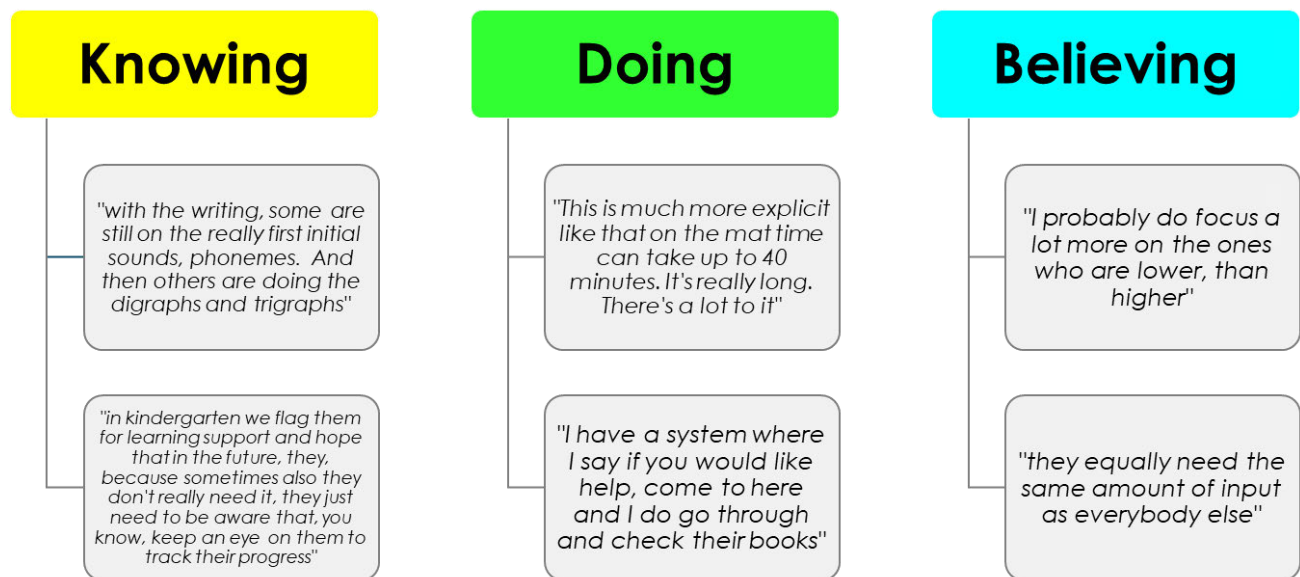
The researcher viewed at least some excerpts of the video observations prior to conducting the semi-structured interviews with the three teachers which were scheduled according to participant availability. Prior viewing of observations for discussion in the subsequent interviews allowed the researcher to ensure that any initial interpretations aligned with participants' views. Participants were invited to review their interview transcripts prior to data analysis being undertaken. The interviews coded for analysis were 44 minutes, 29 minutes and 42 minutes in length.

Data Analysis. Cross-case analysis of the interview data was undertaken and began with open and thematic coding, as described earlier, in order to "identify concepts to stand for the data" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 198) and relate them to each other to determine categories. A further process of selective coding was also used. Selective coding is "the process by which all categories are unified around a 'core' category, and categories that need further explication are filled-in with descriptive detail" (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 14).

The interview transcripts and audio were repeatedly revisited and coded according to the three constructs identified for the research: ‘knowing’, ‘doing’ and ‘believing’ (Rouse, 2008). Participant quotes in the interview transcripts were colour coded according to these three constructs. The coded examples varied in length. Phrases, sentences or sequences of sentences were counted as a single coding of a construct if they were deemed by the researcher to represent a single idea or description of practice, or if they related to a single student being described by the participant. Transcribed interview text was not coded if it was an aside or anecdote that was not relevant to the interview, or if it represented a repetition or elaboration of an already coded example. During longer periods of explanation from participants, separate codings were created if there was a noticeable shift in idea or emphasis in terms of practice (e.g., reading to writing) or construct. Figure 3.5 illustrates the construct coding with a small selection of participants’ interview responses. Longer examples of the construct coding within each of the three interview transcripts can be found in Appendix I. Repeated readings of the interview transcripts allowed for themes to be identified within each of the constructs.

Figure 3.5

Visual Illustration of the Construct Coding with Participant Examples



Following data collection and specific analysis in Phases One and Two, the researcher sought to “integrate findings and interpretations to enable meta-inferences that go beyond” (Sammons, 2010, p. 700) the quantitative and qualitative results in isolation. Integration has been achieved through merging of the quantitative and qualitative databases “for analysis and for comparison” (Fetters et al., 2013, p. 2140) in the discussion. All three research constructs are discussed in relation to data gathered from the semi-structured interviews, as well as participants’ responses to the survey and classroom observations. The researcher was therefore able to consider any contradictions in the data (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2017) across both phases. Similarities and mismatches between teachers’

self-reported beliefs, knowledge and approaches, the observed classroom practice, and interview perspectives, were examined and elucidated findings that can contribute to the field.

Ethical Considerations

Ethics approval for the research, including the pilot and main studies, was first sought from the University of Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC; see Appendix J). Ethics approval was subsequently sought and received via the State Education Research Applications Process (SERAP) and the relevant Catholic dioceses (see Appendix K) for the main study data collection. This included an approved extension of SERAP due to delays in data collection related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

All ethics applications clearly stated that participants' contributions were entirely voluntary, and they could withdraw from the research at any time. Participants' responses in both phases of the research remained confidential and anonymous. Participant information statements and consent forms outlining this information were provided at each data collection point (see Appendix L). During and following data collection, all survey, video and interview data were stored securely and anonymously. The research was carried out under appropriate ethical processes and pseudonyms have been used for the names of participating teachers and their schools to maintain anonymity.

Chapter 4 reports the findings from the data analysis conducted during Phase One of the research.

Chapter 4

Phase One Findings

The following chapter presents the findings of Phase One of the study involving the online survey questionnaire, *Examining Approaches to the Kindergarten Literacy Block*. The focus of this phase was on teachers 'knowing' (Rouse, 2008) about inclusive literacy pedagogy. This chapter has been organised according to the four sections of the survey which gathered participants' demographic information, definitions of literacy, descriptions of a typical kindergarten literacy block, and levels of agreement with statements related to inclusive literacy practice.

Survey Section One: Kindergarten Teachers

Kindergarten teachers in government and Catholic schools within a 25km radius of Sydney were invited to participate in Phase One of the research by completing the online survey questionnaire. A total of 481 responses was captured and 266 of those participants completed at least the demographic information in Section One of the survey. A demographic profile of the 266 participants is included in Table 4.1. Although the actual sample size for the study, with full survey completion, was much smaller, the items in Section One provided information related to participants' professional learning and commercial programs which was considered important for inclusion in analysis.

Some of these participants also completed the open-ended questions in Section Two ($n = 195$) and Section Three ($n = 142$). A total of 140 participants completed the full survey, including the Likert scale items in Section Four.

The mean age of sample participants was 41.23 with a skewness of .214, suggesting some clustering at the lower end of the age range. Sixty percent of participating teachers had 0-5 years of experience teaching kindergarten, but the sample represented a wide range of teaching experience overall, with over 80% of teachers having taught for more than five years.

Table 4.1

Demographic Characteristics of all Participants (n = 266)

Variable	Groups	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	6	2.3
	Female	260	97.7
Age	20-29	47	17.7
	30-39	73	27.5
	40-49	80	30.2
	50-59	55	20.8
	60-69	10	3.8
School Sector	Government	217	81.5
	Independent	22	8.3
	Catholic	27	10.2

Table 4.1 (continued)

Variable	Groups	Frequency	Percentage
Number of kindergarten classes at current school	0	1	0.4
	1-4	213	80.1
	5-7	42	15.8
	8+	10	3.8
Years teaching kindergarten	Beginning (0-3 years)	108	40.6
	Transitioning (4-5 years)	53	19.9
	Experienced (5+ years)	105	39.5
Total years teaching	Beginning (0-3 years)	28	10.5
	Transitioning (4-5 years)	19	7.1
	Experienced (5+ years)	219	82.3
Highest level of teaching qualification	Bachelor of Education	185	69.5
	Master of Teaching	37	13.9
	Graduate Diploma in Education	25	9.4
	Graduate Certificate in Education	13	4.9
	Postgraduate Research	6	2.3
Total		266	100.0

With regard to literacy-specific qualifications and professional learning, there was some overlap in participants' responses. Many participants mentioned the completion of a Bachelor of Education, Masters or Graduate Diploma in Early Childhood ($n = 18$) and two had completed a Masters specifically in Literacy Education. The most commonly cited literacy-specific qualifications were Language, Learning and Literacy (L3; $n = 26$) and Reading Recovery ($n = 11$).

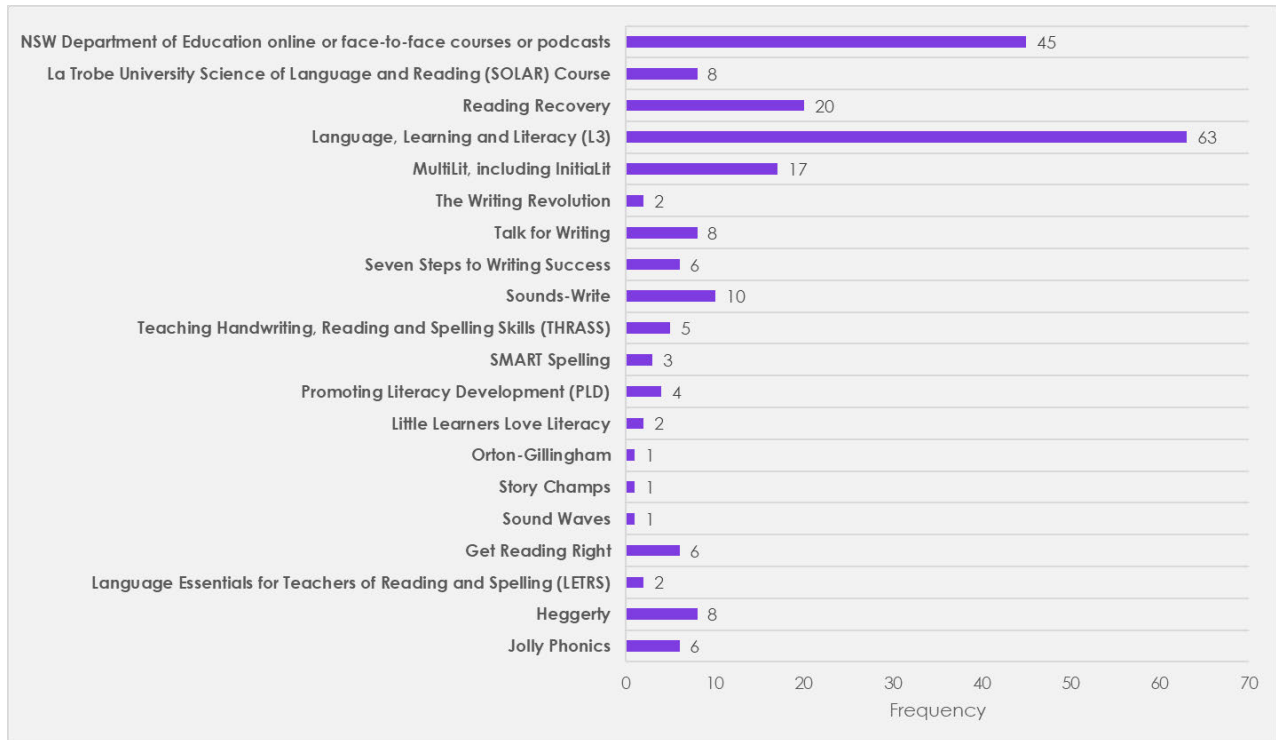
Many qualifications cited by participants were also listed separately as professional learning, including L3, Reading Recovery (Clay, 2005a, 2005b) and the La Trobe University Science of Language and Reading (SOLAR) course. Some participants mentioned 'experience' as a literacy-specific qualification ($n = 3$) while others listed 'science of reading' as both a qualification ($n = 3$) and an example of professional learning ($n = 21$). One participant listed 'Assistant Principal ES1' (referring to Early Stage 1 or kindergarten in NSW) as a qualification. Despite the role involving the leadership of curriculum among a team of teachers, becoming an Assistant Principal in NSW requires no additional formal qualification beyond a 4-year teaching qualification (Drysdale & Gurr, 2011).

Specific professional learning cited by participants has been summarised in Figure 4.1. Many participants mentioned multiple examples of professional learning in a single response. Some of the examples listed, such as Sounds-Write, refer to courses related to a particular phonics program promoted by a brand. While some of the professional learning cited may have a broader focus on various aspects of literacy pedagogy, many of the courses or brands listed focus only on constrained skills and related pedagogies associated with literacy acquisition, such as phonological awareness (e.g., Heggerty) and phonics (e.g., Jolly Phonics, Sounds-Write). A smaller number of participants referred to

examples such as Seven Steps to Writing Success ($n = 6$) and Talk for Writing ($n = 8$), but the general focus of professional learning cited by participants appeared to be reading.

Figure 4.1

Specific Professional Learning in Early Years' Literacy Pedagogy Cited by Participants



Many participants mentioned particular academics, publishers or organisations that run courses relevant to the teaching of literacy, including David Hornsby, Lyn Stone, Jocelyn Seamer, Noella Mackenzie, Brian Cambourne, David Kilpatrick, William Van Cleave, Fountas and Pinnell, Specific Learning Difficulties, Learning Difficulties Australia, Primary English Teaching Association Australia and Five From Five. These names and organisations represent a broad range of approaches with regard to the literacy practices they prioritise and promote.

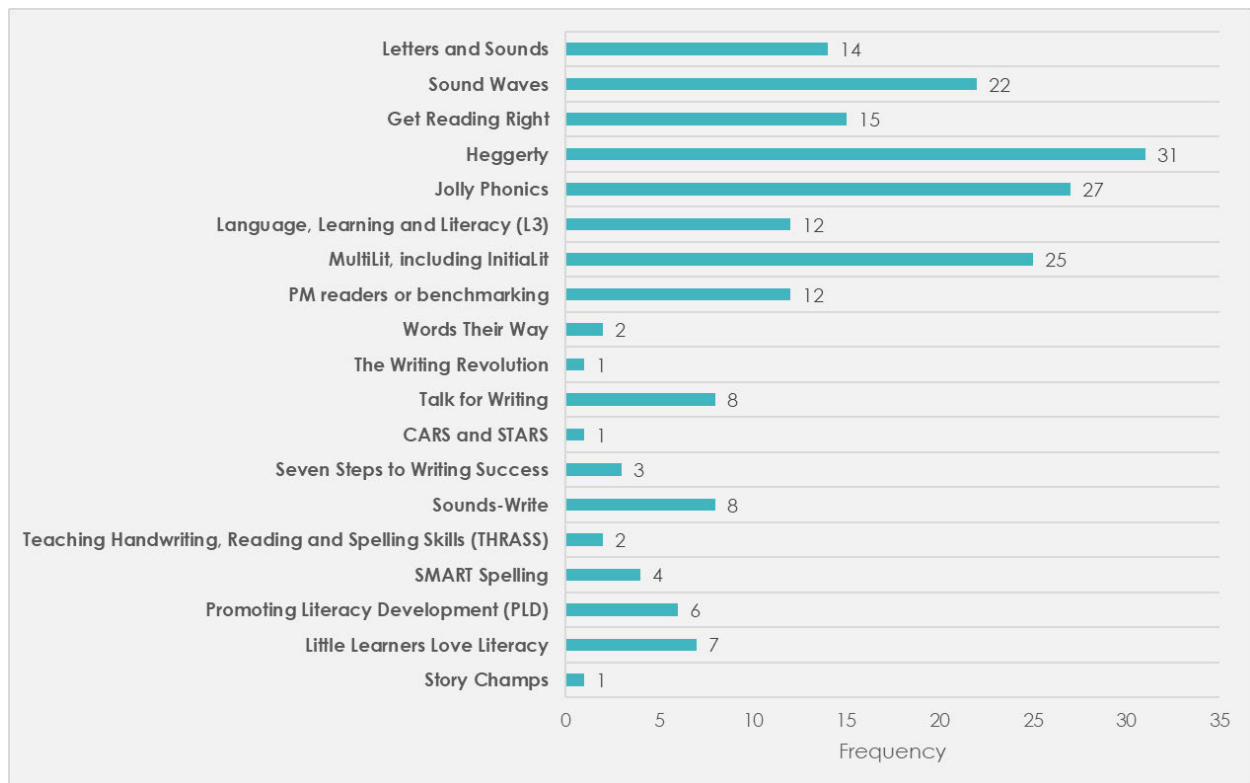
Many examples of literacy-specific professional learning were also cited by participants as commercial programs followed by their school. Notably, Reading Recovery (Clay, 2005a, 2005b) was mentioned frequently as an example of professional learning but was not listed at all for implementation. By contrast, L3 was cited as both an example of professional learning and as a currently implemented program.

Heggerty and Jolly Phonics were the most frequently cited commercial programs in use, followed closely by MultiLit and Sound Waves (see Figure 4.2). Some combination of these programs was commonly listed by participants (e.g., Heggerty and Jolly Phonics, Heggerty and InitialLit, PM readers and Get Reading Right). While some participants noted that they had no commercial program or that their school had developed its own program ($n = 29$), others simply cited the use of 'decodable

texts' ($n = 11$). Brief outlines of companies and programs listed in Figures 4.1 and 4.2 are included in Appendix A.

Figure 4.2

Commercial Programs Cited by Participants



As for professional learning cited by participants, there appeared to be an emphasis on commercial programs related to the teaching of constrained skills such as phonological awareness. Importantly, the survey question asked for any commercial programs participants were required to use in their literacy teaching, but responses did not elucidate the exact origin of this requirement. Some participants specified that they were not required or mandated by their schools to use any program ($n = 9$) and three of these participants noted that they used a commercial program by choice. Two participants did indicate that they were required by their schools to use Fountas and Pinnell for reading assessment.

Given the apparent emphasis on constrained skills in participants' professional learning and commercial programs, gathering teachers' definitions of literacy and descriptions of their literacy sessions was important to create a broader understanding of participants' approaches to literacy practice.

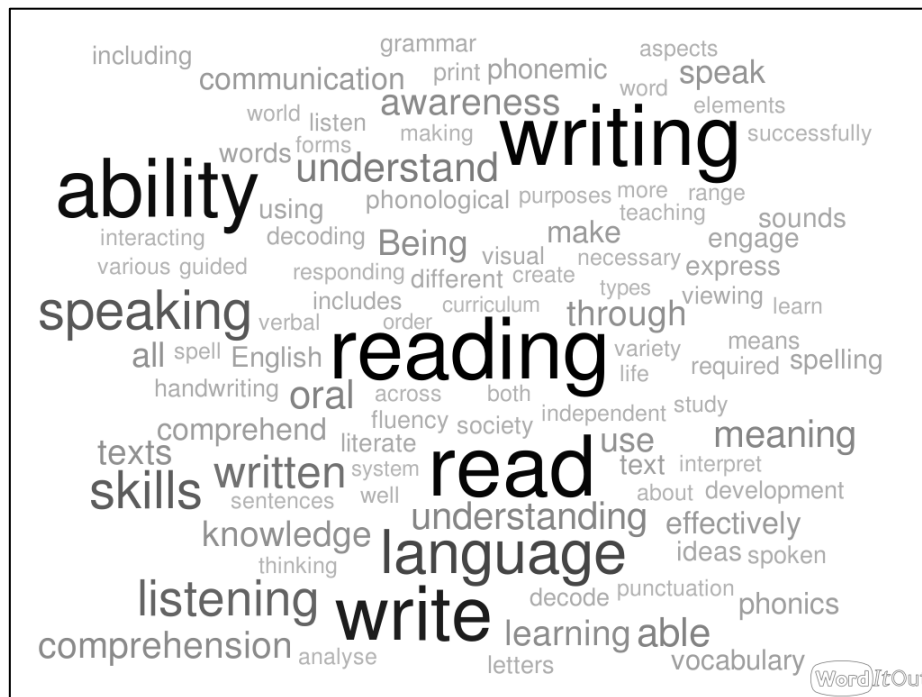
Survey Section Two: Defining 'Literacy'

There were 195 completed responses to Section Two of the survey which asked participants to provide a definition of 'literacy' in their own words as an open-ended response. To visualise

participants' definitions of literacy as a starting point, an online generator (Word It Out, 2025) was used to create a word cloud (see Figure 4.3). Words are arranged by size in the cloud according to their frequency of mention in the text. The words 'reading' ($n = 79$) and 'writing' ($n = 77$) were the most commonly used across participants' definitions, followed closely by 'ability' ($n = 73$) and 'literacy' ($n = 60$). The words 'language' ($n = 51$), 'communicate' ($n = 46$) and 'skill' ($n = 41$) were also commonly used.

Figure 4.3

Word Cloud Visualisation of Survey Respondents' Definitions of 'Literacy'



Participants' definitions of literacy were coded as cognitive ($n = 105$), sociocultural ($n = 28$) or a combination of these two paradigms ($n = 62$). Responses were then grouped according to this coding and revisited to confirm consistency and to elucidate any other themes or categories in the data. A summary of each coding, a description of its characterisation and examples from participants' definitions is included in Table 4.2. These categories are comparable to those allocated in previous research (e.g., Lammert et al., 2022).

Table 4.2*Summary of Coding and Examples of Participants' Definitions of Literacy*

Coding	Description	Participant examples
Cognitive (<i>n</i> = 105)	Discrete skills List of competencies in isolation Curriculum Independent of context	<i>"ability to read and write"</i> (Participant 20) <i>"reading, writing, speaking and listening"</i> (Participant 49) <i>"Engagement with all aspects of English"</i> (Participant 134) <i>"The English syllabus"</i> (Participant 182)
Sociocultural (<i>n</i> = 28)	Focus on <i>application</i> of literacy Emphasis on meaning, communication and expression Participation in society	<i>"Creative Productive Discussions"</i> (Participant 37) <i>"understand English and communicate effectively"</i> (Participant 67) <i>"taking meaning from print and multimedia"</i> (Participant 201) <i>"embrace all types of texts as possible sources of learning"</i> (Participant 128)
Combination (<i>n</i> = 62)	Social function and/or meaning making as outcome or endpoint of reading/writing/skill development	<i>"read to discern meaning and write to convey meaning"</i> (Participant 25) <i>"the ability to use the written English language...to communicate effectively"</i> (Participant 233)

Cognitive

Participant definitions classified as 'cognitive' generally listed many discrete skills, competencies or knowledge domains associated with literacy. These included reading, speaking, listening, writing, phonological or phonemic awareness, fluency, handwriting, comprehension, grammatical knowledge, spelling and oral language. Definitions frequently referred to things a learner does or has, without mention of an endpoint to be achieved or a context in which the learning or proficiency takes place.

'Literacy' is the overarching term that incorporates speaking, listening and interacting, reading and viewing, and writing. Reading includes phonological awareness and phonic knowledge, word recognition, fluency and comprehension. Writing is creating texts but also includes spelling, punctuation, grammar and handwriting. (Participant 76)

Some cognitive definitions included 'communicate' (*n* = 9) or 'communication' (*n* = 4) in this list, not as an outcome of these other competencies but alongside them. Many definitions characterised literacy exclusively as 'the ability to read and write' or 'learning to read and write' (*n* = 28). In some definitions, reading and writing were referred to as 'decoding' and 'encoding' respectively (*n* = 3). In others, literacy was characterised only in relation to reading as *"the ability to understand texts and the*

sounds represented by different letter combinations to read these texts” (Participant 199) and “being able to know the phonemes and to read and understand what you are reading” (Participant 326).

While some cognitive definitions did reduce literacy only to reading and writing ($n = 20$), none emphasised just, for example, phonological awareness and alphabetic knowledge, without mention of other areas such as vocabulary and comprehension. The ‘big five’ (NICHD, 2000) and ‘big six’ (Konza, 2014) were frequently listed: *“Literacy involves the study of the Big 6 Oral language, Phonemic Awareness, Phonics, Comprehension, Vocabulary, Fluency” (Participant 196).* This naming of core literacy components could suggest that participating teachers had at least some awareness of conceptualisations of reading or literacy from the relevant research literature.

The language used in many participants’ definitions aligned closely with or mirrored verbatim the strands of the English syllabus relevant to kindergarten students and teachers at the time of data collection (NESA, 2012): *“Engagement with all aspects of English – speaking and listening, reading and viewing and writing and responding” (Participant 134).* This notion of discrete categories or strands is echoed in the current English syllabus (NESA, 2025b).

Sociocultural

While definitions classified as ‘cognitive’ generally involved the listing of discrete skills, competencies or pedagogies, definitions considered to be sociocultural focused on the function or application of literacy in practice. Many of these definitions characterised literacy using words such as engage, function, communicate, interact or understand. There was an emphasis on *“communication and expression of ideas through a variety of mediums” (Participant 145)* and on developing understanding through literacy. Engagement with language and the application of literacy at a societal, not individual, level was a common theme among responses.

Literacy as the ability, confidence and willingness to engage with language to acquire, construct and communicate meaning in all aspects of daily living. Language is a socially and culturally constructed system of communication. (Participant 252)

To decode, read, interpret, and respond to text. To express ideas in a verbal manner, clearly and logically. To express yourself in writing and/or understand the written language to get by in day to day life. (Participant 315)

A small proportion of sociocultural definitions ($n = 4$) prioritised only reading-related processes as literacy: *“Being able to read, consider what is read, embrace all types of texts as possible sources of learning, and use what you have learned to continue learning more” (Participant 128).* Within these responses, there was an emphasis on *“understanding and taking meaning from print and multimedia” (Participant 201)* and *“a variety of genres” (Participant 343).*

Combination

Responses identified as a combination of these two approaches did not characterise literacy by either discrete skills and competencies or by its social purpose in isolation. They instead positioned the discrete skills or domains with regard to their execution within a sociocultural context (Purcell-Gates et al., 2004). Many responses listed key skills or competencies, as in the cognitive domain, but also articulated their application or intended purpose for making meaning, communicating and engaging with society. Participating in society and making sense of the world “*for various purposes and audiences in life*” (Participant 236) were common themes.

Literacy is the process of applying knowledge and skills to understand and communicate in different contexts and mediums, including written, visual, oral, and digital modes. When an individual is literate, they can interpret, produce and reproduce the particular meaning making system. Developing literacy skills and knowledge is foundational to engaging and interacting in not just schooling situations but broader social and societal experiences in an informed and relevant manner. Literacy is best developed through the simultaneous interaction of a variety of modes. (Participant 332)

Many of the combination responses appeared to describe the connection between the skills and purpose associated with literacy with a sense of causation ($n = 27$). There was a sense that capacities such as reading and writing enable participation and interaction with society and some of these responses alluded to the application of literacy beyond the English curriculum area alone. One participant actively positioned literacy beyond the constraints imposed by others and referred to it as “*more than reading and writing*” (Participant 222) but the following examples exemplify the structure of many combination responses, from capacities to participation:

Reading, writing and speaking in order to communicate and express feelings. (Participant 81)

Decoding, language comprehension, vocabulary, oral language, speaking & listening, reading, writing, spelling, grammar, punctuation, handwriting..... all the learning regarding language and processing language to make meaning. (Participant 155)

Literacy is the ability to read, comprehend, write and use oral language to communicate and gain information. Literacy skills are necessary throughout all the KLAs [key learning areas] (not just English). (Participant 307)

By contrast, some combination responses were conceived in the opposite order, with an emphasis first on the application of literacy, prior to any mention of the skills or competencies necessary to facilitate this application ($n = 17$). While responses included in the cognitive category used verbs such as ‘reading’ and ‘writing’ synonymously with literacy, responses in both the sociocultural and combination categories referred to literacy as ‘understanding’ or ‘communicating’.

Literacy is the ability to function in society, through the basic skills of understanding print and being able to write to convey meaning, but also the more complex skills of interacting with texts for enjoyment and reflection, and critically analysing texts. (Participant 4)

Literacy is understanding and communicating language by way of reading or writing. By studying, phonics, vocabulary, grammar, spelling, punctuation and letter formation, children learn to be literate as they learn to communicate or make meaning through writing and reading. (Participant 63)

As noted earlier, a definition of literacy on its own cannot illustrate practice (Ewing, 2018) but it was interesting that the majority of respondents in this study provided a definition that appeared to align more closely with a cognitive paradigm. The purpose of the literacy block subsection of the survey was to gather some insight into how participants' definitions may translate into practice.

Survey Section Three: The Literacy Block

There were 142 completed responses to Section Three of the survey which asked participants to provide a detailed outline of their approach to kindergarten classroom literacy practice in terms of routines, practices or pedagogies, timings and decision-making. Importantly, this section began with the literacy definition provided by ACARA (n.d.-a) and clarified its positioning within the English curriculum area for the purpose of this research. Most respondents produced lengthy descriptions of their literacy practice, including relevant classroom activities and timings, from 7 to 689 words long. The mean length of response was 104 words. Response lengths could suggest that participants provided some realistic detail in their outlines of their literacy practice.

The researcher first examined the vocabulary used in participants' descriptions of the literacy block. The frequency of key terms used across participants' literacy block outlines is summarised in Table 4.3. The words 'reading' ($n = 298$) and 'writing' ($n = 298$) were the most commonly used across all participants' responses, followed by 'students' ($n = 193$) and 'phonics' ($n = 161$). The frequent use of 'reading' and 'writing' mirrored participants' definitions of literacy but the emphasis on 'phonics' differed. If 'phonics' (i.e., the alphabetic principle) is considered alongside the other 'big six' (Konza, 2014; NICHD, 2000) so often referred to in participants' definitions, it was the most frequently cited term compared to 'phonological awareness' ($n = 31$) and 'phonemic awareness' ($n = 48$), 'fluency' ($n = 23$), 'vocabulary' ($n = 33$), 'comprehension' ($n = 41$) and 'oral language' ($n = 11$). Some of these were referred to using synonymous terms but with a similar frequency, such as 'speaking and listening' ($n = 13$). While this frequency of usage, on its own, could not suggest an overemphasis on code-related skills or teaching, it was notable as a first impression of participants' responses.

Table 4.3*Frequency of Vocabulary Usage Across Participants' Literacy Block Outlines*

Term	Frequency (<i>n</i>)
'reading'	298
'writing'	298
'students'	193
'phonics'	161
'phonological awareness'	31
'phonemic awareness'	48
'fluency'	23
'vocabulary'	33
'comprehension'	41
'oral language'	11
'speaking and listening'	13
'group'	74
'groups'	90
'science of reading'	10
'three-cueing system'	2
'guided reading'	46
'explicit teaching'	20
'guided writing'	17
'whole class'	35
'small group'	24

The frequent use of 'students' was also notable. Students should be at the core of teachers' instructional decisions, and it could be considered significant that they featured so heavily in participants' descriptions of classroom practice. But this did not necessarily suggest that students were being referred to as informing teachers' decision-making. Many participants did simply use the word as the subject in multiple sentences to describe what students would be doing during the literacy session. Nonetheless, this required further interrogation with regard to teachers' explanation of the

'why' of their literacy practice, and the observations of classroom practice explored in Phase Two. Similarly, the words 'group' ($n = 74$) and 'groups' ($n = 90$) were frequently used.

Four themes were identified in participants' literacy block outlines through the analytic process: the 'who', 'what', 'how' and 'why' of classroom literacy practice. Although participants' responses in this section of the survey could be considered most relevant to the construct of 'doing' (Rouse, 2008), since participants described their practice, these themes aligned with all three constructs for this research: knowing ('who'), doing ('what', 'how') and believing ('why'). These four themes have been arranged with descriptions and examples from participants' responses in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4

Summary of Theme Coding and Examples from Participants' Descriptions of Literacy Practice

Theme	Description	Participant examples
Who	Naming of commercial programs or academics Personnel involved (e.g., classroom teacher, teacher assistants)	<i>"Heggerty Phonemic Awareness"</i> (Participant 465) <i>"Writing – Noelle Mackenzie, Draw, Talk, Write, Share program"</i> (Participant 75) <i>"we follow InitialLit for initial sounds and then smart spelling beyond that"</i> (Participant 362)
What	Theory Content Pedagogies and activities Organisation and structure Types of instruction or groupings included	<i>"Literacy instruction [...] is modelled off [...] the science of reading and Scarborough's Reading Rope"</i> (Participant 351) <i>"working on the 3 cueing system"</i> (Participant 244) <i>"the Big 6 as per Deslea Konza"</i> (Participant 4) <i>"Daily Review which revises taught literacy concepts"</i> (Participant 25) <i>"shared, modelled and guided reading and shared, modelled and guided writing"</i> (Participant 165) <i>"guided rotation system 5 days a week"</i> (Participant 20)
How	Additional elements relevant to execution of instruction ('what') Length/specific timings Differentiation Process of selection for student groupings	<i>"2 hour daily session"</i> (Participant 17) <i>"Our literacy is not taught in a block but rather lessons spread throughout the day"</i> (Participant 473) <i>"the Literacy program is fully integrated into a play based program where student agency is the foundation"</i> (Participant 304) <i>"small group differentiated instruction"</i> (Participant 467)
Why	Justification or explanation of choices outlined in 'what' and 'how' Sources of information to determine classroom practices	<i>"We decide what to teach through assessment – best start and NSW literacy progressions tracking"</i> (Participant 449) <i>"As the only kindergarten teacher, I have researched and chosen the programs used in my classroom"</i> (Participant 233)

Importantly, although these four themes are discussed separately below, the researcher noted throughout analysis that they were inseparable in teachers' approaches to classroom practice. During

this process, the researcher was reminded that “how one teaches is inseparable from what one teaches, from what and how one assesses and from how one learns” (NSW DET, 2003, p. 2). There was evidence of an interconnectedness of these facets (i.e., who, what, how, why) of literacy practice throughout participants’ responses and in particular, a cycling back from ‘why’ to ‘who’ influenced teachers’ decision-making. For example, Participant 102 described their approach to guided reading as “*following the model of Marie Clay Reading recovery*” and Participant 71 mentioned that “*Lessons are based on my L3 training from 2020*”. The interaction and overlap between these four themes were substantial.

‘Who’

The ‘who’ of literacy practice included in participants’ responses refers to the naming of specific, commercial programs or resources from a particular academic or company. These included David Kilpatrick, Deidre O’Brien, Noelle Mackenzie, Sounds-Write, Sound Waves, Jolly Phonics, Five from Five, Draw Talk Write Share, the Walker Learning Approach, Get Reading Right, Little Learners Love Literacy, Talk for Writing and The Writing Revolution. As in Section One of the survey, participants most frequently named the Heggerty program ($n = 34$). Eleven participants outlined the use of the InitialLit program and specified that this took up to 2 hours or at least a substantial portion of time available for literacy, if not the entire literacy session. Some participants also alluded to combining commercial programs according to their content: “*we follow InitialLit for initial sounds and then Smart Spelling beyond that*” (Participant 362).

Beyond the naming of commercial programs, the ‘who’ of literacy practice also included reference to additional personnel assisting in the classroom alongside the teacher. The general involvement of the classroom teacher as the facilitator of literacy practice was assumed from participants’ responses which frequently used first person to describe the teaching and learning taking place. A small number of participants ($n = 8$) mentioned a Student Learning and Support Officer (SLSO), otherwise referred to as an education or teaching assistant. These responses described the SLSO as providing general student assistance or leading small group instruction related to areas such as phonics or writing. One participant also mentioned the involvement of an occupational therapist in the classroom.

‘What’

The ‘what’ of literacy practice refers to participants’ naming of content, pedagogies and activities featured in their literacy sessions. The data are discussed below under three headings: literacy block structure; emphases and theoretical underpinnings; and types of practice. Participants’ survey responses are considered in terms of the structure and content of the literacy block, the apparent emphases and theoretical underpinnings related to that structure, and the types of classroom practice included.

Literacy Block Structure. Throughout their responses, many participants listed domains of knowledge or instructional approaches, as seen in their definitions of 'literacy', including phonological awareness, phonics, morphology, fluency, comprehension, handwriting, dictation and writing. Overall, participants seemed to outline a similar structure and the inclusion of similar elements in the literacy session. Most participants mentioned some focus on phonological awareness and/or phonics, a reading focus including or alongside reading or literacy groups, and a writing focus. These elements were not always included in the same order, but phonological awareness or phonics teaching was frequently the starting point. A summary of this general structure, including participant examples, is included in Figure 4.4. Importantly, this summary features discrete domains with relevant practices and participant examples alongside them for ease of representation of the data, and participants often compartmentalised aspects of their literacy sessions in this way. But the integration of these domains within actual classroom implementation is not to be overlooked and was acknowledged by participants:

Explicit literacy instruction is woven into the daily program through whole class, small group and individual activities within a language rich environment. Phonological awareness, phonics, reading, writing, listening and literature are the foundation of the program with a focus on developing vocabulary, oral language skills, comprehension and creativity. (Participant 304)

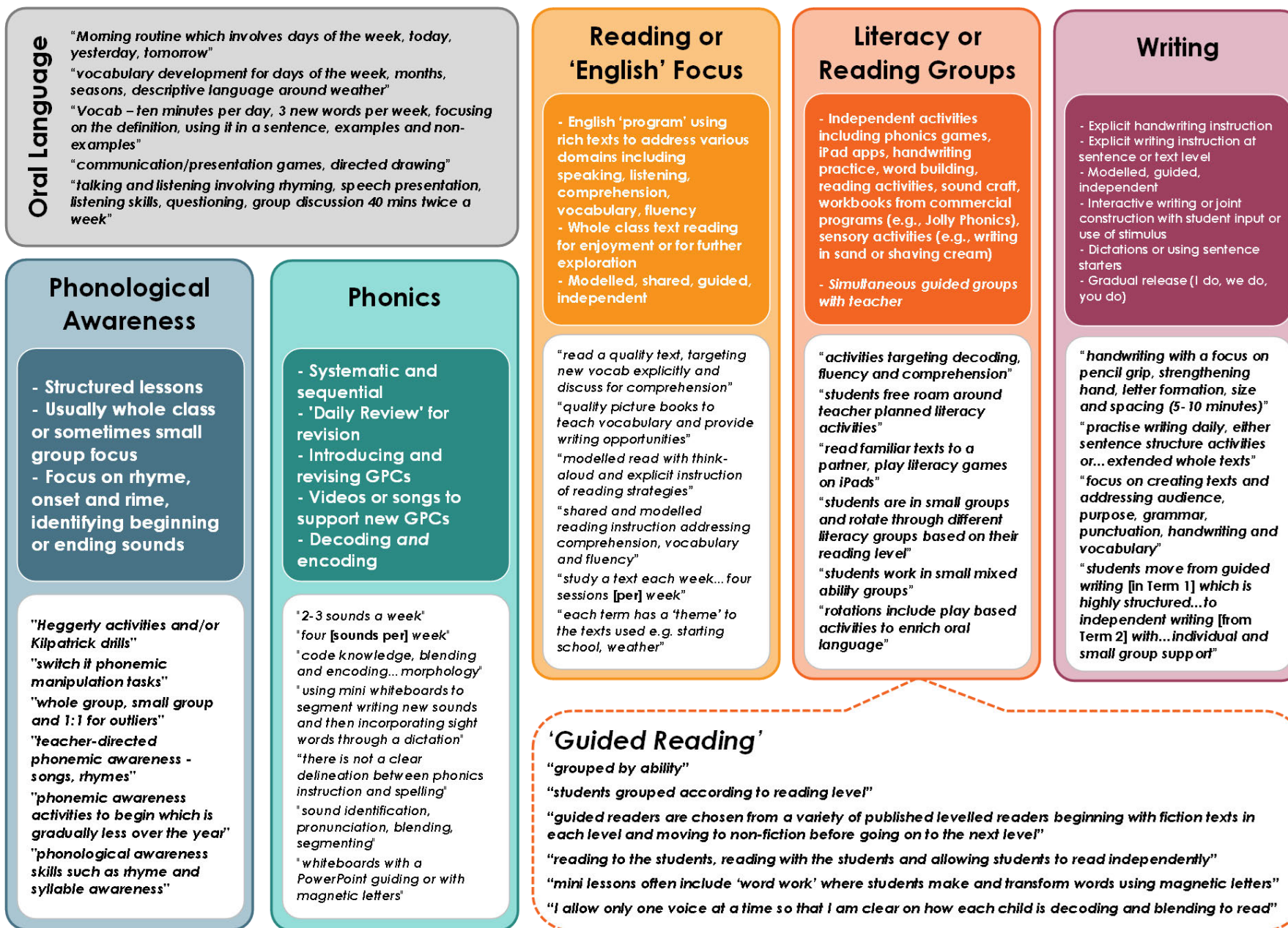
Although phonological awareness could be considered a component of oral language, it has been referred to separately in Figure 4.4. Participants often listed phonological awareness with reference to a scripted program or more in relation to phonic knowledge than its purely oral application. Small group instruction or 'guided reading' was noted frequently by participants, and it has therefore been included and linked to 'literacy or reading groups' in Figure 4.4. Teacher-led 'guided reading' groups and independent literacy activities were almost always referred to as occurring simultaneously.

Throughout participants' responses, phonological awareness and phonics were frequently referred to as whole class while other domains such as fluency were referred to in the context of small groups. Handwriting was cited explicitly 39 times throughout responses, but participants also cited this focus by referring to 'letter formation'. Some participants mentioned the inclusion of fine motor skills or activities ($n = 23$) instead of or alongside handwriting. Technology was referred to with the naming of specific programs, often in the context of 'literacy groups', including Teach Your Monster to Read, Reading Eggs and Hairy Phonics.

There appeared to be less of an emphasis placed on oral language, while reading and writing tended to be at the centre of most participants' responses. Oral language or 'speaking and listening' was commonly described as being "*incorporated into all lessons e.g. during class discussions, listening to stories, listening to instructions*" (Participant 164) and not prioritised for explicit instruction or addressed in isolation. Some participants alluded to oral language in the context of "*daily news*"

Figure 4.4

Summary of General Literacy Session Structure with Participant Examples



(Participant 76) presented by students or *“speaking tasks related to the current area of study in science, history, English”* (Participant 227). There was also frequent mention of literacy practices taking place at the start of the school day. Many participants’ descriptions therefore included mention of their morning routine which *“incorporates vocabulary development for days of the week, months, seasons, descriptive language around weather”* (Participant 197), all of which is relevant to oral language.

Emphases and Theoretical Underpinnings. Participants’ outlines of ‘what’ occurred during their literacy sessions frequently linked back to ‘who’ informed their practice. Ten participants explicitly referred to the ‘science of reading’ as the basis of their practice: *“I am a science of reading advocate and as such have been running a structured Literacy Approach over the last 2 years”* (Participant 465). This was notable given that participants’ descriptions of literacy practice were never limited to just ‘reading’. By contrast, two participants referred to the ‘three-cueing system’ but one of them mentioned a move away from it in favour of the ‘science of reading’. The one participant that did refer to implementing ‘three-cueing’ also mentioned other elements such as phonics:

Literacy groups where students move around the classroom and participate in a range of hands on activities including phonics, fine motor, sight words. During this time the teacher completes guided reading with groups up to 3, working on the 3 cueing system and predictable texts, word work and comprehension. (Participant 244)

Responses such as this could not be dismissed as representing an approach that is not evidence-informed. Such was the complexity of responses in Section Three of the survey, as the researcher discovered in the process of analysis. Participants’ responses could inspire speculation, but they could not be taken at face value given that there is so much more to classroom execution than these responses could illuminate.

Participants’ descriptions of literacy practice generally represented both a focus on the explicit teaching of phonics, and a similar and seemingly equally important focus on meaning-making through areas such as vocabulary and comprehension. An overemphasis on either approach was not perceived by the researcher but this was difficult to discern, particularly because ‘phonics’ and ‘meaning’ or ‘comprehension’ were represented differently in participants’ responses. ‘Phonics’ was referred to as both a noun and as an adjective (‘phonics activities’). By contrast, meaning or comprehension could be alluded to in the context of various activities but were not generally listed on their own as the focus of classroom practice as frequently as phonics. With regard to comprehension, two participants mentioned the use of *“core knowledge units”* (Participant 400) and a *“core knowledge lesson”* (Participant 70).

Beyond ‘phonics’ and ‘comprehension’ alone, several participants mentioned modelling their literacy practice on the ‘big six’ (Konza, 2014; NICHD, 2000) and some specifically named Dr Konza in their response. Others referred to the use of the ‘reading rope’ (Scarborough, 2001), a framework adopted by the NSW Department of Education, to inform practice. This was interesting given that

neither framework includes explicit references to domains such as writing, which was so frequently mentioned by participants.

Types of Practice. With regard to the ‘type’ of instruction included, bearing in mind the limitations of participants’ responses echoing actual classroom implementation, the word ‘explicit’ was used 101 times across all responses. Similarly, mention of some kind of revision or “*Daily Review which revises taught literacy concepts*” (Participant 25) as a specific component of the literacy session was common among responses ($n = 18$). This approach appeared to mirror the tenets of direct or explicit instruction, given the focus on activating students’ prior knowledge (Rosenshine, 2012), although it was noted that this kind of ‘review’ was mentioned only for phonological or phonic knowledge and not for other areas such as handwriting or vocabulary:

Every day starts with a Daily Review of content taught before moving on to the explicit teaching of the focus of the week using 'I do', 'We do', and moving to 'You do' when they have mastered the new concept...The Daily Review lasts about 10 mins and focuses on GPC by using the cued articulation song Ants in the Apple, getting students to step out CVC/CVCC/CCVC words in a game and then ending with fast letters which are done on mini-whiteboards where I say the phoneme and they write the corresponding grapheme. (Participant 290)

This gradual release of responsibility (‘I do, we do, you do’) as another cornerstone of explicit instruction (Rosenshine, 2012) was also featured in several responses. Similarly, many participants referred to teaching and learning being sequenced from shared or modelled, to guided, to independent, particularly in reading or writing. Some mentioned a progression of learning across a week or year with an increase in difficulty:

In a 2.5 hour morning session I would take kindergarten students through a structured phonological awareness lesson that progressively gets more complex throughout the year, followed by synthetic phonics instruction and then a whole class writing lesson. (Participant 16)

The phrase ‘guided reading’ was used 46 times across participants’ responses, compared to ‘explicit teaching’ ($n = 20$), ‘guided writing’ ($n = 17$), ‘whole class’ ($n = 35$) and ‘small group’ ($n = 24$). There was a clear emphasis on guided reading practice throughout participants’ descriptions. This was commonly accompanied by some variation of ‘literacy activities’ involving independent student participation while the teacher focused on this small group, guided instruction: “*While students are rotating through activities I would read with 3-4 students at a time using decodable readers to teach reading*” (Participant 16). As an alternative, 18 participants mentioned the use of partner or paired reading “*using either fluency sheets (lists of words with the target phoneme) or corresponding decodable texts*” (Participant 196) as a classroom routine.

There did appear to be relative consistency among participants’ responses, with some key differences in practical choices. Participants’ responses provided further insight as to how their practice was executed and what influenced their decision-making in this process.

'How'

Participants' descriptions of the execution of these literacy practices in the classroom formed the 'how' of literacy practice. The data are considered below under two key headings: allocation of time; and differentiation. This included specific timings and durations of components within the literacy session, and differentiation in terms of student groupings and resourcing. Notably, these two issues of timing and differentiation were outlined as significant considerations for teachers in orchestrating the literacy block in the review of the literature in Chapter 2.

Allocation of Time. Most participants indicated that their literacy session or 'block' ran for 2 to 2.5 hours. One participant noted that "*Literacy happens all day every day*" (Participant 102), while another suggested that "*Our literacy is not taught in a block but rather lessons spread throughout the day*" (Participant 473), but both then outlined a combination of the elements included in Figure 4.4. Similarly, 'play based' learning was mentioned by a small number of participants, but this usually aligned only with their description of 'literacy activities' for independent completion by students. Participant 160 discussed the allocation of time for key literacy activities across a whole week rather than restricting them to a two-hour daily session, but this was the general approach. Others noted time pressures and suggested that "*in reality I don't always fit all this into 2 hours*" (Participant 307). Very few participating teachers made any mention of other learning areas such as mathematics ($n = 7$), science ($n = 10$), or geography ($n = 2$) in the context of their literacy sessions.

Participants' responses provided some insight as to the duration of components within their literacy sessions. While not every participant included specific timings and bearing in mind the overlap among elements of the literacy session, there was some consistency among responses. A summary of the average duration of the key components of the literacy session reported by participants is provided in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5

Allocation of Instructional Time According to Participants' Open-Ended Survey Responses

Component	Average duration
Phonological awareness, usually via a commercial program	10-20 min
Daily phonics, including revision and introduction of grapheme-phoneme correspondences (GPCs) and teaching related to 'high-frequency words'	15-60 min
Writing, including modelled and independent opportunities	30-60 min
Handwriting	15-30 min

Table 4.5 (continued)

Component	Average duration
Reading focus, including shared reading of quality literature, modelled reading and links to comprehension and vocabulary	15-30 min
Independent 'literacy activities' and simultaneous 'guided' withdrawal groups for reading	30-100 min

Instruction related to phonological awareness, usually via a commercial program, was the shortest in duration from 10 to 20 minutes. Daily phonics instruction, which generally included the revision and introduction of GPCs and teaching related to 'high-frequency' words, was described as lasting for between 15 and 60 minutes. This often included both decoding and encoding with the use of mini whiteboards and access to slides to support the teacher in facilitating the lesson. One participant specified that an hour was spent weekly on the explicit teaching of spelling. Otherwise, spelling appeared to be absorbed into the 'phonics' portion of the session, with one participant noting that *"there is not a clear delineation between phonics instruction and spelling"* (Participant 76). Some participants specified the number of new GPCs introduced, ranging from two to four per week. One participant suggested that this changed across the year as *"2 new phonemes per week [in] term 1 increase to 3 [in] term 2"* (Participant 440).

Writing instruction, usually including modelled and independent opportunities, ran from between 30 to 60 minutes. Handwriting was sometimes referred to within this overall writing instruction. When identified separately, explicit handwriting instruction usually lasted from 15 to 30 minutes, sometimes on a daily basis or more often once or twice per week.

The portion of the literacy session devoted to 'reading' at a whole class level, generally including shared reading of quality literature, modelled reading and a focus on comprehension and vocabulary, lasted between 15 to 30 minutes. One participant specified that six quality texts, including poetry and non-fiction, were read to students daily, but most participants referred to just one shared reading for enjoyment per day. Notably, just two participants in the sample specified the explicit teaching of *"3 new vocabulary words per week"* (Participant 453) and *"4 new words over the course of 2 weeks"* (Participant 456). Although this may simply have been an oversight in participants' responses, the infrequent mention of explicit vocabulary teaching was evident. Participants otherwise referred to the implicit teaching and learning of vocabulary through the discussion of unknown words in shared text reading.

Independent, often rotational, literacy activities or 'stations', alongside simultaneous 'guided' withdrawal groups, represented the largest portion of allocated time in most responses. This accounted for between 30 to 100 minutes, usually on a daily basis and infrequently on three or four days per week. By contrast, participants that referred instead to a paired reading routine specified that this lasted for 5 to 10 minutes daily.

Differentiation. The selection of students for small group teaching, commonly ‘guided reading’, appeared to rely on students being “*grouped by ability*” (Participant 59), teachers selecting texts “*based on the ability of students*” (Participant 70), or “*levelled groups*” (Participant 65). Importantly, this discussion of grouping generally did not include mention of student groupings being flexible or changing according to student needs. Just one participant suggested that “*my groups are based on phonics needs or writing needs. They can be flexible as needed*” (Participant 307). Although this style of independent learning and small group teaching appeared to be extremely common, participants lamented the limited time it afforded them to work with students: “*I have about 10 minutes per group which is not enough*” (Participant 69).

Further, this use of small group instruction appeared in many responses to be the only evidence of differentiation in practice. The words ‘differentiation’ ($n = 3$) and ‘differentiated’ ($n = 16$) were used in some responses but almost always with regard to the “*withdrawal of small groups for explicit ability-based differentiated instruction in reading*” (Participant 330) by the class teacher and, less often, writing. These responses appeared to rely on the notion of ‘ability’ to drive the conceptualisation of differentiation in the classroom, usually in the context of decodable or levelled text reading. One participant mentioned giving ‘different’ words to certain students to spell, presumably to cater for their different needs, during whole class phonics. Another mentioned the seating of students during phonics “*in levelled rows (front row are support students, to the back row which are extension students)*” (Participant 332). Any description of differentiation was otherwise limited to ‘groups’.

There was also mention of ‘ability’ regarding the completion of some activities. One participant suggested that the “*more able students write their response by using sight words they know and sounds they hear in unknown words*” (Participant 5). Another indicated that “*lower learners*” (Participant 69) could complete lower- and upper-case letter matching while other students were engaging with technology, writing or playing literacy games independently. While this may have represented an appropriate approach to catering for students’ needs, the potential implications of the focus on ‘ability’ and reference to students as ‘low’ or as “*outliers*” (Participant 59) are significant.

The choice of decodable or predictable texts as student reading material was another point of difference among responses and the significance of this kind of resourcing was raised in the literature review. The words ‘decodable’ ($n = 44$), ‘predictable’ ($n = 3$) and ‘levelled’ ($n = 4$) were used throughout the descriptions of the literacy session, suggesting perhaps that participants felt a need to specify the types of text in use in their classrooms. While these frequencies may have suggested an emphasis on the use of decodable texts, the term ‘PM’ was also commonly used ($n = 12$) to refer to levelled texts of a particular brand (Cengage Australia, 2024). Some participants referred to exclusive use of decodable or predictable texts while many mentioned using both in equal measure. For others, the combination of use related to timing and student progress: “*I use decodable readers for all early reading in my classroom and then may use predictable texts eventually (eg PM Readers above level 6) after students are confidently us[ing] decoding strategies*” (Participant 307).

'Why'

As the final theme drawn from responses to Section Three, the 'why' of literacy practice refers to the justification participants gave for their classroom practice and often linked back to 'who' influenced their decision-making. A summary of participants' key justifications coded for 'why', with relevant quotes from their responses, has been included in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6

Explanations of Practice Coded for 'Why' and Participant Examples

Explanation of practice	Participant examples
Requirements of and consistency afforded by a commercial program	<i>"I decide what to include based on what each lesson of InitialLit requires" (Participant 248)</i> <i>"We use Heggertys as a program for consistency across K-2" (Participant 229)</i>
Assessment	<i>"I use data such as decoding assessments, Phonological awareness assessments, running records, spelling assessments, and writing samples...to set goals for students and determine my teaching sequence" (Participant 4)</i> <i>"We complete a writing assessment at the end of the term and compare pre/post tests" (Participant 197)</i>
Student learning needs	<i>"I decide what is included based on student needs" (Participant 42)</i>
Syllabus	<i>"I am guided by the ES1 syllabus" (Participant 93)</i>
Timing within the school year	<i>"Because this is the start of the year, students require prompts and support so I will roam while they complete their handwriting" (Participant 76)</i> <i>"we adjust and adapt...to suit our individual student and class needs throughout the term/year" (Participant 152)</i> <i>"The literacy block adjusts over 4 terms" (Participant 351)</i>
Whole school priorities	<i>"As a whole school focus, our goal is to improve Creating Texts aspect of learning progressions, with a focus on spelling and vocabulary" (Participant 213)</i>
'Evidence'	<i>"My literacy block is based on evidence from the science of reading community that I have gleaned and refined from self-study" (Participant 42)</i> <i>"Literacy instruction in all 3 Kindergarten classrooms at the school is modelled off Deslea Konza's 'Big 6' approach to literacy, as well as the science of reading and Scarborough's Reading Rope" (Participant 351)</i>

As mentioned earlier, many participants named specific academics or programs that influenced the design of their literacy sessions. The influence of commercial programs was common among responses which often listed them for coverage in order within the literacy session.

Overall, only eight participants mentioned the use of assessment. Ten participants otherwise referred to 'student needs' as an apparent driver of practice. Notably, one participant referred to lessons from a commercial program, Get Reading Right, not progressing "*until 80% of the cohort achieves 80% on the unit test*" (Participant 332). Although this response could be taken as student driven, it may also allude to an approach which is ultimately driven by the requirements of a program and not of the learners taking part in it.

Only two participants made mention of the syllabus as informing practice, although there was otherwise reference to "*planning/programming requirements*" (Participant 468). Similarly, only four participants mentioned 'evidence'. Others alluded to the 'science of reading' ($n = 4$) and 'big six' ($n = 3$) as the basis of their decision-making for literacy practice. Thirteen participants specified that certain practices occurred during particular school terms and this timing sometimes linked to student progress throughout the year according to assessment.

Just one participant referred to the literacy session being based on "*my personal pedagogical choice*" (Participant 266) but this could not confirm that many participants were not at least somewhat driven by personal preferences and traditional approaches in practice. One participant suggested that they determined their literacy practice independently: "*I randomly decide based on what I see. No school program, the school doesn't care what we do. All 5 classes are different*" (Participant 413). Another participant was even sceptical of practices they were executing in the classroom, regardless of their uncertainty: "*we still do a sight word program at my school (though I know may not be best practice)*" (Participant 307).

Survey Section Four: Levels of Agreement About Inclusive Literacy Practice

Section Four aimed to gather further insight into participating teachers' broader paradigms with regard to literacy practice. Following their definitions of literacy and outlines of their typical literacy sessions, participants' levels of agreement with the Likert scale items were considered important in potentially revealing the knowledge and beliefs that may underpin their classroom approaches.

A total of 140 participants completed the Likert scale items in Section Four of the survey questionnaire. Given that some demographic information has been used as extraneous variables during analysis, a demographic profile of this specific group of participants has been included in Table 4.7. This profile was similar to that of the broader sample of 266 participants who completed at least Section One of the survey.

Over 99% percent of participants were female and 81.4% of the participants were teaching in government schools. There was a broad age range of participants. Participants had a range of years of experience teaching kindergarten, but 80% of participating teachers had been teaching for five or more years overall. Most participants ($n = 111$) were teaching in schools with 1 to 4 kindergarten classes.

Table 4.7*Demographic Characteristics of Participants with Full Survey Completion (n = 140)*

Variable	Groups	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	1	0.7
	Female	139	99.3
Age	20-29	27	19.4
	30-39	35	25.2
	40-49	42	30.2
	50-59	29	20.9
	60-69	6	4.3
School Sector	Government	114	81.4
	Independent	12	8.6
	Catholic	14	10
Number of kindergarten classes at current school	1-4	111	79.3
	5-7	24	17.1
	8+	5	3.6
Years teaching kindergarten	Beginning (0-3 years)	59	42.1
	Transitioning (4-5 years)	29	20.7
	Experienced (5+ years)	52	37.1
Total years teaching	Beginning (0-3 years)	15	10.7
	Transitioning (4-5 years)	12	8.6
	Experienced (5+ years)	113	80.7
Highest level of teaching qualification	Bachelor of Education	94	67.1
	Master of Teaching	21	15
	Graduate Diploma in Education	14	10
	Graduate Certificate in Education	7	5
	Postgraduate Research	4	2.9
Total		140	100.0

The following section represents a shift in emphasis from the largely qualitative analysis required of Sections Two and Three of the survey, to a statistics-based argument which reports on: the factorability of the Likert scale of 27 items; the subsequent generation of construct scores and their examination according to demographic information; and the percentage agreement associated with each of the items, including the correlation between participants' responses to some items and some of their demographic characteristics. This section therefore deepens the understanding gleaned from the previous sections by demonstrating the value of the three constructs identified for this research.

Likert scale items in Section Four were grouped by construct in the survey design: 4a Knowing (Items 1-5), 4b Doing (Items 6-17) and 4c Believing (Items 18-20). To confirm the constructs and to inform the generation of a construct score per participant, factor analysis was undertaken.

Factor Analysis

As part of the process of factor analysis, it is strongly advised in the literature (e.g., Pallant, 2020; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013) to first assess the suitability of the data by considering the sample size. While it has been suggested that 300 cases are required for factor analysis, a minimum sample size of 100 and at least five times as many participants as the number of survey items is common and can be sufficient (Costello & Osborne, 2005; Hair et al., 2010; Pallant, 2020; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). The present scale featured a total of 27 items and was completed by 140 participants, therefore meeting this minimum standard.

Inspection of the correlation matrix revealed the presence of many coefficients of .30 and above. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO; Kaiser, 1970, 1974) and Bartlett's (1954) Test of Sphericity determined the factorability of the scale (see Table 4.8). For factor analysis to be deemed appropriate, it is recommended that Bartlett's Test of Sphericity be significant ($p < .05$) and that the KMO be .60 as a minimum (Bartlett, 1954; Kaiser, 1970, 1974). The KMO value was .862, exceeding the recommended minimum (Kaiser, 1970, 1974), and Bartlett's (1954) Test of Sphericity reached statistical significance ($p = .000$), therefore supporting the factorability of the correlation matrix.

Table 4.8

KMO and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity

		Examining the Kindergarten Literacy Block scale
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		.862
Bartlett's test of sphericity	Approx. Chi Square df Sig.	2841.299 351 .000

After assessing the suitability of the data for factor analysis, principal component analysis (PCA) was undertaken for the 27 Likert scale items within the main study survey questionnaire, *Examining Approaches to the Kindergarten Literacy Block*, using IBM SPSS Statistics. Eigenvalues can be used to determine the number of factors. The Kaiser-Guttman Criterion (KGC; Guttman, 1954; Kaiser, 1960) recommends extracting all factors with corresponding sample eigenvalues greater than 1. PCA revealed the presence of six components with eigenvalues exceeding 1, explaining 40.23%, 9.20%, 5.87%, 5.44%, 4.47% and 4.21% of variance, respectively. The tendency of the KGC to overestimate the number of factors has been noted in the literature and it has been recommended that engaging multiple methods and comparing the results leads to the most accurate number of underlying factors (Auerswald & Moshagen, 2019).

Cattell's (1966) scree test, as an additional method, suggests examining a plot of the eigenvalues in descending order and determining the point at which the eigenvalues decline abruptly (Auerswald & Moshagen, 2019). Inspecting the scree plot (see Appendix M) revealed a break after the third

component, suggesting that three components should be retained. By contrast, the results of parallel analysis (Horn, 1965), as a third method, showed only two components with eigenvalues exceeding the corresponding criterion values for a randomly generated data matrix of the same size (27 variables x 140 respondents). Given that factor analysis is intended for data exploration and interpretation without rigid statistical rules (Pallant, 2020), three components were retained for further investigation. Inspection of the Component Matrix (see Appendix N) confirmed that most of the items loaded more strongly on three of the components, further supporting the decision to proceed with a three-factor solution (Pallant, 2020).

The three-component solution explained a total of 55.32% of the variance, with Component 1 contributing 40.23%, Component 2 contributing 9.20% and Component 3 contributing 5.87%. Oblique rotation is recommended as a method for interpreting the factors and the potential relationships between them (Pallant, 2020). To aid in the interpretation of the three components, oblimin rotation was performed. The aim of this process is to determine the variable loadings on each component and preferably for each variable to load strongly on only one component (Pallant, 2020; Thurstone, 1947). Inspecting the Component Correlation Matrix (see Table 4.9) revealed a strong relationship between all three factors and the strongest correlation between Components 1 and 2 (0.352).

Factor loadings of each of the variables were also examined in the Pattern Matrix (see Appendix O). It has been recommended that only items with a minimum loading of 0.32 be retained for interpretation and that loadings beyond 0.71 are considered excellent (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). The items from each section of Likert items (4a, 4b, 4c) were colour coded in the matrix to assist with interpretation. The items loading on each component mostly aligned with the organisation of survey scale items into the three constructs identified for the research: Knowing (Section 4a), Doing (Section 4b) and Believing (Section 4c). All item loadings fell within or beyond the permissible range (0.32 – 0.71; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013), excluding loadings for Items 11, 12, 17 and 18 (see Pattern Matrix in Appendix O).

Table 4.9

Component Correlation Matrix

Component	1	2	3
1	1.000	.352	.186
2	.352	1.000	.250
3	.186	.250	1.000

While PCA was not undertaken in order to improve or refine the scale, it was used alongside Cronbach's alphas to select items for removal when generating a domain or construct score per participant for closer examination. As an indicator of internal consistency, Cronbach's alpha should be above .70 (Nunnally, 1978). Cronbach's alphas for the three constructs using items grouped according

to the survey design were: Knowing $\alpha = .951$, Doing $\alpha = .767$ and Believing $\alpha = .628$. Scale items 11, 12, 17 and 18 showed the lowest loadings on the intended component to align with the constructs identified for the study (see Pattern Matrix in Appendix O). With regard to reliability, the removal of Items 5, 12, 17 and 18 indicated an increase in Cronbach's alpha. As such, Items 5, 11, 12, 17 and 18 were not included when undertaking descriptive analysis to generate a construct score per participant.

Construct Scores

Construct scores were therefore generated with nine items for 'knowing', nine items for 'doing' and four items for 'believing'. Participants' construct scores represented the total of all responses to items within a construct. Responses from participants #150 and #310 were clear outliers. Inspection of the box plot and the 5% trimmed mean for each construct for all participants confirmed that these scores did not have a significant influence on the data. Overall, participants' construct scores were generally lower for 'believing' but this construct also featured fewer scale items.

Participants' construct scores were examined according to demographic information as extraneous variables using descriptive analysis in IBM SPSS. Female teachers in government schools represented the majority of the sample and therefore gender and school sector were not selected. Participants' age, range of overall teaching experience and range of experience teaching kindergarten were considered. The relationship between participants' 'knowing', 'doing' and 'believing' construct scores and these demographic variables was investigated using a Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient which is a widely used measure of association (Lee Rodgers & Nicewander, 1988; Puth et al., 2014). Correlations are shown in Table 4.10. According to J. Cohen (1988), correlations from .10 to .29 are small, from .30 to .49 are medium and from .50 to 1.00 are large.

Table 4.10

Pearson Product-Moment Correlations Between Construct Scores and Demographic Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Age	—					
2. Years teaching kindergarten	.551**	—				
3. Total years teaching	.804**	.676**	—			
4. Knowing score	-.048	-.001	-.028	—		
5. Doing score	.130	.138	.184*	.654**	—	
6. Believing score	.040	.022	.055	.197*	.328**	—

*Correlation significant at $p < .05$ (2-tailed)

** Correlation significant at $p < .001$ (2-tailed)

Positive correlations between respondents' age, years teaching kindergarten and total years teaching were anticipated and confirmed by statistical analysis. There was also a small positive correlation between participants' 'doing' construct scores and total years teaching, $r = .184$, $n = 139$, $p < .05$. This suggested that as participants' years of teaching experience increased, they were more agreeable to item statements related to classroom practice such as Item 9 *'I use a variety of student groupings to teach reading and writing, including whole class, guided and independent'* and Item 13 *'My literacy instruction changes according to student assessment'*. This could not confirm that the more experienced participating teachers were necessarily more adept at implementing kindergarten literacy practice successfully but may allude to them having greater certainty and confidence in their instructional choices.

There was a strong positive correlation between participants' 'knowing' and 'doing' construct scores, $r = .654$, $n = 139$, $p < .001$, indicating 42.77% shared variance. This suggested that as participants aligned positively with statements related to 'knowing' about inclusive literacy practice, they also aligned positively with statements regarding relevant classroom practices. There was a medium positive correlation between participants' 'doing' and 'believing' construct scores, $r = .328$, $n = 139$, $p < .001$, indicating only 10.75% shared variance. This suggested that as participants agreed more highly with items related to 'doing' classroom literacy practice, they also agreed with items related to 'believing', such as Item 19 *'Children's home literacy environment impacts their literacy development'*.

Small negative correlations between participants' 'knowing' scores and age ($r = -.048$, $n = 139$, $p = .574$), years teaching kindergarten ($r = -.001$, $n = 140$, $p = .992$) and total years teaching ($r = -.028$, $n = 140$, $p = .745$) were also noted. This indicated that as participants' age and years of teaching experience increased, their agreement with items related to 'knowing' about inclusive literacy practice, such as Item 5 *'I keep up to date with research in the field of literacy'*, decreased. Although these correlations were not significant, it suggests that older teachers may be less likely to engage with research or to plan their literacy sessions based on the needs of their students (Item 2).

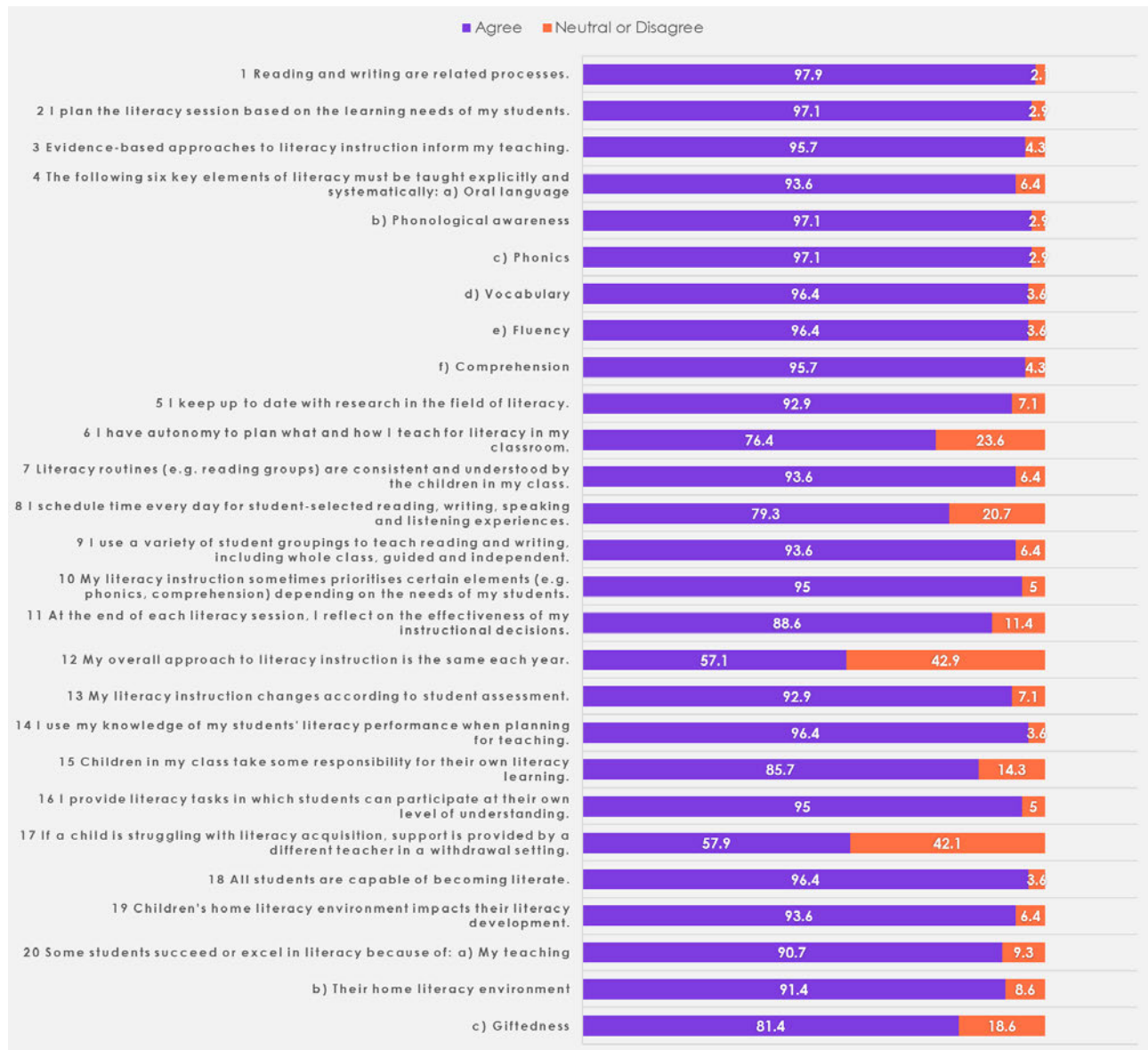
Importantly, higher construct scores could not be taken to suggest a more inclusive or evidence-informed approach to literacy practice, given that the survey gathered only self-reported data. Agreement with some statements may also be less appropriate in an IPA (Florian & Spratt, 2013). For example, Item 12 stated *'My overall approach to literacy instruction is the same each year'*. It could be argued that consistency is appropriate, if teachers are implementing an evidence-informed, successfully differentiated and student-driven approach to enacting curriculum requirements, but this may not necessarily be the case. If not, retaining the same overall approach to classroom literacy practice from year to year would not be advisable. Notably, items such as Items 12 and 17 were *excluded* from the calculation of the 'doing' construct score. Expecting agreement with all the statements included could therefore be appropriate. Nonetheless, it was necessary to examine individual survey items and responses more closely.

Percentage Agreement

Responses from 5-7 on the Likert scale were categorised as representing 'agreement' and the overall percentage agreement for each item was generated (see Figure 4.5).

Figure 4.5

Percentage Agreement per Likert Scale Item



Knowing. Items 1-5 of the survey addressed respondents 'knowing' about inclusive literacy practice. There were high levels of agreement overall for these items, with a slight increase in respondents indicating neutral or disagree (6.4%) for Item 4a, oral language. Given that this question asked about the explicit teaching of six key components of literacy (Konza, 2014), this slight difference was notable. It could be that oral language was slightly less appreciated as a component of the often promoted 'big five' (NICHD, 2000) and participants had a sense that this component was less of a candidate for explicit and systematic teaching, compared to those with a more tangible impact on

reading and writing development such as phonics (Honig, 2007). There was also a slightly lower percentage of agreement (92.9%) with Item 5 '*I keep up to date with research in the field of literacy*'.

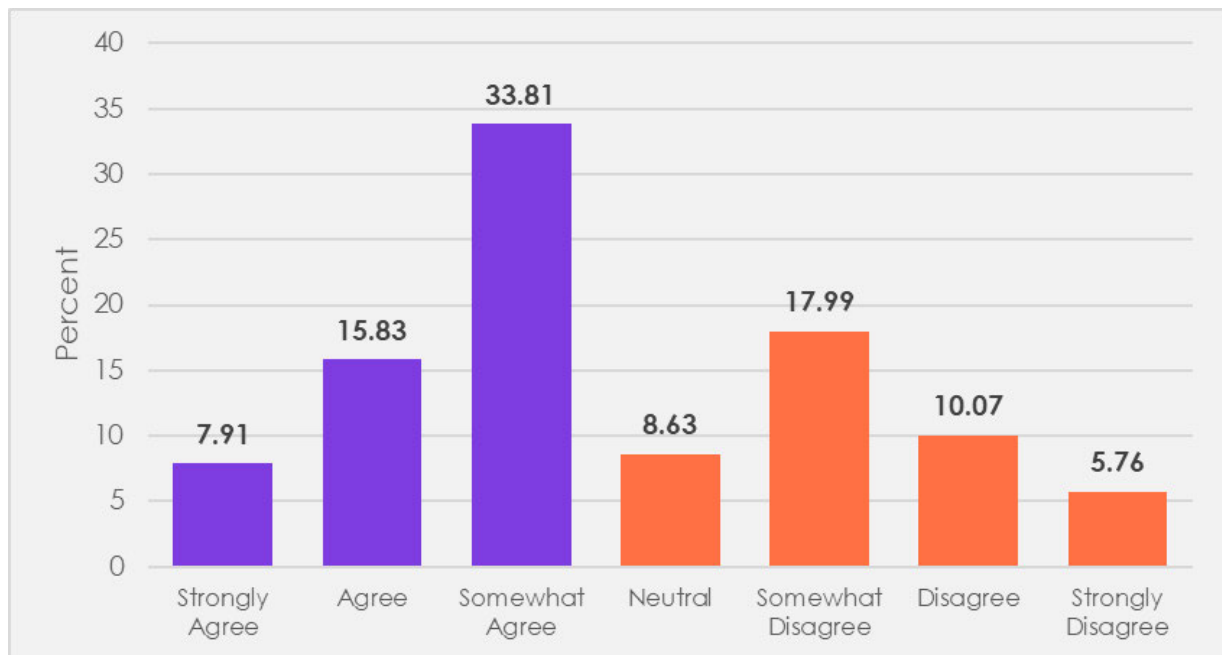
Doing. The construct of 'doing' inclusive literacy practice was addressed by Items 6-17. There were lower levels of agreement with Items 6, 8, 11, 12 and 17 and these items were therefore selected for closer consideration and examination of participants' raw scores. Item 6 addressed participating teachers' autonomy in what and how they teach literacy in their classroom. Twenty three percent of respondents were neutral or disagreed that they have autonomy. Teacher autonomy is not necessarily positive as it may lead to inconsistency in curriculum delivery (Keddie et al., 2023). Teachers need to be able to operate flexibly in their classrooms to ensure that they are meeting the needs of their students, but this flexibility must occur within some boundary of evidence-informed, inclusive practice which reflects syllabus requirements. As discussed earlier, many participants indicated that they were required to use a commercial program which forms at least part of their literacy practice, and this may affect their sense of autonomy. The notion of autonomy required further interrogation through the classroom observations and interviews in Phase Two of the study.

Seventy nine percent of respondents agreed with Item 8 '*I schedule time every day for student-selected reading, writing, speaking and listening experiences*' and 88% of participants agreed with Item 11 '*At the end of each literacy session, I reflect on the effectiveness of my instructional decisions*'. It could be that some participants were unsure of experiences being 'student-selected' and not that they do not include reading, writing, speaking and listening experiences as part of their literacy practice.

In contrast to the high levels of agreement with these items, just 57% of participants agreed with Item 12 '*My overall approach to literacy instruction is the same each year*', the lowest percentage for any item. According to the raw survey result (see Figure 4.6), the majority of these respondents (33.81%) only *somewhat* agreed with the statement. This could be a positive sign if participants considered that their overall approach to literacy practice is flexible and adapted year to year based on the specific needs of students in their care and on updated knowledge of optimal pedagogies.

Figure 4.6

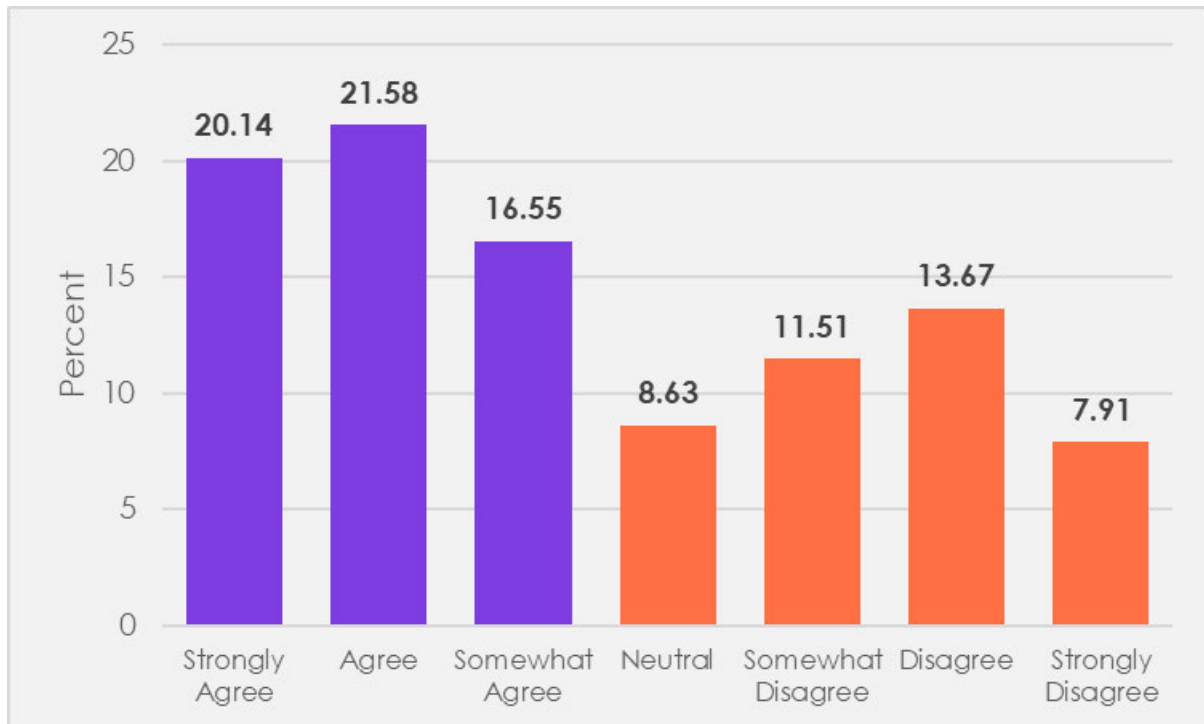
Percentage of Responses to Item 12 'My overall approach to literacy instruction is the same each year'



There was a similar spread of responses to Item 17 '*If a child is struggling with literacy acquisition, support is provided by a different teacher in a withdrawal setting*' with 57% agreement. Raw data for this item (see Figure 4.7) demonstrated the broad range of responses from participants across all categories, with over 40% of participants suggesting that they agreed or strongly agreed. Although this survey item and the self-reported data it gleaned were limited, it is important to note that whether or not they require intervention, the needs of all learners are the responsibility of the classroom teacher (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011).

Figure 4.7

Percentage of Responses to Item 17 'If a child is struggling with literacy acquisition, support is provided by a different teacher in a withdrawal setting'



Following examination of these individual survey items, the relationship between these items and select demographic characteristics was investigated using a Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. Coefficients are shown in Table 4.11.

Table 4.11

Pearson Product-Moment Correlations Between Survey Items and Demographic Variables

Variable	Item 6	Item 8	Item 11	Item 12	Item 17
1. Age	.090	.039	.188*	.078	-.178*
2. Years teaching kindergarten	.026	.135	.035	.118	-.067
3. Total years teaching	.110	.089	.184*	.158	-.163

*Correlation significant at $p < .05$ (2-tailed)

There was a small positive correlation between participants' age ($r = .188$) and total years of teaching ($r = .184$) with responses to Item 11 'At the end of each literacy session, I reflect on the effectiveness of my instructional decisions', $n = 139$, $p < .05$. Although significant, this only indicated 3.53% and 3.38% shared variance, respectively. Nonetheless, it was interesting to note that as

teachers' years of experience increased, their alignment with reflective practice following literacy sessions also increased.

A small but significant negative correlation was also noted between participants' age and responses to Item 17 '*If a child is struggling with literacy acquisition, support is provided by a different teacher in a withdrawal setting*', $r = -.178$, $n = 138$, $p < .05$. This suggests that as participants' age increased, they did not opt to address the needs of students requiring additional support in literacy via withdrawal and may instead have focused on supporting all students as part of Tier 1, whole class literacy practice: a key principle of the IPA (Florian & Spratt, 2013).

Believing. Items 18-20 of the survey addressed respondents 'believing' in inclusive literacy practice and students' capacity to become literate. There were generally high levels of agreement overall for this smaller set of items (see Figure 4.5). A slightly smaller percentage of participants (81.4%) agreed that students may succeed or excel in literacy because of giftedness for Item 20c. Inspection of the raw data for this item clarified that 14% of respondents indicated neutral, compared to just 6% of respondents being neutral with regard to teaching impacting student success (Item 20a). A much higher percentage (90.7%) of participants attributed success to their own teaching and not one participant disagreed or strongly disagreed with Item 20a. A similarly high percentage (91.4%) of participants agreed that the home literacy environment may account for students' literacy success (Item 20b).

The data gleaned from the survey in Phase One of the study answered the overarching question 'What are kindergarten teachers' approaches to literacy pedagogy?' to some extent. The survey findings revealed that participating kindergarten teachers' definitions aligned more strongly with a cognitive perspective on literacy. Participants' open-ended responses suggested that while kindergarten teachers generally aligned with evidence-informed approaches and frameworks for literacy practice, they were also drawing from a vast range of knowledge sources, including commercial programs, to drive their classroom literacy teaching. The final section of the survey indicated that participants' levels of agreement about inclusive literacy practice were high overall. The interrogation of specific Likert-scale items revealed that participants' adherence to certain practices, such as withdrawal for literacy support, may exist in tension with their broader, self-reported inclusive approaches.

Given the potential differences between teachers' self-reported and actual classroom practices, there was much more to be gathered from classroom observations to examine the enactment of literacy practice described by participants, and to consider the extent to which such practice aligned with the IPA (Florian & Spratt, 2013). In the next chapter, the findings from the Phase Two observations and interviews are reported which sometimes corroborate or contradict the self-reported survey data.

Chapter 5

Phase Two Findings

This chapter reports the findings of Phase Two of the study which included the classroom video observations and teacher semi-structured interviews. This chapter begins by introducing the three case study teachers and their classrooms which each represented different literacy contexts within the selected radius of Sydney. This is followed by an outline of how teachers were observed to 'do' literacy practice in their classrooms. The semi-structured interviews provided further insight as to participating teachers 'believing' in inclusive literacy practice (Rouse, 2008).

Case Study Classrooms

Augustine School – April

Augustine School is located in a highly multicultural Sydney suburb. The school had an above average Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA), suggesting that Augustine School is more educationally advantaged than a large proportion of schools in Australia.

April was observed teaching one of three kindergarten classes at Augustine School. A total of 7 hours and 30 minutes of footage from April's classroom was coded for analysis. April's classroom was arranged with carpet space in the centre and student table groups around the edge. There were strips of masking tape with student names written on them on the carpet to determine student seating. In one corner of the room, there was a jellybean-shaped table for small group teaching. At the front of the room was April's desk facing the carpet area, along with an interactive whiteboard (IWB) and a magnetic easel whiteboard.

During the researcher's initial visit to Augustine School, April suggested that her 'literacy block' was relatively consistent on each day of the week and always represented the morning session. She described the morning as including phonics, some handwriting and literacy groups, including small group teaching using decodable texts.

Kings School – Kathy

Kings School is situated in Sydney. The school had an ICSEA in the top 5% at the time of data collection. Kathy was observed teaching one of six kindergarten classes at Kings School. A total of 5 hours and 17 minutes of footage from Kathy's classroom was coded for analysis.

Kathy's classroom had a large floor space in the main classroom area. Student table groups were arranged around the edge of the room, along with a small group jellybean table and other resource trays and equipment. There were coloured Velcro spots for students to sit on during carpet time. Kathy had an IWB and a magnetic easel whiteboard at the front of the room. Almost every wall of the classroom featured learning displays including numerals and number words, alphabet posters and

high-frequency words. During the initial visit, Kathy explained that 'literacy' was broken up into sections throughout the morning and middle sessions of the day for her kindergarten class.

Riverbank School – Robin

Riverbank School is located in Sydney, and it had an ICSEA in the top 5% at the time of data collection. Robin was teaching one of three kindergarten classes at Riverbank School. A total of 4 hours and 24 minutes of footage from Robin's classroom was coded for analysis.

Robin's classroom had a large floorplan and was mostly carpeted, with a substantial wet area at one end. There was a large rug placed at the front of the room with an IWB and easel whiteboard. Student tables were arranged in the surrounding space alongside the teacher's jellybean table. The walls of the classroom featured grapheme displays, alphabet posters and word cards often paired with matching images or drawings. Robin suggested that all three of the kindergarten classes at Riverbank School followed the same program and 'literacy block' structure. This structure was described as being followed every day of the week without variation.

Classroom Observations

The following section outlines the classroom video observations of literacy pedagogies demonstrated by the three case study classroom teachers. The observations are first considered in terms of the pedagogical content, followed by the allocated time devoted to categories of practice. Lastly, an examination of the coding for frequency of the 27 teaching practices of the *Classroom Literacy Observation Schedule – Revised* (CLOS-R; Louden et al., 2008) provides insight into emphases evident in participants' selection of literacy practices.

Pedagogical Content. With regard to the first research question identified for this study, 'What are kindergarten teachers' approaches to literacy pedagogy?', the data gleaned from the teacher survey questionnaire in Phase One of the study suggested relative consistency among participants' responses. Participants tended to outline their classroom literacy practice as including some focus on phonological awareness and/or phonics, a reading focus including reading or literacy groups, and a writing focus. This structure mirrored the English syllabus implemented at the time, with all three key strands apparently addressed: speaking and listening, reading and viewing, and writing and responding (NESA, 2012).

Overall, the data gleaned from the classroom observations was consistent with this general structure of the literacy session but the execution in each of the case study classrooms varied. A summary of the main aspects of the literacy session observed in all three classrooms is included in Table 5.1. It is important to note that each of the literacy sessions observed in each teacher's classroom involved a different combination and order of some the elements included in Table 5.1. Further, the absence of a practice can only indicate that it was not observed in the context of the video

footage and not that it was necessarily excluded from the teacher’s literacy practice altogether. For example, the sharing of individual student news was not included in the video observations collected from Riverbank School but it is possible that this routine did occur as an oral language focus outside of data collection. Nonetheless, participants were asked to assist in timetabling the video observations so that the data collected would be representative of their general approach to the literacy block, with all routine elements included. The three teachers’ approaches to literacy practice were therefore considered in the context of what was included in the observations.

Table 5.1

Summary of Key Teaching Practices Observed in Each Case Study Classroom

April Augustine School	Kathy Kings School	Robin Riverbank School
Morning routine (roll marking)	Morning routine (interactive roll, calendar, weather, Zones of Regulation, visual timetable)	Morning routine (roll marking, student-led Acknowledgement of Country, visual timetable)
Phonological awareness (PA), grapheme-phoneme correspondence (GPC) review or introduction and real/non-word reading using commercial program resources	PA using commercial program GPC review or introduction using slides or commercial program resources	PA practice, GPC review or introduction and word reading/spelling using slides
Independent literacy activities alongside small group reading with teacher	Independent literacy activities alongside small group reading with teacher	Independent literacy activities alongside small group reading with teacher
Modelled writing and independent writing in books, sometimes with picture book as stimulus	Modelled writing and independent writing in books, sometimes with picture book as stimulus	Modelled writing and independent writing in books, sometimes with picture book as stimulus Student independent writing on mini whiteboards
Picture book reading/response	Picture book reading/response	
Modelled and independent handwriting	Modelled and independent handwriting	
Student ‘news’	Student ‘news’	

While there appeared to be some consistency between the three classrooms, and some alignment of the participating teachers’ practices with the research literature, there were some differences related to execution. Table 5.2 outlines evidence of the key components of literacy practice across the video observations gathered in Phase Two. The most notable variations included: the use or

omission of print during phonological awareness tasks; the inclusion or omission of an emphasis on orthographic mapping and the review of previously taught GPCs; and only implicit coverage of fluency, vocabulary and spelling.

Table 5.2

Aspects of the 'Big Six' with the Addition of Writing and Evidence from Phase Two Observations

Aspects of the 'big six' (Konza, 2014; NICHD, 2000) with the addition of writing	Evidence from Phase Two observations
Oral language and early literacy experiences	Observed implicitly in context of whole class questioning or discussion (e.g., of picture book shared reading) and individual student 'news'
Phonological awareness, including whole words, onset and rime, syllables and phonemes	Oral segmentation of phonemes for reading and spelling observed in all three classrooms Always in the context of print in April's classroom
Alphabetic principle for decoding and encoding	Review of learned GPCs in April's and Kathy's observations Robin only observed introducing new target graphemes without review of previous focus Some promotion of orthographic mapping but emphasis on whole word reading in all three classrooms
Fluency, including accuracy, automaticity and prosody	Repeated word-reading practice in isolation and small group independent rereading of familiar texts in all three classrooms No evidence of explicit modelling of fluency in any observations
Vocabulary, including morphological awareness	Implicit exploration of vocabulary in the context of shared reading of picture books in all three classrooms No evidence of purposeful selection of words for explicit teaching No evidence of explicit morphology instruction
Comprehension, including knowledge building and strategies	Elaborated instructional time devoted to shared reading and discussion of texts in April and Kathy's classrooms Questioning and retelling observed in small group reading practice in all three classrooms
Writing, including text composition and transcription skills such as spelling and handwriting	Sentence-level writing practice observed in April and Robin's classrooms Evidence of sentence-level practice <i>within</i> a scaffolded text type focus for writing only in Kathy's classroom Evidence of explicit modelling of letter formation and independent handwriting practice only in April and Kathy's classrooms No evidence of explicit teaching of spelling patterns or strategies for spelling unfamiliar words

Consistency between the practices observed in the case study classrooms and those recommended in the literature was also impacted by the length of allocated time devoted to them.

Allocated Time. In participants' responses to Section Three of the survey questionnaire in Phase One of the study, the general lengths of time reported to be spent on each aspect of the literacy session were considered (see Table 4.5 in Chapter 4).

For comparison, the average allocation of time to each aspect of the literacy session in each of the case study classrooms is shown in minutes in Table 5.3. It is important to note that although these categories were considered discretely for the purpose of quantifying them from the data, they are each overlapping and broadly relevant throughout the literacy session. For example, vocabulary and phonological awareness were sometimes observed to be addressed as part of participants' 'morning routines'. During interactive roll marking, Kathy asked students to touch their name if it began with a particular phoneme. Similarly, handwriting, including letter placement on the lines and formation, was often corrected in the context of independent writing practice. The breakdown represented in Table 5.3 and outlined here establishes the broad chunks of time that appeared to be devoted to each of these categories.

Table 5.3

Average Allocation of Whole Class Time in Each Case Study Classroom in Minutes

Category	April Augustine School	Kathy Kings School	Robin Riverbank School
Morning Routine	4 min	14 min	2 min
PA/Phonics/Spelling	23 min	11 min	7 min
Modelled/Independent Writing	60 min	41 min	24 min
Handwriting	4 min	25 min	0 min
Modelled/Shared Reading	22 min	30 min	5 min
Independent Literacy Activities	60 min	33 min	47 min
Other	3 min	8 min	0 min

The time allocated to several of the categories aligned with the timing gleaned from the survey responses discussed earlier (see Table 5.4). Phonological awareness (PA), phonics and spelling as a combined category fell within the 10-60 minutes reported in the survey for April and Kathy, but Robin appeared to be spending much less allocated time on these elements. This perhaps suggested a more implicit approach to teaching and learning in this area, with an average of only 7 minutes devoted to this explicit teaching and practice. During Robin's video observations, practice associated with phonological awareness, phonics and spelling was observed to be incorporated into independent

literacy activities. These activities sometimes involved additional personnel to support students, but this kind of phonics or spelling practice occurred in a small group, not as a whole class, and therefore only involved some students in the class (see Chapter 6 Discussion).

Table 5.4

Average Allocation of Whole Class Time in Survey Responses and Case Study Classrooms

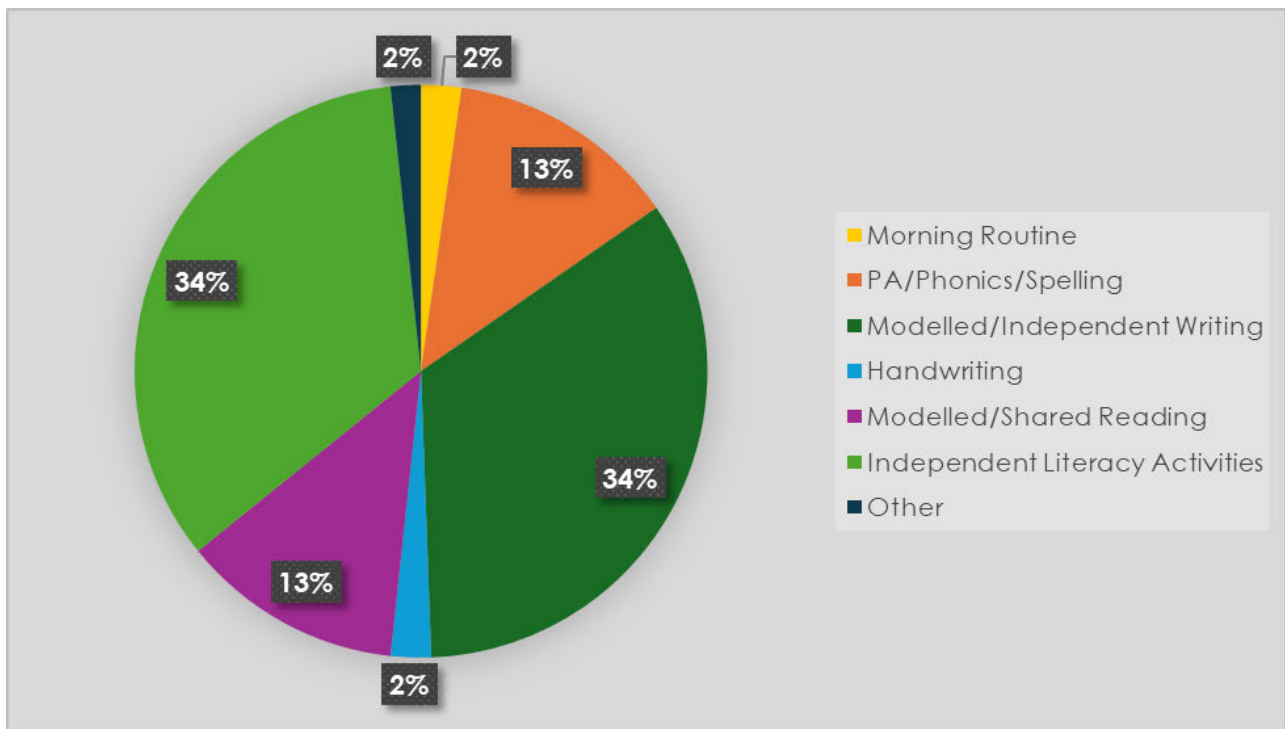
Category	Survey responses	Case study classrooms
Morning Routine	10-20 min	2-14 min
PA/Phonics/Spelling	15-60 min	7-23 min
Modelled/Independent Writing	30-60 min	24-60 min
Handwriting	15-30 min	0-25 min
Modelled/Shared Reading	15-30 min	5-30 min
Independent Literacy Activities	30-100 min	33-60 min
Other	0 min	0-8 min

Case study participants' allocated time devoted to modelled and independent writing (24-60 minutes) was similar to the timing reported in the survey, but there was a significant difference noted for handwriting. April was only observed explicitly engaging the whole class in a handwriting focus on one occasion and this instruction was very brief compared to the average 25 minutes devoted to it in Kathy's classroom. Modelled or shared reading were equally addressed by April and Kathy while Robin's time was more heavily devoted to modelled and independent writing and independent literacy activities (see Table 5.3).

To further examine the breakdown of time afforded to each category by the three observed teachers, percentages of allocated time were calculated and are represented in Figures 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3.

Figure 5.1

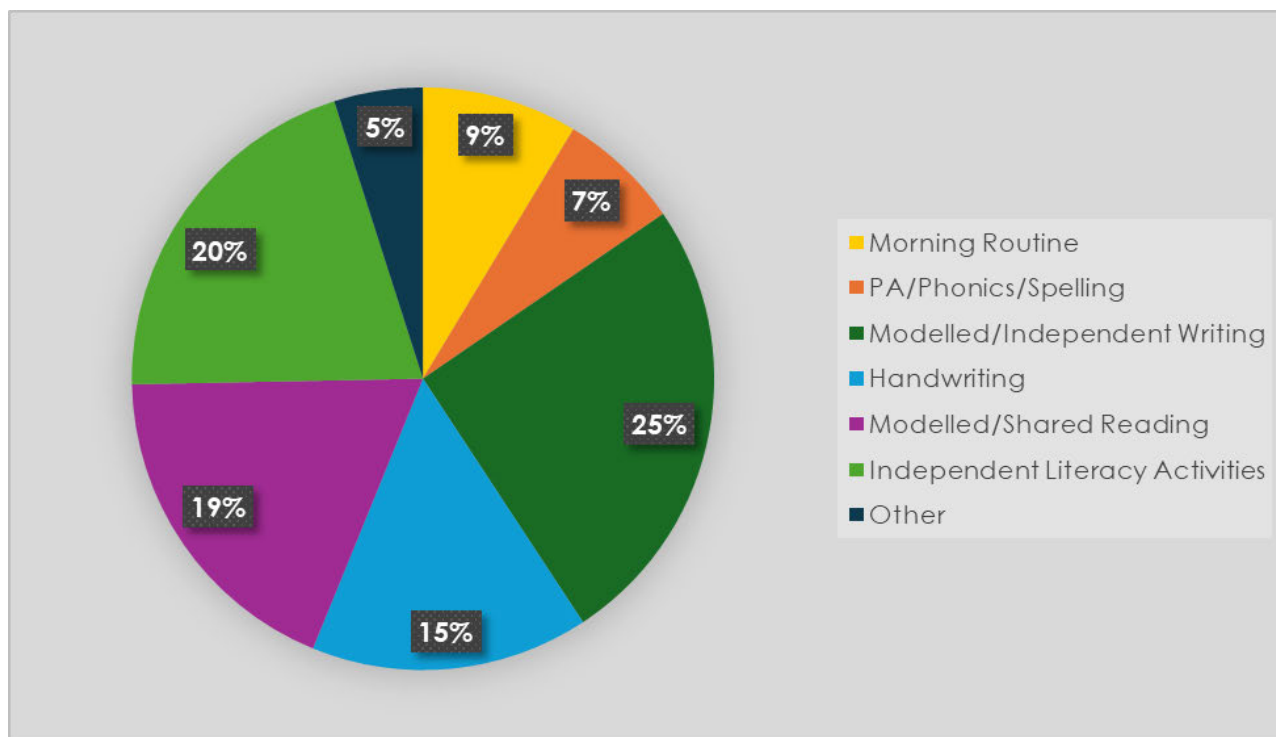
Percentages of Allocated Time in April's Literacy Sessions at Augustine School



April and Kathy appeared to devote relatively equal amounts of time to some elements of the literacy session and Kathy's sessions represented the most even distribution of each category overall. Kathy appeared to spend a larger proportion of time on her morning routine (9%) and handwriting (15%) compared to April (both 2%). While April spent slightly longer on modelled/independent writing and independent literacy activities, the proportions of time spent on these categories of practice were comparable to Kathy's. Robin spent a similar proportion of time on modelled/independent writing. Time devoted to modelled/shared reading was relatively evenly distributed for both April (13%) and Kathy (19%) but much shorter for Robin (6%).

Figure 5.2

Percentages of Allocated Time in Kathy's Literacy Sessions at Kings School

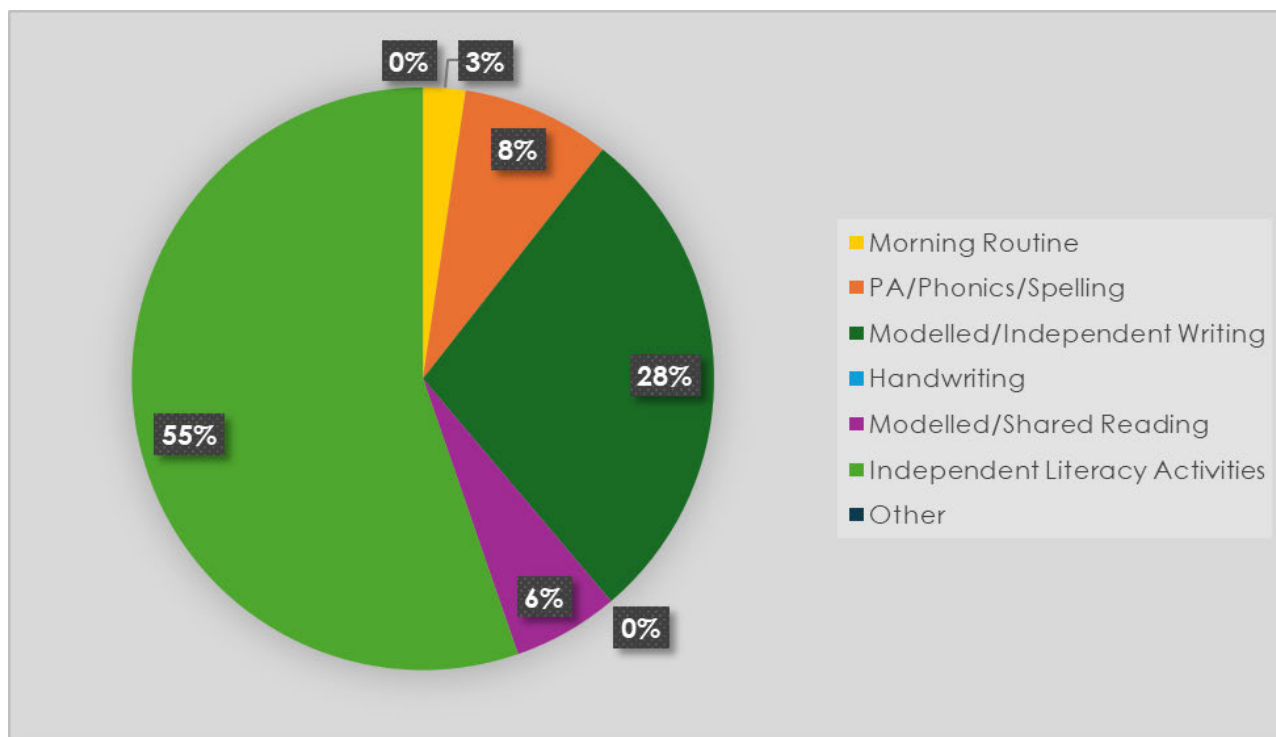


The most notable difference in the proportion of allocated time was in independent literacy activities. As seen in Table 5.3, April, Kathy and Robin spent an average of 60, 33 and 47 minutes, respectively, on independent literacy activities with their classes across the observed sessions. But when this time was considered in proportion to the other categories for each teacher, there was a sizable difference. April and Kathy spent comparable proportions of time (34% and 20%) devoted to this category, bearing in mind that in all participating teachers' classrooms, it involved students engaging with independent tasks while the teacher withdrew small groups for reading.

It could be that April required some additional time to accommodate the rotational aspect of her literacy activities. As small group reading was included as part of this rotation each time, it may have been that there was additional pressure to ensure student groups reached at least 2-3 of the rotation activities in a session. Kathy's organisation of this time instead involved a schedule being displayed on the IWB which indicated to students which activity (e.g., iPad app) was theirs to focus on for the duration of the session and this was separate from the small group reading withdrawal. Both April and Kathy ultimately devoted roughly a fifth to a third of their allocated time to independent literacy activities.

Figure 5.3

Percentages of Allocated Time in Robin's Literacy Sessions at Riverbank School



By significant contrast, independent literacy activities represented over half (55%) of Robin's allocated time. Its structure was also different from both April's and Kathy's. Robin's students were not engaged in activities on a rotational basis, nor did they have just one activity allocated to them for the duration of the session. Students were encouraged to select from a range of independent activities themselves, and during this time, they may have read in a small group with Robin or played a specific literacy game in a small group with a teaching assistant. Although some students may have had teacher input in a small group setting during some of this allocated time, it represented a significant proportion of time for the apparent majority of students in the class to have had no direct teacher input.

The time devoted to the categories of practice described here is not necessarily indicative of the 'quality' or 'effectiveness' of the teaching. But in the context of a crowded curriculum, day to day interruptions and limited instructional time, the ways in which teachers prioritise and address each of these categories of practice by allocating time is significant for students.

To explore the finer grain teaching practices included in the broader categories of literacy practice identified here, including their frequencies and differences in execution by each participating teacher, the CLOS-R (Louden et al., 2008) was used as a guide.

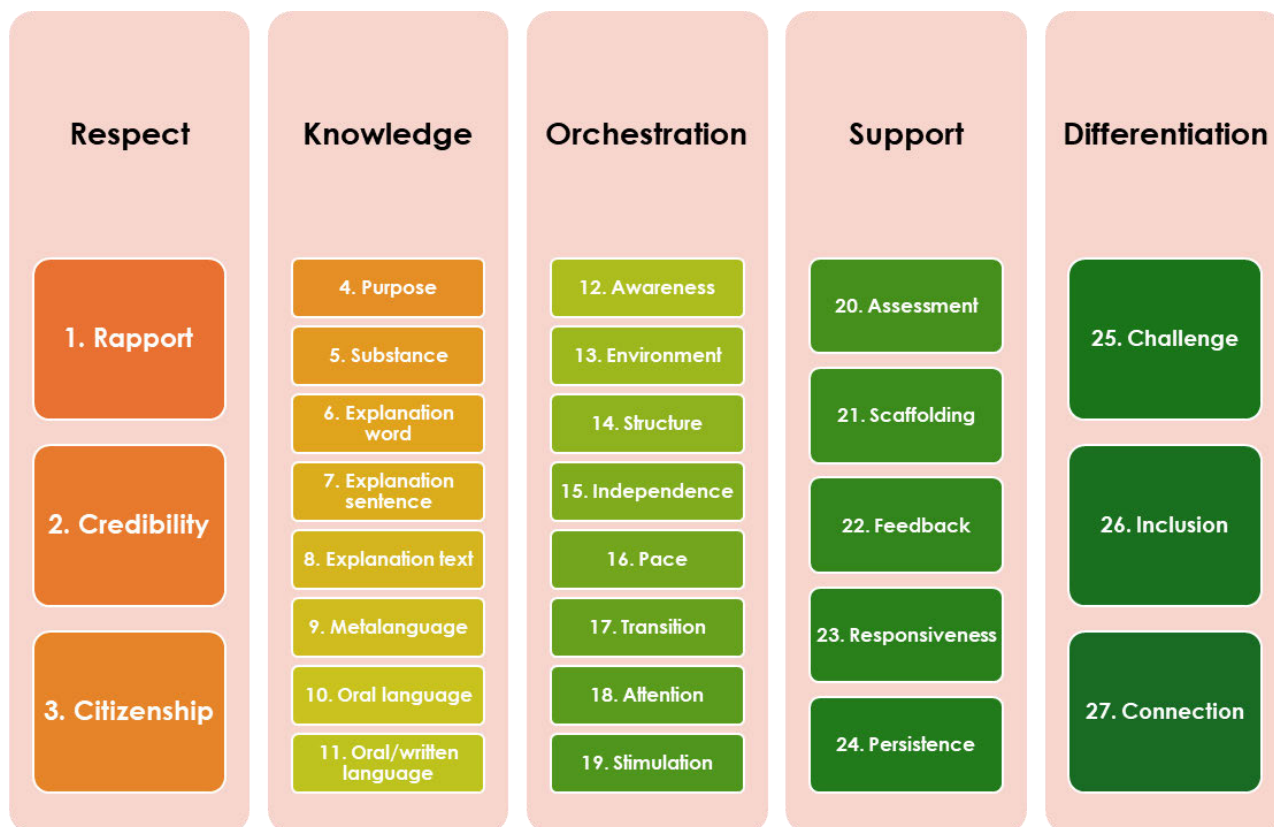
Analysis of Observations Using the CLOS-R

To further examine the pedagogical content addressed by each of the three classroom teachers, the video observations were scored for frequency of the 27 teaching practices included in the

Classroom Literacy Observation Schedule – Revised (CLOS-R; Louden et al., 2008). A visual illustrating the organisation of these 27 teaching practices within the five dimensions of the CLOS-R is included in Figure 5.4.

Figure 5.4

Teaching Practices within the Five Dimensions of the CLOS-R (Louden et al., 2008)



Frequency tables scoring each of the individual video observations for each teacher can be found in Appendix P. Within each school context, variation in the frequencies of practices across video observations was to be expected, given that certain categories of practice were prioritised in particular literacy sessions, although some, such as ‘morning routine’, were included in all. For example, scores for ‘Explanation text’ were particularly high in certain sessions when allocated time was devoted to text exploration, including modelled or shared reading.

A comparison of the total frequency of each practice across all video observations for each participating teacher can be found in Table 5.5. If all practices featured in the CLOS-R are considered to be evidence-informed (Louden et al., 2008) and to align with more recent literature reviewed earlier, the inclusion of any combination of these practices at any frequency could reflect evidence-informed classroom practice to at least some extent. The purpose of generating the frequency of practices was to consider any apparent emphasis on practices that may or may not align with the research literature, and to examine the extent to which that emphasis may reflect student needs as the driver of practice: a cornerstone of the IPA (Florian & Spratt, 2013).

Table 5.5*Frequency of CLOS-R Teaching Practices by Teacher*

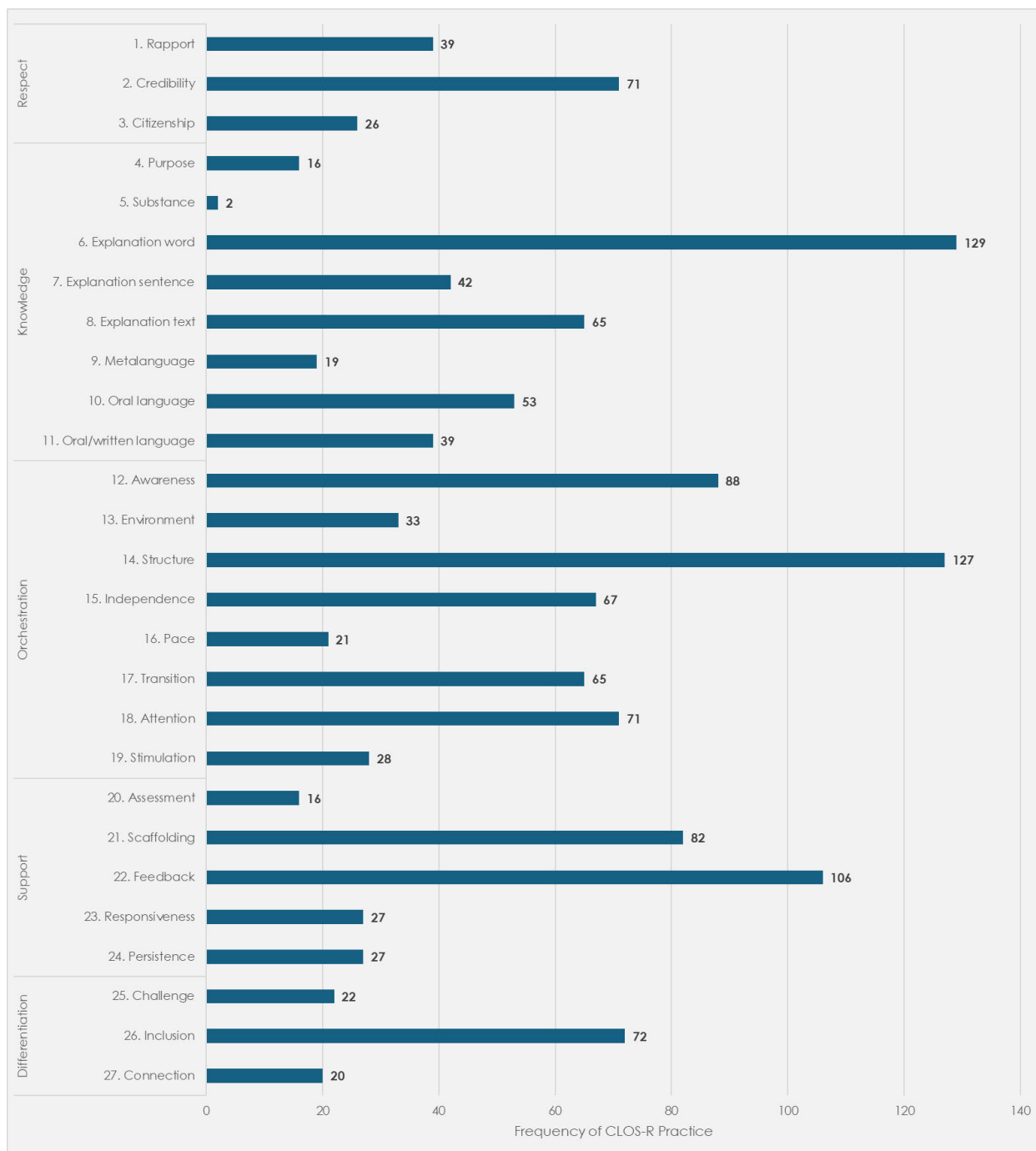
Dimension	Teaching practice	April Augustine School	Kathy Kings School	Robin Riverbank School
Respect	1. Rapport	7	18	14
	2. Credibility	35	24	12
	3. Citizenship	8	13	5
Knowledge	4. Purpose	4	10	2
	5. Substance	1	1	0
	6. Explanation word	59	40	30
	7. Explanation sentence	19	15	8
	8. Explanation text	27	21	17
	9. Metalanguage	7	10	2
	10. Oral language	22	19	12
	11. Oral/written language	13	18	8
Orchestration	12. Awareness	30	33	25
	13. Environment	4	25	4
	14. Structure	35	58	34
	15. Independence	14	31	22
	16. Pace	8	6	7
	17. Transition	30	19	16
	18. Attention	44	16	11
Support	19. Stimulation	12	12	4
	20. Assessment	3	2	11
	21. Scaffolding	35	21	26
	22. Feedback	36	35	35
	23. Responsiveness	13	9	5
Differentiation	24. Persistence	11	9	7
	25. Challenge	7	5	10
	26. Inclusion	24	33	15
	27. Connection	9	7	4

Overall, within the five dimensions of the CLOS-R, practices related to orchestration were most frequently observed ($n = 500$), followed by knowledge ($n = 365$) and support ($n = 258$). Practices related to the respect ($n = 136$) and differentiation ($n = 114$) dimensions were less frequently observed but these dimensions also had fewer practices associated with them.

Figure 5.5 shows the total frequencies of the 27 CLOS-R practices across all video footage analysed from the three schools. The highest frequencies were recorded for explanation word ($n = 129$), structure ($n = 127$) and feedback ($n = 106$). The following section outlines an examination of the nature of these and other practices with notable frequencies from the CLOS-R, according to the five dimensions.

Figure 5.5

Total Frequency of CLOS-R Practices Across All Video Footage



Respect. The ‘respect’ dimension includes the teacher’s development of a classroom culture that is conducive to literacy learning and student-teacher relationships which form the foundation on which many of the practices across all five domains can be built (Louden et al., 2008; Vernon-Feagans et al., 2018). The frequency of observation of the three practices included within the ‘respect’ dimension has been represented in Figure 5.6.

Rapport, as the first of these practices, was identified in the context of student-teacher interactions, which demonstrated the teachers’ encouragement of students and facilitation of

enjoyment and excitement regarding the literacy tasks included in the session. All three teachers were observed listening to students sharing stories about their family or recent experiences and making brief asides about the learning in which they were engaged. For example, during her morning routine in the first observation, which involved students' free writing on mini whiteboards, a student excitedly held her writing up to show Robin. The student's excitement and Robin's bubbly demeanour during this exchange were representative of the general classroom dynamic.

Robin: [animatedly, after reading the student's writing] *Oh did she already come, the tooth fairy!?*

Students: *She came last night...that big tooth...and then she's gonna come again tonight*

Robin: [surprised] *Did that big tooth only fall out yesterday?*

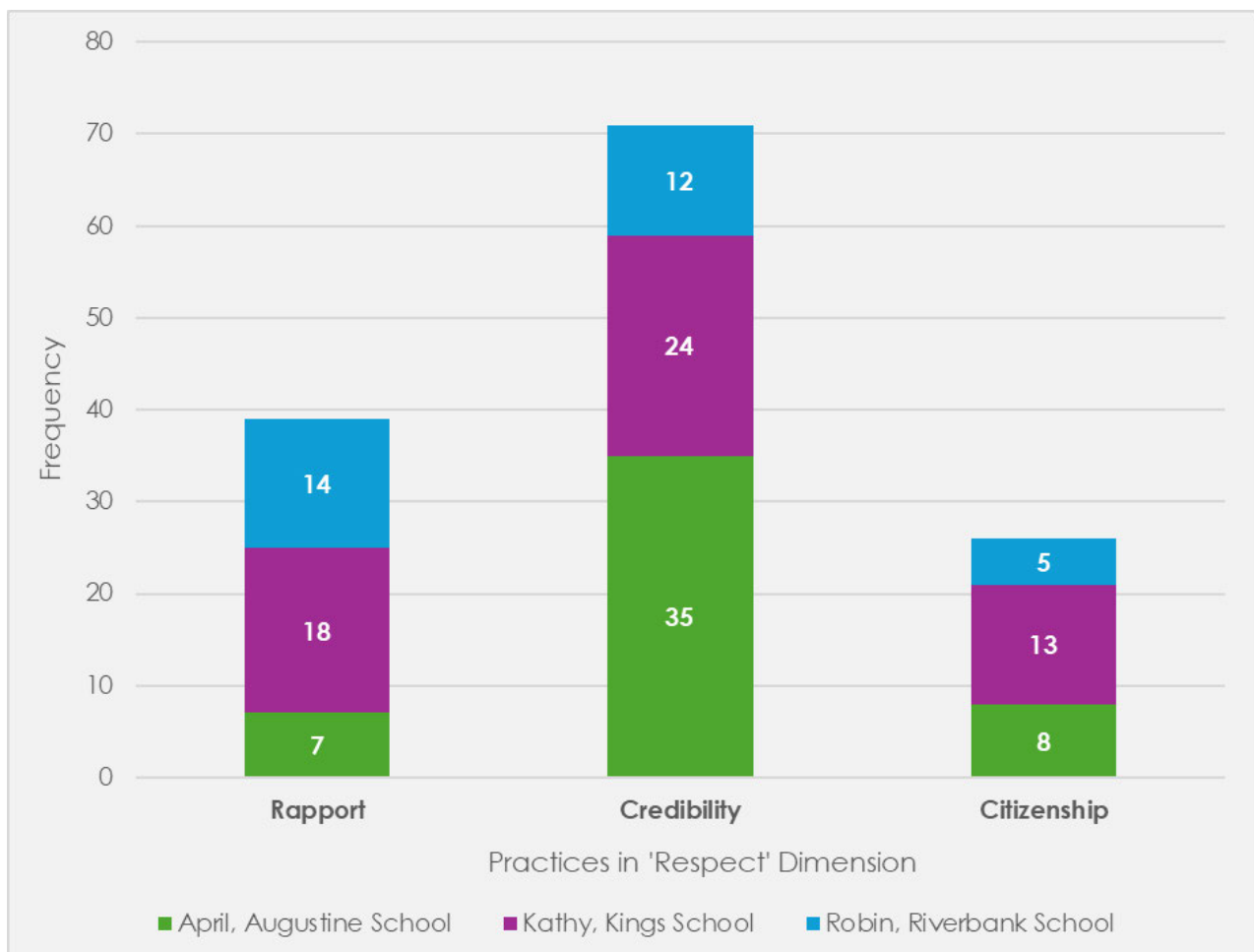
Student: *Um, no it fell out the day before yesterday but I only remembered...yesterday night*

Robin: *Ooh I see, I see, my goodness me...*

This interaction exemplified the teacher-student rapport evident in all three case study classrooms. It also involved an opportunity for the exchange of oral language, a key practice included in the 'knowledge' dimension, therefore demonstrating the overlap among these practices and dimensions in the classroom environment.

Figure 5.6

Frequency of Practices Observed Within the Respect Dimension



The frequency of practices included in the 'respect' dimension ($n = 136$) was generally lower than for the other dimensions. This may have been because the relevant practices were embedded in the functioning of the classroom, such that there were fewer tangible, discrete examples to be identified and coded by the researcher. Indeed, in their application of the CLOS-R, Louden et al. (2008) found that "the practices of Credibility and Rapport are low-level practices (in that all teachers demonstrated them in some episodes)" (p. 26).

With regard to 'credibility', it was coded most frequently in April's ($n = 35$) and Kathy's classrooms ($n = 24$) overall (see Figure 5.6), but the examples were often contextually different. Disruptions to learning, as characterised by this practice, were generally minimal in all three classrooms and each teacher had clearly established expectations of student behaviour. The most frequent reminders related to student behaviour or disengagement occurred in April's classroom and these represented much of the coding for 'credibility' in her setting. April's verbal reminders were mainly directed towards one student who was frequently off-task, but this did not represent any significant disturbance to learning. Coding of 'credibility' in April's setting usually involved verbal reminders once a student was already engaged in a behaviour.

By contrast, the examples coded within Kathy's sessions tended to involve a *pre*-correction regarding appropriate learning behaviour which involved pre-emptive, positive reinforcement (e.g., "*Touch your name, sit on the carpet*"). In one example, Kathy's establishment of 'credibility' involved her accepting all students' contributions during a discussion of emotions as part of the morning routine:

Kathy: [to a different student] *You're a bit cold?*

Student: [to the other student] *You don't have a jumper on*

Kathy: *Remember it's an opinion, you might feel differently than others*

This example was also relevant to the practice of 'citizenship' which was observed at a similar frequency across all three classrooms. 'Citizenship' was generally coded for the naming of particular literacy behaviours in a whole class context. These included sitting up on the floor to look at a text being read, or facing the front during phonological awareness practice to enable the teacher to monitor students' participation. In one example, Kathy asked students to "*find a good phonics spot for you*" and praised individual students for their self-selection.

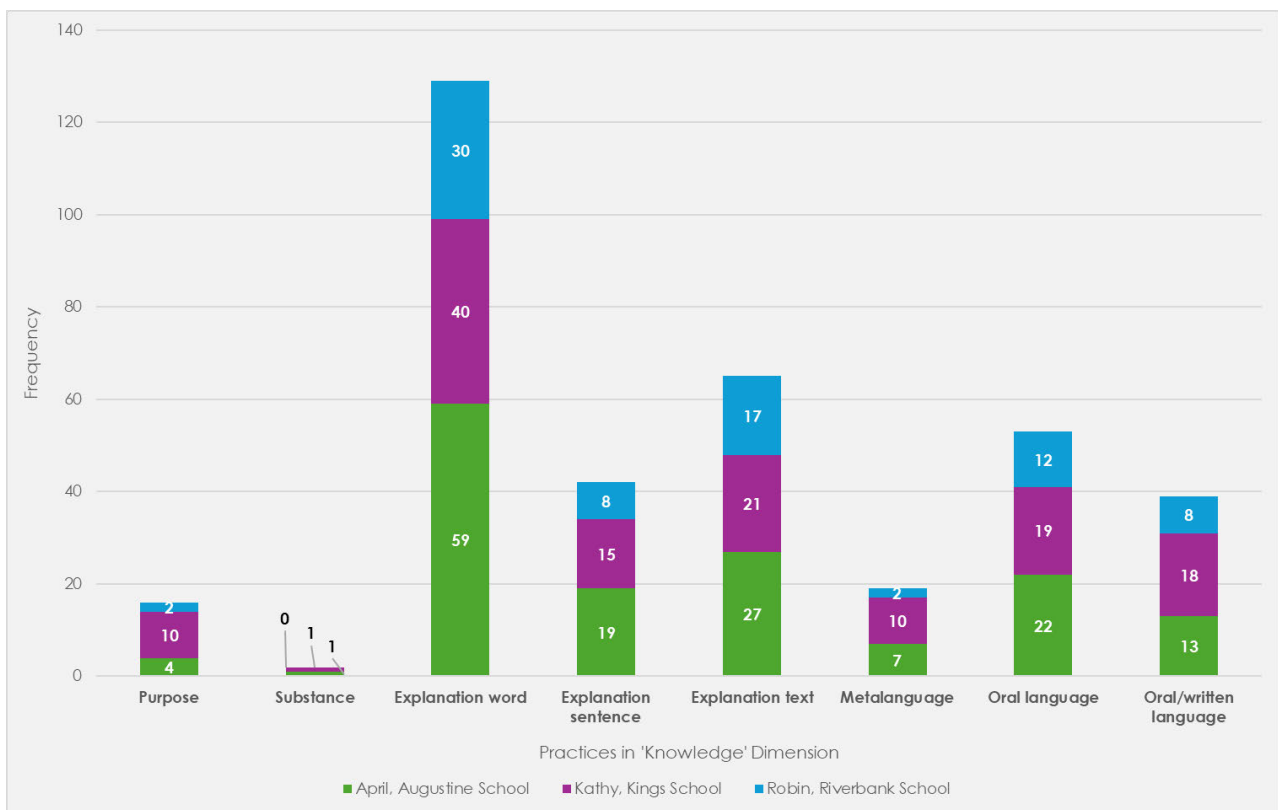
Knowledge. Practices relevant to the 'knowledge' dimension of the CLOS-R framework related to the explicitness of instruction at the word, sentence and text level and the selection of activities which appeared to develop and consolidate students' learning in literacy in meaningful ways (Louden et al., 2008). The frequency of observation of the eight practices included within the 'knowledge' dimension has been represented in Figure 5.7. The lowest overall frequency of observation was recorded for 'substance' ($n = 2$). This practice is outlined as involving the provision of 'quality' activities that are "highly productive and provide for significant learning or consolidation of literacy

concepts” (Louden et al., 2008, p. 108) rather than ‘busy work’. During analysis, the researcher and research assistant found it challenging to make a judgement regarding how ‘substantial’ students’ literacy engagement appeared to be in the observations, particularly given that the emphasis of the footage was on the *teacher*, not the students. This may explain the low frequency which does not suggest a lack of ‘substance’ in the observed literacy practice.

‘Purpose’ ($n = 16$) was also observed less frequently than other practices in the knowledge dimension. Louden et al. (2008) clarified that this could include “tacit or explicit understanding of the purpose of the literacy task” (p. 108). It may have been that this tacit understanding of the purpose of tasks incorporated into the literacy session was emphasised, and therefore less observable, particularly given the young age of students involved in the teaching and learning being observed.

Figure 5.7

Frequency of Practices Observed Within the Knowledge Dimension



‘Explanation word’ was coded with one of the highest frequencies ($n = 129$) of all the practices included in the CLOS-R (Louden et al., 2008). Coding for ‘explanation word’ included evidence of the explicit teaching of phonological awareness (PA) and grapheme-phoneme correspondences (GPCs). The practice was observed with a higher frequency in April’s classroom overall, which appeared to mirror the higher proportion of time she devoted to the ‘PA/Phonics/Spelling’ category (13%) compared to Kathy (7%) and Robin (8%). This was interesting to note, given that April was the only one of the three teachers using a fully scripted commercial program and this may have contributed somewhat to this allocation of time.

In addition, Louden et al. (2008) specified that 'explanation word' included the accurate discernment between letter names and letter sounds, which is consistently modelled with accuracy for students. Kathy was the only one of the three teachers observed specifically differentiating between letter *names* and letter *sounds* and asking students to do so during a review of GPCs. Robin sometimes confused this language and used the terms letter and sound interchangeably.

It was interesting to note the frequencies of practices which did not tend to coincide (see Appendix P). For example, when all three teachers had an apparent emphasis on practice associated with 'explanation word', the frequency of 'explanation text' tended to be lower and vice versa. As noted earlier, texts such as picture books were used by all three teachers as a springboard for independent writing but, as is apparent from the individual observation frequencies in Appendix P, not as a context from which to draw word-level concepts for exploration.

In their application of the CLOS-R, Louden et al. (2008) identified 'explanation sentence' as a high-level practice that was less frequently identified in practice and this result was mirrored in the present findings ($n = 42$). Examples of 'explanation sentence' usually involved the three teachers reminding students of syntax concepts such as capital letters and full stops or other punctuation in the context of modelled or independent writing. These examples therefore simultaneously addressed 'metalinguage' which itself was observed with a slightly lower frequency overall ($n = 19$) and generally in this context of writing. All three teachers used 'sounding out' as an encouraged strategy for reading at some point during the observations but only Kathy modelled metalinguistic terms related to punctuation in the context of writing *and* reading.

Kathy: [modelling with mini whiteboard during small group reading] *So, do you remember last time, if I've got, here's the writing. What's this one?*

Student 1: *Full stop*

Kathy: *Good. What's this one?*

Student 1: *That's, um, like yelling!*

Student 2: *It's like the thing when you put [pointing to the cover of a decodable reader] over here and then it's like, if you're loud or you're like excited...*

Kathy: *Yeah what's it called, the name of it? [pointing] This is full stop, this is an...e...ex...*

Student 1: *Exclamation!*

'Explanation sentence' is also described as including the teaching of grammatical strategies or concepts but this practice was not observed in this context in any of the classrooms. This may have been appropriate given the syllabus required at the time of data collection which combined grammar, punctuation and vocabulary into a single objective and emphasised 'recognition' and 'awareness' (NESA, 2012) but not necessarily the clear explanation of grammatical strategies required for coding of this practice (Louden et al., 2008).

The 'explanation text' practice was often characterised by whole class modelled or shared reading of a fiction or non-fiction text which involved discussion before or after reading to develop

students' comprehension and understanding of vocabulary. It therefore generally aligned with observations of 'oral language'. For example, Kathy paused during the reading of a picture book to discuss the text.

Kathy: ...*What do you think happens?*

Student: *He's going to look for food in the trees.*

Kathy: *Ooh, [student name] thinks that he's going to look for some food in the trees. Now, is that kind of what happens in this book?*

Students: [in unison] *No*

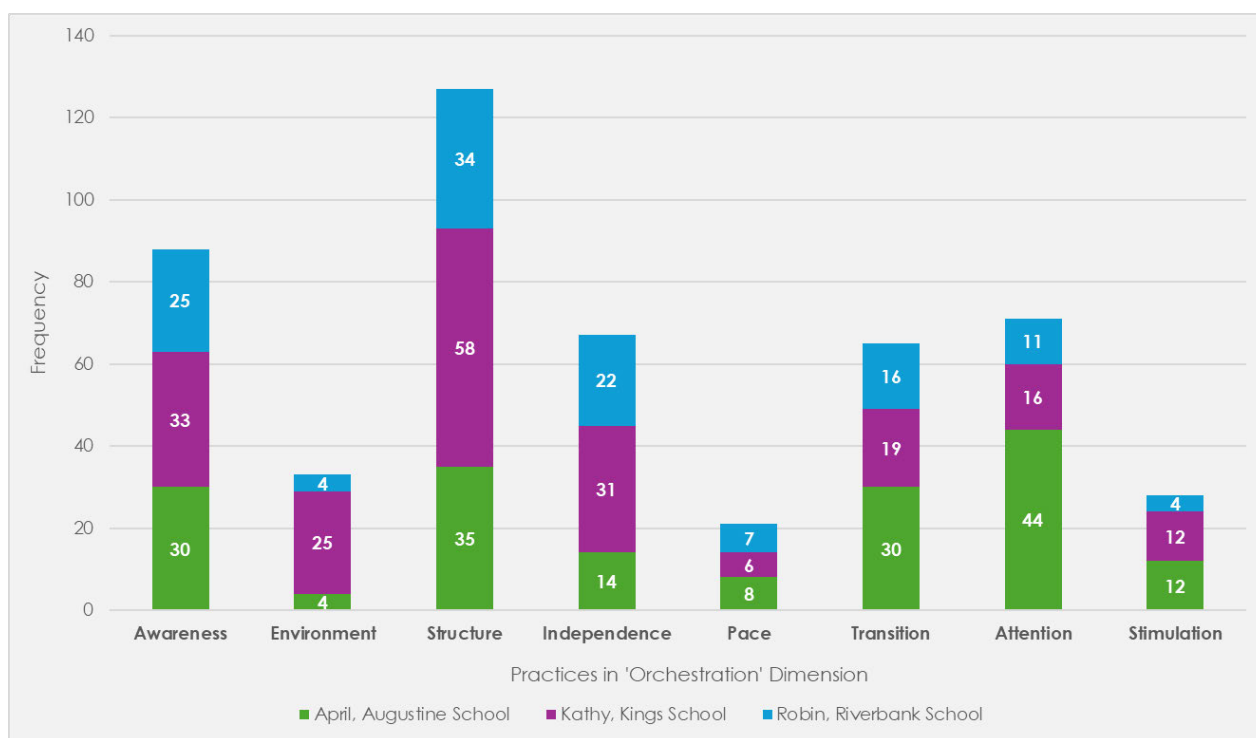
Kathy: *Not quite...that's a very good guess though...a good prediction...*

This exchange was followed by a discussion of textual concepts including the cover, author and illustrator. It also involved Kathy guiding student responses with appropriate questioning and demonstrated that she valued all students' contributions.

Orchestration. Teachers' 'orchestration' of literacy teaching involves their organisation and execution of the practices evident in the 'respect' and 'knowledge' dimensions outlined thus far. A successful literacy environment is punctuated by predictability and structure which enable student engagement and independence (Louden et al., 2008). The researcher noticed during analysis that the practices within this dimension were often inextricably linked and simultaneously observed. For example, the *structure* of the literacy session and sequencing of familiar activities generally required students to demonstrate some *independence*. The use of the classroom *environment* was often encouraged as a strategy to support students to maintain this independence and this, in turn, required the teacher to maintain a broad *awareness* of student engagement throughout the classroom. The frequency of observation of the eight practices included within the 'orchestration' dimension has been represented in Figure 5.8.

Figure 5.8

Frequency of Practices Observed Within the Orchestration Dimension



All three teachers monitored and responded to individuals and groups of students with an ‘awareness’ of student participation. This practice was observed with relatively consistent frequency across all observations and settings. It was most often coded during the ‘independent literacy activities’ portion of the literacy session in all three classrooms, during which the teachers had a small group of students as their immediate instructional focus but maintained awareness of the rest of the class.

But during analysis, the researcher noted the distinction between *awareness* and engagement or *responsiveness* (see ‘Support’). While all three teachers’ body language, verbal and non-verbal cues and eye contact suggested that they were cognisant of student behaviour occurring in the rest of the classroom, they were not in a position to monitor and *respond* to individual students’ progress in this format with any kind of depth. Their attention was necessarily drawn to the 2-4 learners directly in front of them. And yet the researcher also noted that given that all three teachers’ attention seemed to be so frequently diverted from this focus to the rest of the classroom, the allocated time calculated to be spent on ‘independent literacy activities’ may not necessarily have been representative of the *actual* conscious teaching delivered during this small group time. The three teachers emphasised concerns about time pressures during their subsequent interviews.

The practice of ‘attention’ could be likened to this awareness of the classroom environment, and it was observed with a similar frequency but also included the teachers’ deliberate seeking of contributions, or lack thereof, from all individual students (Louden et al., 2008). During phonics instruction, contributions were sought from all students in April’s classroom as individuals were asked

to recall GPCs or to decode words on the screen. By contrast, students in Kathy's and Robin's classrooms participated in similar activities in a choral format. This difference may have accounted for the higher frequency of observation of 'attention' in April's classroom ($n = 44$). This difference in format was also observed during small group reading which involved individual reading in April's and Kathy's classrooms but choral reading in Robin's groups.

'Independence' was coded more frequently overall in Kathy's ($n = 31$) and Robin's ($n = 22$) classrooms but for different reasons. In Robin's classroom, 'independent literacy activities' represented the largest proportion of allocated time across all three observed sessions. This required the majority of students to engage with activities in the absence of any direct teacher input for a significant portion of the session and therefore necessitated such independence.

Kathy's sessions also involved these independent activities and simultaneous small group teaching on some occasions. While reading with a small group, Kathy asked another student in the room to "*solve it yourself please*", presumably to avoid interruption to the small group teaching. But this practice was also coded in the context of Kathy engaging with students to empower them with independence by using the classroom 'environment' as a tool. During independent writing, Kathy prompted a student to access a digraph mat to assist with spelling using appropriate 'metalinguage': "*You might like to get the digraph mat, 'bone' is actually on here, it's got a split digraph*". Kathy was also the only one of the three teachers observed using digital charts for routines involving literacy learning as part of the morning routine to discuss the weather and calendar. 'Environment' was otherwise coded relatively infrequently across the observed sessions, possibly because classroom practice was so embedded in the physical environment that fewer tangible examples stood out for coding.

'Structure' was the second most frequently coded practice ($n = 127$) from any dimension across all observations in all three classrooms. This practice was evidenced throughout the footage in students' perceived familiarity with routines which they could quickly commence. 'Structure' was more frequently observed during sessions in which the teachers included 'independent literacy activities' and appeared to require a predictable environment. This practice also involved the establishment of time frames for given tasks in the literacy session. Kathy was the only one of the three teachers observed setting a visual timer on the IWB to help students to monitor the time remaining for writing tasks or small group activities. This strategy contributed to the forward momentum and appropriate pacing evident in her literacy sessions (Louden et al., 2008).

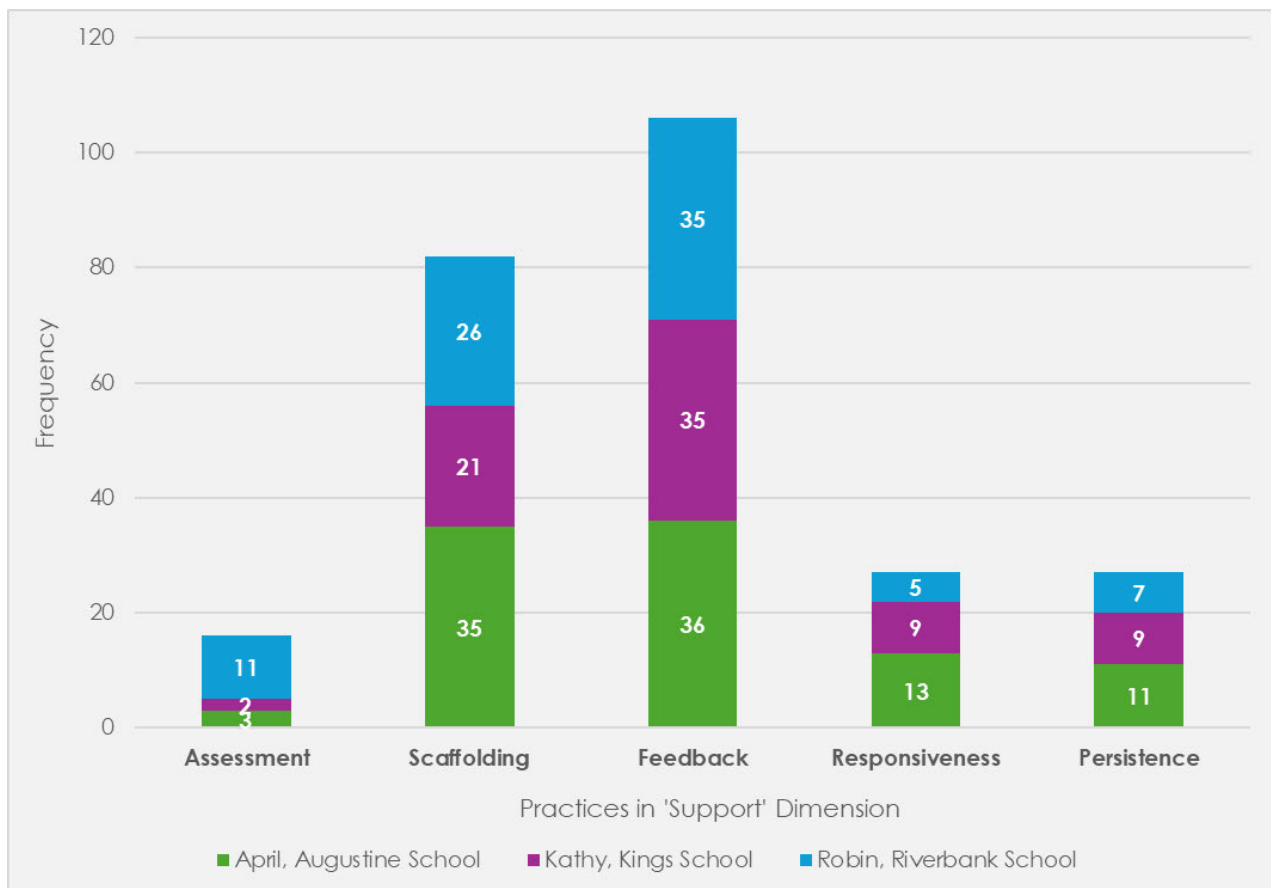
Given the structure observed within all three classrooms, there were necessary 'transitions' between activities or categories of practice within the literacy sessions, particularly as the three teachers appeared to be cognisant of students' ages and attention spans. Interestingly, according to the average allocated times included in Table 5.3, no category of practice ran for longer than 60 minutes. The categories that did run up to this maximum were modelled or independent writing and independent literacy activities, which both involved variation in format from whole class to small group or independent learning.

Support. Teachers' successful 'support' of students in the literacy environment involves scaffolding in response to student needs gleaned from appropriate assessment of learning, and timely feedback being provided to enable improvement. The frequency of observation of the five practices included within the 'support' dimension has been represented in Figure 5.9.

Overall, 'assessment' ($n = 16$), 'responsiveness' ($n = 27$) and 'persistence' ($n = 27$) represented the lowest frequencies for practices in this dimension. With regard to 'persistence', Louden et al. (2008) acknowledge that this practice "will often occur across episodes" (p. 112). Given that this practice required the provision of 'significant' amounts of time for repeated application of learned literacy concepts alongside the teacher's drive and passion for improvement, it may be that the classroom observations gathered from all settings were not extended over a long enough period of time throughout a school year to capture this.

Figure 5.9

Frequency of Practices Observed Within the Support Dimension



Similarly, 'assessment' referred to teachers maintaining awareness of students' individual progress and using this to make judgements about the next priorities for teaching and learning (Louden et al., 2008). This could be considered one of the many "invisible complexities" (Nind et al., 2016, p. 159) of the classroom ecosystem that was not represented with tangible evidence to be coded but absorbed into each teacher's practice and therefore required further elucidation via the semi-

structured interviews. The researcher did note that 'assessment', which was coded infrequently, also referred to a teacher's clear approach to instruction *reducing* the need for individualised teaching in favour of whole class reinforcement, given the emphasis identified in all three case study classrooms on small group teaching in the context of 'independent literacy activities'.

'Scaffolding' ($n = 82$) and 'feedback' ($n = 106$) were coded with the highest frequencies within this dimension. 'Scaffolding' referred to the teacher providing clear introductions to tasks, adjusting and adapting instruction in real time according to student responses, and breaking complex tasks into achievable steps to facilitate student understanding (Louden et al., 2008). This could be likened to the 'structure' observed at an even higher frequency within 'orchestration'. But while 'structure' often related to the overall organisation of activities within the session, including the transitions between them, 'scaffolding' tended to be observed in the specific context of those activities, including the teacher-student interactions involved.

'Scaffolding' was coded most frequently during the second observation of Robin's practice. In this session, 'scaffolding' was sometimes observed in the context of modelling activities for independent completion with sufficient clarity and student involvement to ensure understanding. Robin described each of the activities, including games involving words with 'magic e' and syllabification, and provided sufficient time for students to understand the established expectation for each task. Robin otherwise made whole class reference to student errors and made use of them to extend literacy learning.

Robin: *Today we're going to do some free choice writing but I'm going to show you...um...a few reminders when I'm doing my writing today. I have noticed in your writing books that I'm having to remind a lot of people that we need to start with a...*

Students: [in unison] *capital letter!*

Robin: *Does a capital letter belong anywhere else in a sentence?*

Students: [in unison] *No!* [a handful of students calls out 'yes' at the same time]

Robin: *Yes it does! 'I', always when I write the word 'I'. Good boy [student name]. Where's the other place it always belongs?*

Student 1: *Um, in a name.*

Robin: *In a name. Just the very first letter though, right?*

Student 1: *Yes*

Robin: *Yes. Is there anywhere else?*

Student 2: *Um, when you do a full stop in the middle of your sentence, you do another capital letter.*

Robin: *Good job, it's not in the middle of my sentence though, that's when there's a full stop in the middle of my story but you're right. There...sometimes there is a capital letter somewhere else in a sentence and one of my reading groups definitely had it today...*

In this example, Robin extended understanding by affirming correct responses, actively addressing student misconceptions during instruction and checking for student understanding before

moving on. On other occasions in this session, Robin used scaffolding in a small group setting to introduce reading at the word-level prior to text-level practice. After referring to the smoothness of students' reading, Robin began this instruction by saying "*let's have a look at our speed words at the back today, that might help us*".

'Feedback' occurred with relative consistency across all three classrooms. During the fifth observation of Kathy's practice, individualised 'feedback' was observed in the context of independent writing. Kathy circulated throughout the classroom space to engage with individual students and provide brief but timely feedback related to letter formation or handwriting placement with spacing, spelling or syntax. By contrast, April's approach to 'feedback', which was coded in her sessions with a similar frequency, sometimes involved this individualised approach but also included 'feedback' on a whole class basis. April was observed to provide whole class positive reinforcement regarding students' appropriate task completion based on initial instruction. She also sometimes paused the whole class to redirect them with feedback based on a specific learning point noticed for one child, therefore relating this practice to 'responsiveness'.

April: [modelling holding a student's writing book] *So, you've done the date on your first line. Now, with you guys, because you've got lots of lines in your book, you can miss the next line then start right over the other side, on the lefthand side, and it can be the third line down. One, two, three [pointing], third line down. Ok? And you can start there. What word are you starting with?*
[Student name]?

Student: *I*

April: *Good girl.*

Following this whole class clarification, April circulated to reinforce the instruction with individual students.

Louden et al. (2008) identified 'responsiveness' as a high-level practice that was incorporated less frequently into the teaching observed in their sample and this result was mirrored in the present data ($n = 27$). Interestingly, the authors suggested that this practice was mainly incorporated by the 'highly effective' teachers identified in their sample but also acknowledged that it is "characterised in some instances by its absence" (Louden et al., 2008, p. 112) as it sometimes involves the teacher electing *not* to follow a tangent based on student contributions or understanding. In the fourth observation of Kathy's practice, 'responsiveness' was characterised by her engagement with students' contributions during a discussion of a picture book, and also by her judgement as to when to steer discussion along the planned direction.

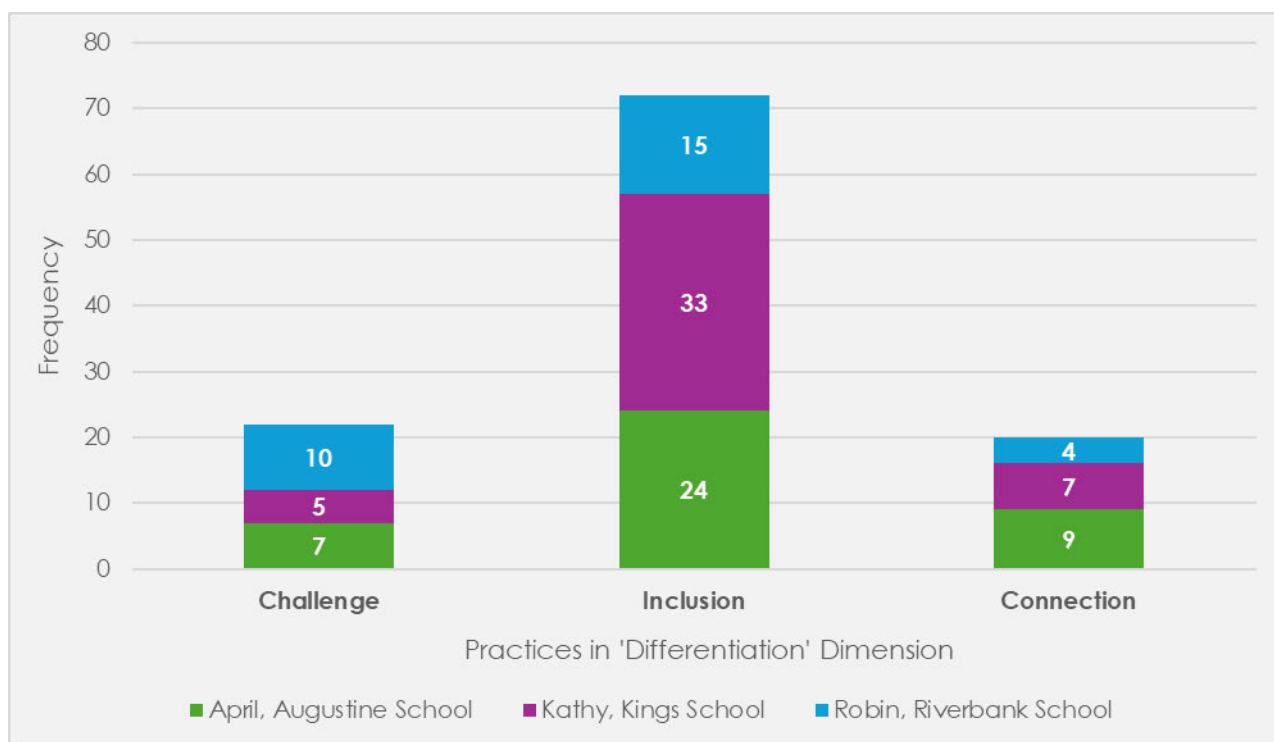
Differentiation. The final dimension of the CLOS-R involved teacher practices that challenged student thinking, reflected an understanding of student learning needs, and elucidated connections between areas of learning and prior knowledge (Louden et al., 2008). The frequency of observation of

the three practices included within the 'differentiation' dimension has been represented in Figure 5.10.

The researcher's initial impression from the observational data was that Kathy's literacy sessions featured the most tangible examples of differentiation of content, process or product in various contexts, including reading and writing practice. In reading, Kathy engaged with small groups of students and provided different decodable readers for them to access. Different titles were selected for different groups of students, and this practice was common across all three case study settings. In writing, Kathy made tangible reference to differentiated expectations, of which students were clearly aware, with regard to the quantity and structure of their sentences based on different templates Kathy provided. The observed writing sessions also included familiar structures of support as needed for individuals or small groups, with students sometimes oscillating between independent learning and teacher proximity according to their preference and Kathy's coordination.

Figure 5.10

Frequency of Practices Observed Within the Differentiation Dimension



And yet small group teaching in Kathy's classroom also included the teaching of the exact same lesson sequence related to punctuation with three consecutive groups during the first observation. The researcher queried why this concept could not have been addressed at a whole class level to allow all students to benefit from the explicit teaching involved in the small group. 'Inclusion', as the second practice included in this dimension, specifically mentions the use of different structures including individual, small group and whole class teaching opportunities (Louden et al., 2008), as observed in Kathy's classroom. It could be argued that the emphasis on small group teaching in all three

classrooms was appropriate as it allowed the teacher to provide specific support (Louden et al., 2008). But the reteaching of the same content to three small groups of students, rather than the whole class, did not necessarily represent the optimal allocation of time with regard to student support.

The CLOS-R coding manual mentions the provision of open-ended tasks for student participation, such as those available during 'independent literacy activities', but this could potentially contradict the explicit instruction recommended elsewhere in the CLOS-R and in the research literature (Alfieri et al., 2011; CESE, 2014, 2020b; Rosenshine, 2012; Tuovinen & Sweller, 1999), particularly in the early years setting addressed here. The CLOS-R also specifically mentions the adjustment of groupings according to the needs of students (Louden et al., 2008) but the underlying approach to student grouping in all three classrooms was unclear from the video observations alone.

'Challenge' was observed relatively infrequently across all observations ($n = 22$) compared to the other practices in this dimension. It was coded particularly infrequently in Kathy's classroom ($n = 5$) compared to April's ($n = 7$) and Robin's ($n = 10$) and yet Kathy's literacy sessions represented the highest occurrence of 'inclusion' ($n = 33$) overall. During analysis, the researcher noticed that 'challenge' included a significantly larger number of examples to illustrate it (15) compared to the other practices in the CLOS-R coding manual (Louden et al., 2008), including those in this dimension: 'inclusion' (9) and 'connection' (5). The researcher wondered if this was because there were so many ways in which 'challenge' could be observed in the classroom context, or if this quantity suggested a lack of clarity as to how it manifested in practice. The highest frequency of 'challenge' was observed during Robin's first literacy session. The coded examples in Robin's session represented many of the indicators included in the manual, such as: encouraging students to reflect on the quality of their own sentence writing with peer input; prompting particular students to take responsibility for their learning by self-selecting more challenging tasks; and modelling the use of 'tier three' words, as appropriate, during text exploration (Beck et al., 2013).

But overall, if 'challenge' represented the promotion of higher levels of thinking in literacy learning based on knowledge of student progress, the researcher did consider that this kind of differentiation was mainly evident in the small group setting. Although activities such as writing were engaged with to an individualised and often self-determined extent by students in terms of quantity, the time spent reading with the teacher involved the most tangible examples of the selection of resources (readers) that apparently met student need. During this time, the remaining students in each class were engaged with independent literacy activities that did not appear to be changed or adapted for particular students, apart from the possible provision of support by additional personnel with select students.

'Inclusion' was coded most frequently ($n = 72$) overall of the practices included in the differentiation dimension. Occurrences of this practice across all three classrooms mostly involved the small group instruction that featured alongside 'independent literacy activities'. It was noticeably higher ($n = 11$) in the final observation of Kathy's literacy session. In addition to the overall provision

of small group opportunities, the examples coded in this session involved Kathy differentiating the level of support she provided for particular students with direct teacher-student interaction or indirect reminders across the classroom. Kathy noticeably remained in close proximity to students with whom she interacted more frequently, to provide suggestions or prompts for spelling or syntax, and she seemed to have anticipated this need. Kathy also provided opportunities for students to “pursue tasks at their own level” (Louden et al., 2008, p. 113) by offering for students to begin an independent writing task if desired, or to wait on the floor for additional assistance.

As the final practice included in this dimension, ‘connection’ related to the teachers linking different areas of learning and drawing on prior learning opportunities and student knowledge as the foundation for new understanding (Louden et al., 2008). During one session, April was observed engaging students in the shared reading of a text and pausing to discuss it. This was preceded by a discussion of an illustrated map of Australia and followed by a joint exploration of Google Earth as relevant to the story. This process involved students themselves making connections between concepts and texts.

Student 1: [after April mentioned Canberra on the map] *Well the Year 6 camp they go to Canberra*

April: *That's right, they do, and that's when I went and I loved it so much, I took my kids when they were about your age...Um, [student name]?*

Student 2: *I went to Canberra [pauses] once I went to Canberra and I did ice skating*

April: *Wow, good, ok ...[points to another student with their hand up] Yep, [student name]*

Student 3: *Even there was, um, a map of Australia in that book [points to another picture book sitting under the IWB]*

April: *That's right! And you're also going to be doing, looking at a map of Australia on Thursday when [teacher name] does a maths lesson with you so we're looking at maps a lot this week!*

This activation of prior knowledge and valuing of students’ previous experiences with the topic prior to reading was an essential step to contextualise the learning for students (Dochy et al., 1999; Loudén et al., 2008). This was made relevant and accessible to all students in the classroom with the addition of visuals, including the picture book to be read and the large, illustrated map of Australia on the IWB.

The classroom video observations described in this section added further depth to the understanding provided by the survey results from Phase One regarding the pedagogical approaches enacted by each of the three participating teachers. Although these approaches could not be considered representative of those of the broader population of kindergarten teachers in NSW, they somewhat corroborated the outlines of the literacy block provided by the larger sample of teachers that completed the survey questionnaire, and helped to illustrate just some of the complexities associated with the execution of literacy practices in the classroom setting, using the CLOS-R as a guide (Cook & Cook, 2016; Loudén et al., 2008).

This illustration made further progress towards addressing the first research question identified for this study, ‘What are kindergarten teachers’ approaches to literacy pedagogy?’ It also provided some insight as to the alignment of classroom practice with the principles of the IPA (Florian & Spratt, 2013) through the examination of the dimensions included in the CLOS-R (Louden et al., 2008), but the constructs of ‘doing’ and ‘believing’ required further interrogation. The classroom observations, on their own, could not provide adequate insight into particular influences on participating teachers’ decision-making that underpinned their pedagogical approaches (Florian & Spratt, 2013; Schachter et al., 2021). This was subsequently explored through the semi-structured interviews to conclude Phase Two of the study.

Semi-Structured Interviews

The following section reports the findings of the semi-structured interviews as the final part of Phase Two of the study. In the context of the study, the semi-structured interviews were designed to provide insight into teachers’ ‘believing’ in inclusive literacy practice (Rouse, 2008). During coding, the researcher noted that the data illustrated teachers’ ‘knowing’ about and approaches to ‘doing’ inclusive literacy practice to a large extent, while also providing further guidance as to the beliefs and decision-making underlying that knowledge and practice. There was significant overlap among participants’ responses, exemplifying the complex nature of the literacy classroom. For example, participating teachers noted changes in their professional knowledge as a result of the execution (‘doing’) of commercial classroom programs. Similarly, participants’ comments related to ‘doing’ literacy practice in their classrooms often linked to their beliefs about student capacity and their responsibility in catering for them. The cross-case analysis of the data therefore elucidated factors relevant to all three constructs identified for the research.

As such, data gleaned from the participant interviews were coded according to the three constructs identified for the research: ‘knowing’, ‘doing’ and ‘believing’. The frequency of coding for each construct within each of the participant interviews is shown in Table 5.6.

Table 5.6

Frequency of Coding in Each Participant Interview

Coding	April Augustine School	Kathy Kings School	Robin Riverbank School
‘Knowing’	46	34	42
‘Doing’	34	26	30
‘Believing’	20	12	4

Coding across the interview transcripts was relatively similar in frequency for ‘knowing’ and ‘doing’. There were generally fewer examples of ‘believing’, particularly in Robin’s interview, but the

existing examples were revealing. 'Believing' was also commonly embedded within participants' responses coded for the other two constructs, particularly through their use of language to describe students as 'low' or 'high'. The three constructs have been arranged with overall frequencies, themes with descriptions, and examples from participants' responses in Table 5.7. There was an emphasis across the interviews on participants' 'knowing' about their students' needs and school approaches and this emphasis was reflected in the frequency of coding.

Table 5.7

Frequency and Description of Coding with Examples of Participants' Interview Responses

Construct	Frequency	Theme Description	Participant examples
'Knowing'	122	<i>Student needs</i>	
		Knowledge and/or assessment of current students and their family backgrounds, learning behaviours, needs and progress	"they haven't mastered all of their single sounds yet" (Robin) "that keeps it interesting for them to try and keep them engaged" (April)
		General knowledge of the age group or grade and relevant student needs	"I think the thing especially maybe in kindergarten is that repetition and consistent routine" (April)
		<i>Professional knowledge</i>	
		Teacher professional knowledge and experience, including awareness of gaps or improvements	"we did [commercial program] before, which was pretty good. It was a lot faster and it was a lot less explicit" (April)
		Knowledge of existing, previously used or other available programs and practices, including resourcing	"I think it enriches my practice by going with the flow and trying new things...tweaking the existing system to suit myself and the kids" (Kathy)
		Knowledge of their current school's capacity, culture, approach or resourcing	
		Knowledge of priorities including other learning areas, syllabus requirements and department responsibilities	"I really think that phonics is important, but I mean that is a departmental priority now" (Kathy)

Table 5.7 (continued)

Construct	Frequency	Theme Description	Participant examples
'Doing'	90	<i>Classroom literacy practice</i> Implementation of current programs and practices, including school-developed or commercial programs	"this is much more explicit like that 'on the mat' time can take up to 40 minutes" (April)
		<i>Autonomy and agency</i> Capacity to apply professional knowledge in action	"our first block of the day is an hour and a half, and so that's where I primarily use my literacy block" (Robin)
		<i>Pace and allocation of time</i> Pace, timing, duration and frequency of practices Allocation of time to English and other learning areas	"I have noticed this year that I am doing a lot less maths than I used to" (April)
		<i>Differentiation</i> Orchestration, including differentiation, student groupings and independence	"we're just starting to get into PMs for the kids who are like level 8" (Kathy)
'Believing'	36	<i>Conceptions of student capacity</i> Perception that students are/are not worth teaching	"the high ones probably will always be high" (April) "I hardly even read with them because it's not really worth it" (April)
		<i>Teacher responsibility</i> Perceptions of responsibility to cater for needs of students requiring support or extension	"I try to make sure that the literacy activities that I put on the table are accessible to them" (Kathy) "depending on...their deficit" (Robin)

The following section outlines examples of coding within each of the three constructs. The examples within each construct have been organised according to the description 'themes' identified in Table 5.7.

Knowing

Evidence from the interviews which was coded as representing participating teachers' 'knowing' about classroom literacy practice is reported below under two headings related to: teachers' knowledge of student needs, including the general needs of the age group with regard to literacy and the backgrounds, needs and progress of the specific students in their care; and teachers' professional knowledge, including their awareness of gaps in that knowledge.

Student Needs. During Kathy's interview, student need was emphasised almost exclusively as the driver of practice. She suggested that any programs, including commercial programs, were "*a guide only*" and that if she were to skip a section or elect a different focus based on student interest, "*nobody is going to care, as long as I am doing the best job for the kids*". Kathy later alluded to the impact of school leadership:

...it is very supportive, collegial, you're all experts. 'We're not gonna micromanage you' sort of culture here. Everybody has a lot of personal freedom... to do what they think is the right thing for the kids...If we do an assessment and it says this, but we really don't think that, then it would go with teacher judgement. (Kathy, Kings School)

Despite this apparent freedom, when asked if her phonics sequence or program might be adapted to meet the different needs or learning progress of students, Kathy disagreed by saying that it was a "*standardised program*". Kathy did later suggest that her literacy practice may change if students were "*just not getting it*" but provided an example related to writing, for which she did not outline any commercial program. By contrast, Kathy lamented the use of a commercial reading assessment specifically because it did not meet the needs of her students:

It's so boring. That first book is really wrong. It's too hard. A lot of mine don't pass the first level, even though I know that on the other decodables we have, they can read level two or three. So I have issues with [commercial program assessment], but we do use it. (Kathy, Kings School)

Kathy noted that she had complained about the commercial assessment, but its use continued.

Knowledge of the general needs of students in the kindergarten age group, and practices suited to those needs, was evident in participants' responses. April noted the importance of "*repetition and consistent routine*" in the kindergarten literacy context, but she also seemed to express a view of her school's homogenous perception of kindergarten students as "*all learning from the beginning*". Robin echoed the mention of consistency by suggesting that "*our day is pretty much the same every day of the week*" but, by contrast, noted that part of her literacy practice was not exclusively driven by a commercial program, as in April and Kathy's classrooms:

...it's school-based...we started by doing the sequence of phonics we originally took from [commercial program], I think, for their sequence. And then I think from there, we were just sort of, every so often we'll have an eye on something to see, just to check that that looks right. I know that we're gonna change it to make it match the new syllabus when that comes in. (Robin, Riverbank School)

It was notable firstly that all three participating teachers (or their schools) had elected different commercial programs or school-driven programs specific to the teaching of grapheme-phoneme correspondences (GPCs). Robin's comments alluded to her professional knowledge being updated and being used to consider available programs with some criticality, in terms of their suitability for students *and* the adequacy of their coverage of syllabus requirements. While April noted that her

commercial program 'matched' the requirements of the new syllabus pending implementation, Robin suggested that her school's program would need to be amended.

Participants suggested that teaching ideas and resources shared via social media had some impact on practice, alongside their knowledge of student needs. When discussing the selection of decodable or other texts for student reading during literacy activities, Robin noted that teaching content shared via social media sites had provided the "*practical input*" she sought for resourcing: "*it's actually through things like social media that we've actually worked out...what's the best way*". She also mentioned incorporating student needs gleaned from assessment into her literacy routines:

I try and follow what I've found I need through either their phonemic awareness assessment, if it's later in the year, like the second half of the year, I take it from there, like I said, there's actually a whole bunch of them, that had trouble with phoneme deletion or phoneme addition, or it might be syllables or whatever. (Robin, Riverbank School)

Professional Knowledge. Both April and Robin made mention of increases in their professional knowledge, either as a result of their engagement with a commercial program, or due to a combination of factors. April noted that:

It's [commercial program] been fantastic because when I came to kindergarten which was last year, I had no idea. I've been in stage two and three, I hadn't taught stage one at all...I feel like I'm always learning as much as I can. I'm always wanting to learn more. (April, Augustine School)

Although not related to a particular program, Robin noted that she had been more focused "*in the last three years on that really explicit phonics teaching*".

But participants also acknowledged *gaps* in their own professional knowledge. Robin referred to high-frequency words as "*a bone of contention because we just would like someone to give us a list instead of having to find which is the best one*". The origin of the expectation that such a list exists and is necessary as part of literacy practice was unclear, but Robin's frustration demonstrated the link between professional knowledge and 'doing' classroom literacy practices.

Robin was the only teacher observed in the video data to make reference to spelling patterns or rules, but this was often in the context of her forgetting the relevant pattern, as in the following example:

Robin: *The next one, oh it's someone making a...*

Students: [in unison, in response to a photo on the IWB] *call*

Robin: [students writing 'call' on mini whiteboards]...*if you chose the other 'k' [says letter name] I'm actually not so sure about this one...and I'll have a look at it for us and find it out...um, sometimes you have to think about what looks right, what you've seen before. I know there is a rule for which one is 'c' [letter name] and which one is 'k' [letter name] but I can't remember it...I think it has to do with 'cat'...*

On some occasions, Robin also specified to students that some words could not be ‘sounded out’ but reconsidered this during small group teaching:

Robin: *So have a look at that tricky word....pterodactyl...there’s no way we could sound that out...the ‘p’ [says letter name] is a silent sound...You could do the rest though I guess, if you ignore the ‘p’ [letter name], pt-e-r-o-dac-tyl [orally segments word]...Yeah that’s a tricky word.*

In their interviews, both April and Robin referred to ‘decodables’ and ‘PMs’ as text options.

Robin mentioned uncertainty regarding the selection of books for students’ independent or small group reading practice:

I really wonder how the two marry like, yeah, that's one thing that I am interested to see how that goes, what the department suggests, how do you benchmark for the decodables...And that's where I wonder, where do you stop with the decodables, because I know that they are only good for a certain amount of time, right? But then when is the cutoff and where do you jump off the decodables...it's quite a tricky, yeah, it's a good question... (Robin, Riverbank School)

Robin’s comments clearly outlined her desire to understand how best to make use of both types of resources as important practical considerations for classroom literacy practice.

Doing

Examples from the interviews which were coded as representing participating teachers’ actions in ‘doing’ are reported below under four headings related to: classroom literacy practice, including their overall approach and orchestration of literacy sessions; autonomy and agency, regarding their enactment of professional knowledge; pace and allocation of time; and differentiation.

Classroom Literacy Practice. With regard to classroom literacy practice overall, all three teachers spoke mostly about student learning and activities relevant to reading and writing and there was no explicit mention of teaching related specifically to oral language. All three participants emphasised phonological awareness and phonics during the interviews. Fluency was not referred to explicitly by any participant. Vocabulary and comprehension were only mentioned in the context of shared, whole class text reading or during discussion of independent writing, not in the context of explicit teaching.

The teachers made comments during the interviews to explain their current actions in enacting literacy practice, which sometimes involved commercial programs. April explained that her literacy program was “*phonics based, which obviously reflects the new syllabus*”. Notably, she used the pronoun ‘our’ to refer to the program which possibly suggested some consistency among neighbouring kindergarten classes. April specified that her school was using a commercial program which was “*based on direct instruction, being extremely explicit and systematic.*” In noting the explicitness of the program, April also clarified how this might appear in practice in the classroom by describing a “*three lesson cycle*”:

...you introduce the sound, then the next day you will read and spell with that sound, and then the next day it's text reading and writing with that sound. And the handwriting is integrated into it as well. (April, Augustine School)

April also made particular mention of the teaching of handwriting as a practice that was relatively new and had been introduced or at least emphasised on a daily, whole class basis, as a result of the introduction of a commercial program.

As in the survey and observational data, the selection of commercial programs teachers used to 'do' classroom literacy practice appeared to emphasise those which addressed phonological awareness and phonics. Kathy specifically noted that "*everything I do stems from phonics and phonemic awareness*" and went on to clarify:

...so phonemic awareness is [commercial program], which is research-based evidence practiced...and then for phonics we use the [commercial] program which is the camera words as well...The writing program, that is collaboratively planned by the stage. We all follow the same thing. (Kathy, Kings School)

Both April and Kathy made mention of 'direct', 'explicit' and 'research-based' practice to justify the selection of these commercial programs.

Beyond phonemic awareness and phonics, participants did make mention of other components of literacy being addressed in their general classroom practice. For example, April outlined the use of literature as a springboard for further exploration, but this once again seemed to be driven by the selected commercial program:

There is a storybook lesson, and you do a book over about three sessions. And it's really good. I don't do it over that many sessions, but you're looking at the...comprehension, vocabulary and it involves drama...in the afternoons, they might act out those words...But I also link writing to that storybook as well. (April, Augustine School)

The mention of other curriculum areas arose in participants' interview responses either as contexts in which literacy could be promoted, or as a hinderance related to instructional time. Kathy stated simply that "*it's [literacy] just embedded everywhere*" and gave an example of a science lesson:

I mean even in science yesterday, when we were doing words on the board, I was still sounding it out. Doing 'I know that we're doing the /ee/ sound this week. You see the /ee/ in this word, help me sound it out'. So it's just embedded everywhere really. (Kathy, Kings School)

April also mentioned a link to science based on a topic explored via a picture book which was prescribed by a commercial program, but which led to additional learning opportunities:

...the other thing I do...with writing is sometimes these books...might be about refugees or...possums in my school. So that led to a whole thing about marsupials. And then so we sort of did writing, we did research and writing for that. And that was really great linked into science. (April, Augustine School)

Autonomy and Agency. All three participants' interviews included comments which were coded as relating to their sense of autonomy and agency with regard to literacy practice. Robin emphasised that her program and that of the other kindergarten teachers at her school was school-developed, not drawn from or based entirely on a commercial program. When asked if she felt that she had autonomy in her enactment of her classroom program, Robin said "*Yeah. Absolutely... if I might have a bunch of kids that need xyz I'll do xyz but they might do ABC next door more just to sort of even it out*". She also noted that "*our results are pretty consistent across the stage in reading and in writing as well. So we obviously do similar things*", possibly suggesting some consistency and autonomy across her team of kindergarten teachers.

By contrast, April and Kathy were both following commercial programs associated with phonics and/or phonemic awareness and made significantly different comments about their sense of autonomy. While Kathy described some "*personal freedom*", April referred to the pace of her execution of a commercial program, and how this had been driven by her students but was now being somewhat controlled by broader school management.

I've moved through it a lot faster than the others...So I'm quite a long way ahead. Now I talked to another teacher at another school who's been doing it for, I don't know, five years or something and she's ahead of me. She moved through it a lot faster. And so I've gone to see her and done a bit of PL [professional learning] with her about the program. So I was basically trying to keep up with her. But now I have to stop...Anyway. So I will slow down, which isn't a bad thing as long...I mean, obviously, just my high kids are at a certain level anyway. (April, Augustine School)

April's comments provided insight which became clear throughout the interview as to her conceptions of student learning (see 'Believing'), given her mention of some students as being 'high'.

Pace and Allocation of Time. The notion of pace and allocation of time was elicited from parts of the participant interviews which were also relevant to differentiation. Two mentions of lesson duration stood out with regard to classroom practice more broadly. Kathy made reference to students' engagement with learning by suggesting that her "*kids never do something for more than an hour, which is good for their attention span*". During the video observations, Kathy made less frequent use of 'independent literacy activities' but April emphasised this structure during her interview. April focused on the need for students to be independent to assist with classroom 'management' but also lamented the lack of teacher-student time afforded by this structure:

...if you think about it in the literacy groups, it's about three minutes per child if I've got four of them [in a reading group] and it's nothing, and I just need them to keep practising reading. (April, Augustine School)

April appeared to promote this small group and simultaneous independent literacy activity structure in her classroom literacy practice, but was equally cognisant of how it impacted the time spent with each of her students.

Differentiation. Overall, the most frequent mention of differentiation throughout all three participating teachers' interview responses was in the context of these small 'reading groups' alongside independent literacy activities. There was some mention of differentiation in other areas such as writing. For example:

I guess the reading part of it is quite an easy differentiation, because you've obviously got levelled groups that you're pulling out, that I'm pulling out anyway. In their writing, for example, it might be just the goals are higher level goals like for goal setting, or their focus will be different, or I might take like a small group out and be like 'this is what I want you to really be focusing on'.

(Robin, Riverbank School)

In describing her implementation of a commercial phonics program, Kathy suggested that the sequence of the program itself could not change but outlined student seating as a method of differentiation:

It is a standardised program. The only differentiation is that [Student 1] sits up close to me and I have paired them. So [Student 2] sits next to [Student 3] because [Student 3] is loud and says the correct answer, and she sits next to [Student 2]. So, I know that [Student 2] is hearing the correct answer every time. So, I have paired them up and I say 'hey, go find your phonics spot'. And then they know that means 'I need to sit next to so and so'. (Kathy, Kings School)

While this explanation emphasises individual student strengths in modelling learning for their peers, participants' conceptions of student capacity were not generally framed in terms of their strengths throughout the interviews. Although participants' responses revealed a significant amount about their 'knowing' about and 'doing' literacy practices, it was clear that this knowledge and action was underpinned by participants' beliefs about student capacity.

Believing

Participants' comments that related to 'believing' included: their conceptions of students' capacity to learn; and their perceptions of the necessity of teaching all students in literacy as their own or someone else's responsibility. Importantly, although these two themes are considered separately below, the researcher noted during analysis that the participating teachers' conceptions of student 'ability' seemed to permeate their comments about their responsibility for catering for student needs.

Student Capacity. With regard to student capacity, the language used by participants was significant. All three participants frequently referred to students as being 'low' or 'high' in relation to their level of understanding and learning achievement. April suggested that "*the high ones will probably always be high*" as though some students' 'ability' was naturally fixed. Participants' conceptions of student 'ability' – not 'transformability' as promoted by the IPA (Florian & Spratt, 2013) – were prominent throughout the interviews and embedded across examples coded for 'knowing' and

'doing'. The frequency of use of 'high' and 'low' and related terms in referring specifically to students and student needs was generated and is included in Table 5.8.

Table 5.8

Frequency of Language Across the Three Participant Interviews

Language	April Augustine School	Kathy Kings School	Robin Riverbank School
'Low' and related terms (lower, lowest, low kids)	17	7	6
'High' and related terms (higher, highest, high kids, high achievers)	23	2	3

The use of these terms in describing student capacity, student groupings for literacy practices, and approaches to support or extend students, was most prominent in April's interview. The application of these terms was also different. The 'low' students were frequently referred to as being the priority for instructional decisions. For example, April suggested that *"the thing with [commercial program] is to really support those low ones as much as possible"* but she also remarked *"Putting in support for those lower kids, I don't know, I think...not really"*. Support was framed not necessarily in terms of teachers' willingness to assist students but as a necessity. April also emphasised *"identifying the low ones, because they're the main ones"*. This need to support students because of some difficulty with aspects of literacy was echoed across the three participants' interviews. Robin spoke positively about the provision of a teaching assistant for student support, which benefited the whole class: *"...so I have a student who has funding...So I use [teaching assistant] to take a focus group...he's not attached to the one student, but he's still here for support if we need it"*.

By contrast, students deemed to be 'high' or 'high-achieving' were spoken about more favourably in terms of the teachers' desire and willingness to cater for them by finding ways to prioritise their engagement. For example, with regard to students requiring support, April said that *"I just feel like I can't do it all"* but when talking about students requiring extension, she said *"I can extend them"*. Similarly, Robin suggested that her 'higher' students *"equally need the same amount of input as everybody else"* and Kathy said *"I can just support her very easily to do that"* when talking about extending a student. Robin also seemed to indicate that she had a higher expectation of those students: *"I think they also think 'I know everything, I don't need to...'...getting them that idea that you're still learning too, you just might be able to do this, but I'm still expecting that your growth is different"*.

While the additional time needed to support some students seemed to be presented somewhat as an unwanted but necessary onus on the teacher, the time required to extend other students was presented as a positive challenge. Indeed, April said *"I've got all this other work for him"* when describing a student requiring extension for whom she was already catering. This tension between

support as a burden and extension as a challenge was evident throughout most of the interview responses.

Teacher Responsibility. Participants' responses not only provided an impression of their conceptions of student 'ability' but also suggested some influence on practice, and on the teachers' perceptions of responsibility in catering for the needs of students. Students were frequently referred to as 'low' or 'high' by all participants in their identification of students to receive learning support, their selection of students for certain learning tasks, or the apparent need for additional literacy support. All three participants referred to students' numbered 'levels' for reading, as though this was a fixed capacity that was used to inform the orchestration of literacy activities. Kathy suggested that she selected her "*lowest kids*" as candidates for learning support provided by an additional teacher. When asked to clarify what she meant by 'lowest', she said this was according to their knowledge of single sounds.

A negative conception of student 'ability' was generally evident in participants' reference to students as 'low' but April also mentioned students with the "*highest needs*":

...they're the two that are my highest needs, but I don't know, I hardly even read with them because it's not really worth it. Sometimes...I don't bother now. With the other one, I'll have a go with him sometimes. (April, Augustine School)

This response exemplifies the apparent link between the participating teachers' conceptions of student 'ability' and the literacy practice they provide. April went on to clarify that one of these two students was "*really disruptive*" and she relied on him being withdrawn to "*keep him occupied*". April's perception of 'ability' appeared to be tied to student behaviour as well as the need for additional support:

Then I've got another student who's really low as well. And we're just waiting for him to see a paediatrician to get a diagnosis, but like he's still on the very first reader... I really want to get a diagnosis because...that could lead to funding. And also then we sort of know what we're working with and what strategies might help him. (April, Augustine School)

April seemed to suggest that there was an ongoing lack of understanding as to how best to address the needs of a student because of a lack of a diagnosis and subsequent funding to facilitate additional support. With regard to additional support via external providers, Robin suggested that the involvement of speech pathologists or occupational therapists in her classroom was fairly common, but this led to mention of student 'deficits':

...it's pretty common for someone to have their speech path[ologist] or OT come in to take them. But they must take them at a time that's convenient to us...unless it was something like someone who had a disability, I would never say 'please come in the morning session' because I need that explicit teaching time. Depending on what their deficit is. (Robin, Riverbank School)

Robin was evidently mindful of the need to maximise 'explicit teaching time' for students but embedded in this awareness was a deficit model of student capacity. This model was similarly evident in participants' discussion of particular students requiring literacy support or acceleration.

Student need for support or extension was embedded in participants' responses related to differentiation, which also included evidence of their conceptions of student 'ability'. April made the point that 'reading groups' represented the most potent time for differentiation in her classroom. In terms of support, April suggested that the purpose of the commercial program was to "*really support those low ones...which is a little tedious for the high ones*". She commented that she was still trying to determine how best to engage all students because "*I don't want the higher ones to get bored*". This tension between supporting and extending students in literacy was common among all three participants' interviews. There was some mention of relying on 'high' students to support other students with literacy difficulties, and of requiring these 'high' students to work independently for greater periods of time.

That's [whole class storybook reading] when you can differentiate as well and get the higher kids to answer those inferential questions to help the lower kids. (April, Augustine School)

I'll make sure that I pull my lower readers every day, whereas my higher, I might say 'I'm gonna give you this book, and you go away and read it, make me a list of things that you want to know'...which is tricky, because...they equally need the same amount of input as everybody else. But sometimes it's just 'well go and read to yourself and I'll listen to you later' but it's not as deep I guess. (Robin, Riverbank School)

Both April and Robin's comments alluded to the 'classification' of students as 'high' or 'low' as though this is a fixed state. Robin's response also demonstrates an acknowledgement that the 'high' students were just as entitled to targeted teacher input but were being relied upon to engage with literacy independently. This requirement of independence was sometimes justified because "*they can read themselves*" (April) or because those students demonstrated that capacity as a strength and were empowered to engage themselves:

I probably do focus a lot more on the ones who are lower, than higher. For the ones that are higher, one of the big things that I like to use is the phonemic phonics mats that I keep over there. And so instead of spelling things for them, I'll say 'that's /ee/ like in bead, go find it on the phonics mat to find how to spell it'. And those kids are just increasingly independent. I don't help them so much. Or I will give them an extra task to do in the lesson, like I'll say 'I'd like you to write two sentences please'. But I do focus a lot more on the lower ones. (Kathy, Kings School)

Kathy emphasised that she spent more time with students requiring support in a similar way to April but framed the remaining students' independence as an individual and suitable goal to extend them. Kathy was also the only participant to note that she made some deliberate selection of activities, not

just with independence in mind but with a consideration of student needs: *“I try to make sure that the literacy activities that I put on the table are accessible to them”*.

There was much more of a focus on students requiring support in participants' responses. While April noted that *“about three of my students go out once a week to do extension writing sessions”*, any mention of additional personnel such as a learning support teacher was in the context of addressing the needs of students requiring support in literacy. Kathy noted that support via a withdrawal program occurred in every grade except kindergarten at her school, possibly suggesting that in kindergarten the support was solely the responsibility of the classroom teacher. Kathy did mention input from the learning support teacher, and this was the only mention across the three interviews of what appeared to be a tiered system of support.

Kathy did say that the learning support teacher *“will do the same activity and she'll do it in a different way”*. This indicated that the approach to support did not involve providing something 'different' for those students. It instead provided repeated exposure to the content and activities covered in class in a more targeted setting.

Kathy also explained that her more frequent contact with students requiring support allowed her to be directly informed as to their learning needs: *“Do I test them [the 'low' kids] more often? No, because I have that extra contact. I feel like I can mould whatever I'm doing right then to what they need”*. Further, in relation to support, both Kathy and April mentioned having more frequent contact with the parents or carers of those students. April referred to it as *“a three-way thing. You go parents, students, and me”* but seemed to place some onus on the parents in facilitating support beyond the classroom:

I suppose with those lower ones as well...I'm always talking to the parents and I'm always sending home extra things...for the lows. I just feel like I can't do it all. Parents have to do it if they want their kids to be at a certain level. Because really like that amount of time, one on one is just so minimal. (April, Augustine School)

April's comments suggested a belief that some of the responsibility for catering for the literacy needs of students remained with the parents in the home environment and not with the classroom teacher. Of her 'higher' students, April even said that *“Their parents are probably more proactive”*, linking back to the suggestion that students' categorisation as 'low' or 'high' was fixed and predetermined by their home literacy environment. Robin echoed this attribution of student success to the home environment: *“the kids who are on level eight, they are reading elsewhere. They're reading at home”*.

The data gleaned from Phase Two of the study addressed both the overarching question 'What are kindergarten teachers' approaches to literacy pedagogy?' and the sub-question 'To what extent does early literacy practice align with an Inclusive Pedagogical Approach (Florian & Spratt, 2013)?' The observational data generally aligned with the survey data from Phase One in outlining the typical literacy practices and pedagogies emphasised by participating kindergarten teachers. The video

observations demonstrated some frequency of all 27 practices associated with the CLOS-R (Louden et al., 2008) but revealed important differences in the case study participants' actual allocations of time to key literacy components. The interview data directly addressed the sub-question identified for this research, indicating that the case study participants 'know', 'do' and 'believe in' inclusive literacy practice to some extent. The interview data were particularly revealing with regard to participants' beliefs about students and their responsibility in catering for their diverse needs, which sometimes conflicted with their broader promotion of inclusive principles across Phase Two.

The reporting of the findings from the three data sources outlined in Chapters 4 and 5 forms the basis of the rich discussion that now follows in Section Three. The discussion in Chapter 6 will infer important themes and broader issues that emerged from the findings with regard to kindergarten teachers' day to day literacy practice, as related to prior studies and the literature in the field.

Section Three: *Interpreting* Inclusive Literacy Education

Chapter 6

Discussion

We can, whenever and wherever we choose, successfully teach all children whose schooling is of interest to us. We already know more than we need to do that. Whether or not we do it must finally depend on how we feel about the fact that we haven't so far. (Edmonds, 1979, p. 23)

This chapter discusses the findings in relation to the literature on inclusive literacy practice and the two core research questions identified for the study. The discussion is underpinned by the three constructs (knowing, doing, believing; Rouse, 2008) which are used as guiding principles for the interrogation of approaches to classroom literacy practice gleaned from the data. The three constructs form the basis of the Inclusive Pedagogical Approach (IPA; Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Florian & Spratt, 2013) as the theoretical framework for the study.

The chapter begins by revisiting the complexities of the kindergarten literacy classroom as the context for this research. This is followed by the extrapolation of four themes from the data: consistency vs. difference; privileged knowledge vs. knowledge gaps; time vs. substance; and visions of inclusion vs. visions of 'ability'. These themes are discussed in relation to the ways in which they address the research questions. Finally, the conclusion synthesises the discussion and features a suggested framework based on the implications of the study findings. An outline of the limitations and challenges associated with the study is also provided.

Setting the Scene

While both quantitative and qualitative research has long been undertaken in the field of literacy education (Teale et al., 2020), research has tended to emphasise only some aspects of literacy acquisition. This is evident in Australian and international research spanning the last two decades (e.g., Galuschka et al., 2020; Jordan et al., 2018; Lammert et al., 2022; Malpique et al., 2017; Piasta et al., 2009). Within this emphasis, there has been a particular focus on intervention studies which examine student growth in a singular domain of literacy, and a tendency towards highlighting the significance only of cognitive research in education (T. Shanahan, 2020b; Teale et al., 2020; Yaden et al., 2021). Such a tendency fails to acknowledge the reality of classroom literacy practice which is context-dependent and requires an inclusive, informed and coordinated approach (Derewianka et al., 2024; Teale et al., 2020).

Nonetheless, research has identified key components and related practices which must be addressed in classrooms for the benefit of students' literacy development: oral language (Hindman et al., 2022; Wallace et al., 2022); phonological awareness (Clemens et al., 2021; Piasta & Hudson, 2022; Rice et al., 2022); phonic knowledge (Castles et al., 2018; Mather & Jaffe, 2021); fluency (Aldhanhani & Abu-Ayyash, 2020; Hasbrouck & Tindal, 2017); vocabulary (Beck et al., 2013; Kargiotidis et al., 2023); reading comprehension (Clemens & Fuchs, 2021; Dujardin et al., 2023; Smith et al., 2021) and writing,

including text composition and transcription skills (Ahmed et al., 2022; Madelaine, 2023; Malpique et al., 2017; Sedita, 2022). Experiential and contextual evidence demonstrating the enactment of these essential components in classrooms has been lacking in the research literature but could be of value to teachers in determining their approaches to literacy practice (Cook & Cook, 2016).

With regard to the emphasis on inclusive pedagogy in the present study through the IPA (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Florian & Spratt, 2013), studies using the IPA as a framework for exploring inclusive practice have been minimal and have addressed settings other than the Australian primary classroom (e.g., Brennan & King, 2022; Moosa & Bekker, 2021). Such research has not engaged specifically with English literacy education in kindergarten and the methodologies involved have not included survey data, alongside observations or interviews, as a tool for gathering input from a larger sample of teachers.

Finally, research in the literacy or inclusive domains has yet to consider kindergarten classroom teachers' *existing* practice within an inclusive pedagogical approach to literacy education: the aim of the present study. There is no doubt that the translation of government policy and research related to literacy education into the practical realities of the classroom is a challenging endeavour. Teachers' already complex task is compounded by the constant churn of policy reform, curriculum review and development, and public scrutiny of student achievement, all of which potentially leads to inconsistent classroom practice (Gawne, 2023; Stark et al., 2016). Persistent debates and apparent dichotomies which divide education research in the literacy domain add to this complexity.

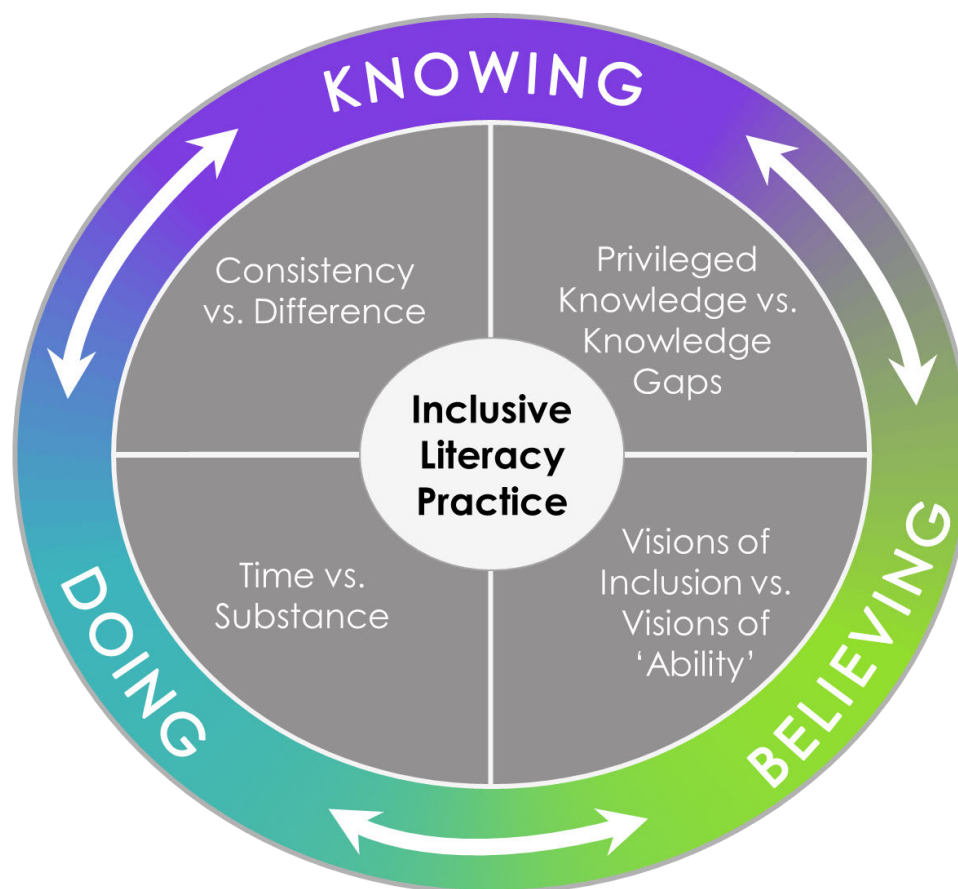
But albeit challenging, the role of the classroom teacher is to manage these competing pressures by navigating the intersections between policy and research, in order to facilitate classroom practice that caters for diverse student needs. Within this landscape, the following research questions were considered:

1. What are kindergarten teachers' approaches to literacy pedagogy?
2. To what extent does early literacy practice align with an Inclusive Pedagogical Approach (Florian & Spratt, 2013) in terms of teachers:
 - a. Knowing?
 - b. Doing?
 - c. Believing?

Florian (2014) recommends a move towards theorising practice by exploring teachers' "principles, assumptions and actions" (p. 293) in inclusive pedagogy. The analysis and theorisation of inclusive *literacy* practice, based on the data from the present study and its relation to existing literature, is discussed in this chapter via four key themes: consistency vs. difference; privileged knowledge vs. knowledge gaps; time vs. substance; and visions of inclusion vs. visions of 'ability'. These themes have been drawn from the findings of the research and are embedded in the three key constructs of the IPA (Florian & Spratt, 2013) as the lens through which literacy practice has been examined in this study (see Figure 6.1).

Figure 6.1

Visual Overview of Themes Embedded in Research Constructs



In all four themes drawn from the data, the ‘opposing’ ideas are not seen as mutually exclusive but as intersecting and overlapping principles which exemplify sometimes paradoxical tensions and complexities inherent in the literacy classroom, and in teachers’ roles within that context. These tensions reflect or refract existing research in dynamic and sometimes divergent ways.

Each of the four identified themes responds to each of the research questions. Within each of the themes and the tensions inherent in them, the first of the ‘opposing’ ideas reflects an initial consideration of the first research question on literacy practice at a ‘zoomed in’ level. The second of the ‘opposing’ ideas reflects the more revealing and potent inference on *inclusive* literacy practice drawn from the application of the IPA (Florian & Spratt, 2013) at a ‘zoomed out’ level.

Further, the tensions represented by and within these themes are layered and multifaceted. Firstly, there is a perceived tension between the two core ‘opposing’ ideas. Secondly, there is sometimes a conflict between the findings drawn from the two different phases of the study and between the different types of data collection within the mixed methods approach, particularly in relation to self-reported and actual practice. Thirdly, there is a tension between the many underlying factors impacting teachers which contribute to the four themes.

Finally, within all of those layers, there is a tension between the three research constructs with regard to teachers’ knowing, doing and believing in inclusive literacy practice. In the conceptualisation

of inclusive literacy practice via Figure 2.3 in Chapter 2, the researcher had noted that it placed an emphasis on the 'syllabus, content, pedagogy and allocation of time' teacher-related variable identified in Figure 1.2 in Chapter 1. While this emphasis was indeed reflected in the analysis and discussion of the findings, in drawing inferences from the study results, it also became clear that some of the other teacher-related variables in Figure 1.2, including teachers' beliefs and motivation, were somewhat inseparable from their pedagogy, exemplifying the simultaneous application of the three constructs. Further, the 'content' and 'pedagogy' within the identified teacher-related variable were implicated in distinct but equally revealing ways.

All four core themes are considered to be equally important to the discussion of the findings, and they are all pertinent to the generation of implications of the study. While all three constructs identified for the research are relevant across all four themes, the construct of 'believing' underscores all of them in different but significant ways. Participating teachers' 'believing' in inclusive literacy practice is inherent in their: beliefs about the literacy components and practices to be valued and included in the literacy block (consistency vs. difference); perceptions of literacy (privileged knowledge vs. knowledge gaps); beliefs about the time required for certain components or practices, whether those practices should vary or remain unchanged, and potential contradictions underlying those beliefs (time vs. substance); and beliefs about student 'ability' as the driver of their perceptions of responsibility (visions of inclusion vs. visions of 'ability').

The underscoring of all four themes by the construct of 'believing' does not detract from the importance of 'knowing' and 'doing' and how those constructs are similarly emphasised within some of the themes. But findings relevant to 'knowing', including teachers' definitions of literacy, and 'doing' are strongly tied to the teachers' beliefs and values underlying the enactment of that knowledge.

The consideration of the four themes offers a realistic and constructively critical representation of the classroom literacy experience of kindergarten teachers which has been lacking in the literature. The discussion outlined here serves to: (a) validate the conceptualisation, application and interpretation of the theoretical framework for the study (see Figures 1.2 and 2.3) because it reveals more than an isolated interrogation of either literacy or inclusive education could achieve; (b) justify the use of a mixed methods approach within the study which is demonstrated, through the discussion of the findings, to be more revealing than a single method on its own; and (c) exemplify the complex challenges associated with the early literacy context and with applying the IPA (Florian & Spratt, 2013) in the early literacy classroom, in answering the research questions. The consideration of these themes has the potential to inform teacher practice and professional reflection and may therefore benefit the students for whom classroom literacy practice ultimately matters.

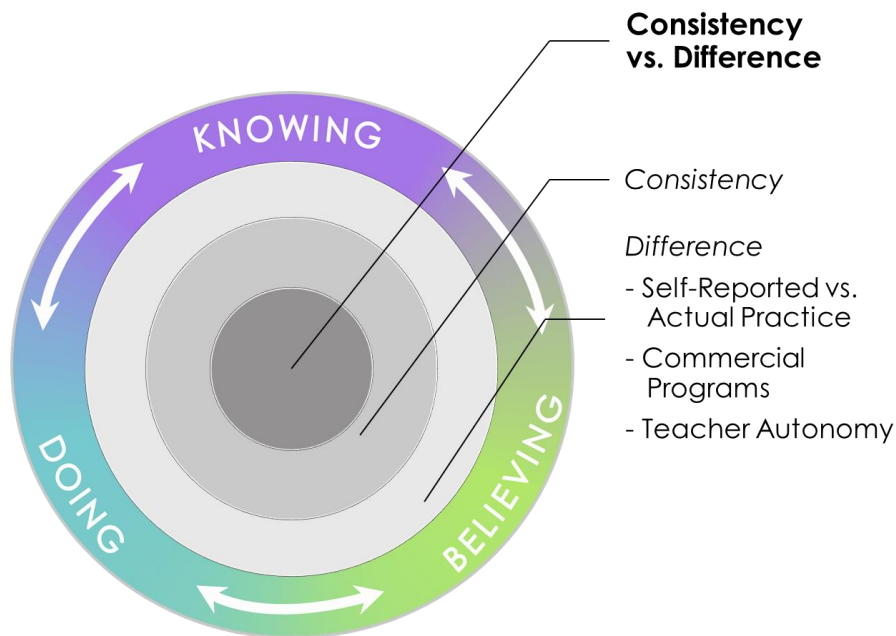
Consistency vs. Difference

The first theme drawn from the present study relates to the tension between consistency and difference inferred from participating teachers' approaches to classroom literacy practice (see Figure

6.2). The consideration of consistency answers the first research question by suggesting that kindergarten teachers' approaches to 'doing' the content and categories of practice addressed in their literacy sessions are broadly similar. Paradoxically, the *broader* consideration of that practice afforded by the outer layer of the IPA framework illustrates important differences in the nature and execution of those practices.

Figure 6.2

Visual Overview of Theme 1



Consistency

Both phases of data collection included a consideration of the broad categories of practice addressed by participating kindergarten teachers in the survey and observations. Overall, this consideration appeared to illuminate relative consistency among the practices chosen for coverage in the literacy block. Figure 6.3 provides an overview of the nature of the coverage of those practices according to both phases of data collection.

Figure 6.3

Visual Overview of Coverage of Essential Components of Literacy Practice Across Both Phases



There was a sense across the survey and observational data that phonological awareness and the alphabetic principle were prioritised for explicit coverage, while the coverage of oral language, fluency, vocabulary and reading comprehension remained only incidental and implicit. Despite the belief that teachers may prioritise components such as oral language (Honig, 2007; Konza, 2014) and fluency (Hudson et al., 2020; Rasinski et al., 2020; Van den Hurk et al., 2017), an overt emphasis on these components was not perceived from the data. The implicit coverage of some literacy components has been gleaned from other recent studies of the literacy block (e.g., Reed, 2024).

Within the coverage of some of the components, the participating students' ages and the timing of data collection may have impacted the results. For example, it could be that participating teachers did not assume that fluency would develop automatically (Van den Hurk et al., 2017) but that they were emphasising other areas, such as the alphabetic principle, to first develop accurate decoding skills. Similarly, the apparent omission of specific comprehension strategy instruction involving explicit modelling (Elleman & Oslund, 2019) may have resulted from the age and stage of learning of the participating students. But students' status as novice readers in kindergarten does not preclude an explicit focus on fluency at the grapheme-phoneme correspondence (GPC), word, sentence or even text level (e.g., Kuhn et al., 2010; Rasinski et al., 2020), nor does it necessitate a delay in focusing on meaning-making until the later grades, which has been lamented in the literature (Cervetti & Wright, 2020; Connor et al., 2017).

The interviews also offered some clarification as to the importance of timing in relation to some components in the observations: there may have been a greater emphasis on handwriting earlier in the year, prior to data collection. But frequent, repeated practice of handwriting – beyond just the beginning of the kindergarten year – as an instructional priority could be expected, given the significant impact of handwriting automaticity on written expression (Feng et al., 2019; D. Jones & Christensen, 1999).

While the findings discussed thus far represent some lack of alignment with *research* recommendations, there was some consistent alignment *between* participating kindergarten teachers' choice of practices. For example, participants were generally addressing phonological awareness, although this sometimes occurred in the absence of print, contrary to research recommendations (Brady, 2020; Clemens et al., 2021; NICHD, 2000). Similarly, there was some promotion of orthographic mapping for word reading (Coltheart et al., 2001; Ehri, 2022; Kilpatrick, 2020) evident across both phases of the data. Implicit coverage of fluency, vocabulary and comprehension was also noted, and this was consistent across the literacy practice of survey and case study participants. While text composition was evident in writing, the explicit teaching of spelling and handwriting generally appeared to be omitted.

The consistency of coverage of key components of the literacy session in the present data suggested an apparent emphasis on the explicit coverage of phonological awareness and phonics. At this level of magnification, with regard to the first research question, participants' approaches appeared to consistently emphasise or omit the explicit coverage of some literacy components. But the 'zooming out' afforded by the IPA as part of the framework for this study illuminates some key differences between the nature and execution of practices related to those components.

Difference

Important differences between participants' coverage of key components in their literacy sessions are further elucidated via the IPA (Florian & Spratt, 2013) as a lens through which those components can be considered. Teachers' 'knowing' about and 'doing' literacy practice reflected more than just their *intended* approaches.

The listing of key components, including those in the 'big six' (Konza, 2014; NICHD, 2000) by survey participants, and the apparent broad coverage within the observations, could provide reassurance to the research community that teachers, at a surface level, know about and are implementing evidence-informed approaches to enhancing literacy. But it may be that teachers have simply been somewhat conditioned to perceive literacy in a finite way, with discrete domains and competencies in mind. The current English syllabus (NESA, 2025b) and the syllabus relevant to teachers at the time of data collection (NESA, 2012) subscribe to this kind of outlining of discrete domains. Being able to list or 'tick off' each of the elements of the 'big six' or the syllabus to be

addressed no doubt provides reassurance to teachers that all necessary components have been 'covered'.

But during analysis, the researcher sensed a possibility that terms such as those in the syllabus, the 'big six' and the 'science of reading' (SOR) have simply been absorbed and embedded in teachers' vernacular, such that they only represent awareness, independent of interpretation or research-informed *execution*. In the absence of rigorous research which examines the classroom *implementation* of evidence-informed practices, any program, resource or teacher approach can claim to be led by the 'big six', the SOR (Seidenberg et al., 2020) or other frameworks (Cook & Cook, 2013).

Indeed, while the first part of this theme ('consistency') suggested some homogeneity in the literacy practices of participating kindergarten teachers, a simultaneous and conflicting heterogeneity was perceived by the researcher. Three key sub-themes of difference were drawn from the data: self-reported vs. actual practice; commercial programs; and teacher autonomy. Each of the sub-themes represents a factor which may further disrupt either the alignment of teachers' literacy practices with research, and/or the alignment of their practices with their intended approaches.

Self-Reported vs. Actual Practice. The literature has long considered the lack of correlation between teachers' self-reported and actual *knowledge* (Hammond, 2015; Macken-Horarik et al., 2018; Meeks & Kemp, 2017) but this research provides further insight by offering a comparison of self-reported and *actual* classroom literacy practice.

The self-reported selection of components for 'doing' classroom literacy practice listed by survey participants (see Table 4.5 in Chapter 4) and those demonstrated in the video observations (see Table 5.1 in Chapter 5) generally aligned with the research literature. If core literacy practice is known to integrate word study, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension through whole class, guided and small group activities, including guided reading, in a morning session, survey participants' self-reported approaches reflected this perception (Meeks et al., 2020; Nicholas et al., 2021; Sisson & Sisson, 2016). Survey responses also appeared to indicate a focus on the explicit teaching of these components, as recommended in the literature (CESE, 2020b; Rosenshine, 2012).

But discrepancies between participants' descriptions of practice in the survey and the case study participants' *actual* classroom execution were evident. The 'big six' (oral language and early literacy experiences, phonological awareness, the alphabetic principle, fluency, comprehension and vocabulary; Konza, 2014; NICHD, 2000) and, to a lesser extent, writing, were frequently self-reported by participants in the survey questionnaire. But in the Phase Two observations, there were some notable omissions in practice and some approaches to execution that differed from recommendations in the literature.

For example, survey participants, including those involved in the case study, apparently attributed at least some importance to vocabulary (that is, knowledge of words, including their morphological structures and definitions) via their open-ended responses. An emphasis on vocabulary

has been self-reported by teacher participants in other recent studies (e.g., T. B. Johnston, 2025; Smith et al., 2023, 2025). But there was no evidence in the video observations of the purposeful selection, explicit exploration and revision of words, as is recommended in the literature (Beck et al., 2013; Kindle, 2009; Lemov et al., 2016). While some implicit coverage of vocabulary is necessary, it is inadequate without robust vocabulary instruction alongside it, particularly for beginning readers in the kindergarten context who are limited in the types of reading material, and therefore vocabulary, they can access independently (Kindle, 2009; Manyak et al., 2021; Wright & Cervetti, 2017).

Similarly, the teaching of writing was frequently referred to in survey participants' outlines of the literacy block, and text composition was indeed addressed in the classroom observations. But any emphasis on spelling patterns or rules and strategies for spelling unfamiliar words (S. Graham & Santangelo, 2014), as part of the transcription skills relevant to writing, was not perceived by the researcher in the observations or interviews.

Acknowledging that the observations did not capture all teachers' literacy teaching, the present data were characterised by important differences with regard to self-reported and actual classroom practice. Further, there were significant differences in the selection of commercial programs by participants in both the self-reported and observational data.

Commercial Programs. Within the broadly consistent coverage but varied execution of core literacy practices inferred from the present data, commercial programs were evidently popular among participating teachers across both phases of the study. Commercial programs may well be associated with efficient, adequate coverage of elements of literacy necessitated by both the research literature and syllabus requirements.

But there may be some inherent issues with their usage. Firstly, the use of commercial or department-recommended programs can come at the expense of teachers' own development as professionals, with the capacity to think critically and constructively about individual student needs, and to address those needs based on a repertoire of carefully selected – not scripted, 'one size fits all' – strategies (Gawne, 2023; Mantei et al., 2022): an essential tenet of an inclusive pedagogical approach. Secondly, the execution of some commercial programs may not mirror recommendations from recent research. Additionally, schools risk the commercial program *becoming* the reading or broader literacy program and neglecting other essential components (Mantei et al., 2022). Overall, commercial programs have the potential to limit the coverage of essential content, and to limit the extent to which approaches to literacy practice are personalised to meet student needs.

Consistency among participants' selection of practices and the explicit coverage of phonological awareness and phonics was noted in the first part of this theme. This consistency was mirrored in the types of commercial programs selected by schools, which appeared to privilege 'constrained skills' via phonics (see Figure 4.2 in Chapter 4). Such an emphasis could be considered appropriate in the early years of literacy education, but students require a foundation in all key components of literacy.

Participating teachers (or their schools) had selected a broad range of commercial programs and academics, authors or companies (see Figure 4.1 in Chapter 4) on which to rely to guide practice. Some participating teachers and their schools had generated their approach to literacy practice entirely independently, while others were being explicitly led by programs for at least some components of their classroom literacy teaching. Commercial programs explicitly driving practice in some classrooms may have led to the consistent emphasis on phonological awareness and phonics perceived in the first part of this theme.

In light of this focus on participants' selection of commercial programs, it is important to note that the only formal requirement is the mandatory implementation of the NSW English syllabus (NESA, 2012; at the time of data collection). The use of a supplementary, commercial program – be it by teacher choice or school requirement – could suggest that: teachers require further guidance, seemingly with regard to addressing the more constrained skills associated with literacy acquisition; the commercial program provides such guidance and therefore lessens teacher pressure in terms of planning and preparation time (e.g., J. Hunter et al., 2022), and alleviates potential uncertainty regarding optimal implementation; and/or the program aligns with teacher or school leadership preferences regarding the style of implementation and the aspects of literacy it promotes.

Regardless of the origin of the selection and promotion of commercial programs by participating teachers, the results of the study illuminated significant variation in that selection and therefore the enactment of coverage of core components of literacy practice. Further, the selection of some programs did not align with recent research. For example, the Heggerty program (Heggerty & VanHekken, 2020) was frequently cited by survey participants as an example of professional learning, and as a commercial program in use in their classrooms. The program addresses phonemic awareness only through oral manipulation tasks, despite the teaching of phonemic awareness with print generating stronger reading outcomes (Brady, 2020; Clemens et al., 2021; NICHD, 2000).

If such variation has been gleaned from the small population of teachers within this study radius, it could be expected that there is even greater variation among kindergarten teachers in the broader population of teachers in NSW. Such variation could be deemed appropriate given that the *students* within the study radius and beyond are indeed varied. An inclusive pedagogical approach to literacy practice must be driven by the diverse needs of those learners (Finkelstein et al., 2021). But some greater level of consistency could also be expected if teachers are to be implementing an evidence-informed and successfully personalised approach to enacting syllabus requirements.

In the process of engaging with the data and this sub-theme, the researcher noted an underlying paradox within this expectation of variation within consistency. But it may be that a 'standardising' of *content* (and pedagogy, to some extent, with explicit teaching as one example), based on recommendations drawn from the research literature, and a varying of the *execution* according to the needs of students, is required. That distinction between content and execution also arises as a conflict underlying the second theme.

The use of commercial programs could be considered to address this ‘standardising’ of content *if* they align with research recommendations, but at least some of them, evidently, do not represent such an alignment (e.g., Heggerty). The researcher considers that the problem with commercial programs, at least as they appear to have been referred to by participating teachers, is that they ‘standardise’ *both* the content and practice required for literacy, and therefore no amendment or modification to the execution appears to be expected. Indeed, the limitations of commercialised programs and resource packages are characterised by their inherent assumption that the learners for whom they are intended are as ‘standardised’ as the content and activities they contain (Mantei et al., 2022).

Teacher Autonomy. Adding to the variation drawn thus far from the data, as a final sub-theme, were school and teacher autonomy, which may create further inequity and inconsistency of curriculum delivery (Keddie et al., 2023). A large percentage of survey participants agreed that they have autonomy to plan for the teaching of literacy in their classrooms. This raises the possibility that teachers make professional decisions under the influence of factors including student needs, personal preference, tradition, policy directives or practices required by school leadership (T. Young, 2022). Indeed, the possible impact of other factors, including school leadership or system-wide directives, has been acknowledged in the literature (Blasé & Blasé, 2000; E. Ross, 2024; te Riele et al., 2022; Teale et al., 2020). Importantly, such factors are far removed from the *students* whose needs should be a central driver of classroom literacy practice (Florian, 2014).

Levels of autonomy which enable teachers to drive practice according to student needs varied according to the findings of the present study. Interview responses in one setting alluded to a school culture in which teachers were empowered to proceed with autonomy, with students in mind as the central factor informing their practice. This kind of culture without ‘micromanagement’ but with the prioritising of student needs is reflective of the IPA (Brennan et al., 2021; Florian & Spratt, 2013).

By contrast, there was evidence in another case study setting of an intervention into teacher agency from school leadership related to the pace of implementation of a commercial program. A desire among school leaders for consistency in literacy practice has previously been reported (te Riele et al., 2022) and the requirement of such consistency represents a barrier, not only to teacher agency but also to an Inclusive Pedagogical Approach (Florian & Spratt, 2013). The findings indicated that while teacher agency for enacting craft knowledge as part of an IPA is necessary (Black-Hawkins & Florian, 2012; P. Jones et al., 2025) and sometimes afforded to teachers, other factors may interfere with its provision.

Within this first theme, the present data illustrate that there is some consistency among the core literacy practices selected by participating kindergarten teachers, and that there is some broad alignment of that practice with research. This answers the first research question identified for the study. But further meta-inferences drawn from the data through the IPA (Florian & Spratt, 2013) framework in response to the second research question indicate that teachers’ literacy practice is

simultaneously characterised by significant variation in the execution of practices, and the specific alignment of some components with research, which mirrors previous research on self-reported practice (Cunningham et al., 2009). Further, factors including commercial programs and levels of autonomy may interact with teachers' 'knowing' about and 'doing' their intended literacy practice in ways which disrupt their approaches and the extent to which they can be driven by student needs.

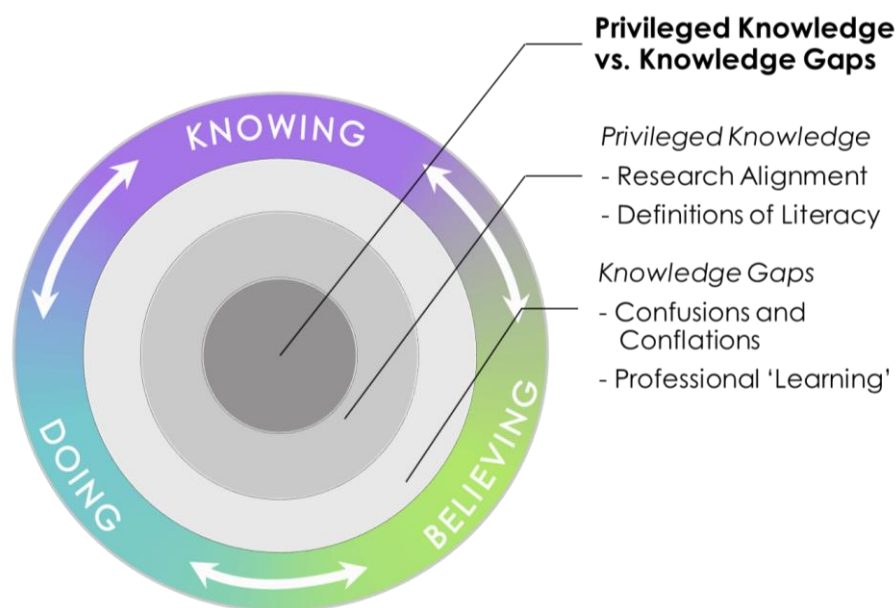
The findings explored within this theme imply that the literacy practices participating teachers perceive themselves to be undertaking are different from those occurring in their classrooms. Additionally, their actual practice is not fully aligned with research recommendations. This contributes to the field of literacy education by illuminating the need for further upskilling of in-service teachers, to enhance their existing literacy practices, particularly via the incorporation of explicit coverage of fluency, vocabulary, handwriting, spelling and comprehension. Part of that enhancement could include the evaluation of existing commercial programs and a critical consideration of the extent to which they are genuinely addressing literacy components in evidence-informed ways and driven by the needs of students. Given that participating teachers generally framed commercial programs in positive ways, this evaluation may require some challenging of their beliefs.

Privileged Knowledge vs. Knowledge Gaps

The second theme that emerges from the data relates to the knowledge sources participating teachers appear to privilege to drive their practice, and the gaps that appear to exist in that knowledge (see Figure 6.4). The interrogation of teachers' privileged knowledge responds to the first research question by considering the influence of research and the types of 'knowing' emphasised in participants' definitions of literacy. The application of the inclusive lens via the IPA (Florian & Spratt, 2013) to that consideration of knowledge subsequently reveals confusions and connotations inherent in it, and important inferences related to relevant professional learning. That application relates to teachers' 'knowing' about inclusive literacy practice and responds to the second research question.

Figure 6.4

Visual Overview of Theme 2



It would be hoped that all teachers strive to be reflective practitioners who engage critically and actively with colleagues, curriculum, and prevailing beliefs and approaches to literacy practice, with the aim of enhancing student learning (M. Ryan & Barton, 2020). But the results of the present study suggest that participating teachers may not engage with research to the extent that they self-reported in the survey, and that they may not engage with specific bodies of knowledge that are key to teaching literacy with sufficient criticality.

Privileged Knowledge

The discussion of privileged knowledge within the second core theme is organised into two key sub-themes: research alignment; and definitions of literacy.

Research Alignment. The first consideration within this theme at a 'zoomed in', literacy-specific level, is whether participating teachers consult the research literature to develop their knowledge (and practice). Survey participants generally did refer to frameworks, such as the 'big six' (Konza, 2014; NICHHD, 2000), which are drawn from research, but this may simply have represented an echoing of key phrases drawn from oversimplified interpretations of the research and not a genuine, well-developed understanding and execution of research recommendations in practice (Mesmer & Kambach, 2022). And yet, 92% of survey participants agreed that they keep up to date with research in the field of literacy. It may be that participants held broad and varied understandings of what counts as 'research' and indeed, 'research-based practice' (Cook & Cook, 2013), given the inconsistent alignment of self-reported and actual practice drawn from the present study and articulated in the first theme.

In the quantitative analysis of the survey, the small negative correlation between participants' 'knowing' construct scores, age and years of teaching suggested that as participants' age and experience increased, their agreement with items related to 'knowing', including their engagement with research, decreased. By contrast, a recent Australian study suggested the most prevalent knowledge source for participating teachers, including those with 15-20 years of teaching experience, was their own research (Smith et al., 2023). But this 'research' could include sources other than the literature, as was apparent in the present study (Cook & Cook, 2013; Mesmer & Kambach, 2022).

Previous studies have demonstrated that beginning and experienced teachers can engage in a similar quality of teaching (e.g., L. J. Graham et al., 2020). This 'quality' is very much dependent on what teachers actually do in their classrooms, in their process of enacting their "practical wisdom" (Florian & Beaton, 2018, p. 873). There is much more to this enactment than knowledge or experience. It has also been acknowledged that research literature in general can tend to be overcomplicated and to lack translational findings relevant to classroom implementation, making it inaccessible for teachers (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Seidenberg et al., 2020). But 'research' was not the only knowledge source that participants appeared to privilege.

Definitions of Literacy. A second consideration that was relevant to teacher knowledge was participants' definitions of literacy. The majority of survey participants' definitions of 'literacy' took a cognitive approach (see Table 4.2 in Chapter 4). This involved the listing of discrete skills, competencies or knowledge domains associated with literacy. While this could be seen to neglect the importance of the application of those competencies in a sociocultural context (Davidson, 2010; Purcell-Gates et al., 2004; Wyse, 2017), it may also be that teachers, at least in this study, are somewhat conditioned to perceive literacy in this discrete, cognitive way. Many participants' definitions of literacy mirrored verbatim the three objectives (i.e., speaking, reading, writing) of the English syllabus relevant to kindergarten students and teachers at the time of data collection (NESA, 2012).

It could be that the syllabus, by which they are mandated to teach, drives teachers' experience of literacy teaching and learning, or that these terms were simply easy to list. Nonetheless, participants' definitional approaches link to the possibility raised in the first discussion theme that the absorption of competencies into teachers' vernacular does not represent the successful and inclusive coverage of those competencies in practice. The results of the present study support this inference, given the differences between teachers' self-reported and actual practice, and the misalignment of some practices with research.

While participating teachers' definitions did not necessarily neglect the importance of the contextual application of literacy, it was in the context of the cognitive competencies and tangible outputs of literacy that their specialist literacy knowledge appeared to be lacking or to contrast with

the research literature. A more nuanced interrogation of the present data forms the second part of this core theme.

Knowledge Gaps

Research has previously noted the insufficiency of teachers' literacy-specific knowledge (e.g., Carson & Bayetto, 2018; Mahar & Richdale, 2008; Moats, 1994; Stark et al., 2016) and teachers' self-reported knowledge often does not correlate with their actual knowledge (Hammond, 2015; Macken-Horarik et al., 2018; Meeks & Kemp, 2017). Similarly, differences in teachers' self-reported conceptions of inclusive education and their actual 'inclusive' practice have been reported in the literature (e.g., Woodcock et al., 2022). Data from the present study mirrors these findings but goes beyond existing research to provide further context regarding professional learning. The discussion of this second part of the theme has been organised into two sub-themes: confusions and conflations; and professional 'learning'.

Confusions and Conflations. There was a perceived tension in participants' survey definitions between those considering literacy as an individual capacity or competency, and those viewing it through a lens of classroom practice ('doing'). There was also a common conflation of competencies (e.g., phonological awareness) and types of classroom practice (e.g., phonics) which is evident in the 'big five' (NICHD, 2000) referred to frequently by survey participants as an example of professional learning and as a characterisation of literacy. Across all three categories but particularly in the definitions classified as 'cognitive', the notions of literacy as knowledge and literacy as practice appeared to be inseparable in many examples.

Within this tension appeared to be an underlying conflation of knowledge or 'content' and 'practice'. These concepts of 'knowledge' and 'practice' are explicitly distinguished in the professional standards by which teachers in NSW are required to abide (AITSL, 2022), but this conflation permeated both phases of the study. Participants' survey and interview responses were often characterised by the 'doing' or 'following' of a program. Many survey responses referred to the 'doing' of the 'big six' or 'science of reading' (SOR) as though these frameworks could simultaneously represent both the content and practice required of classroom literacy teaching. Similarly, some interview responses referred to named commercial programs as 'evidence-based practice', or as reflecting the new English syllabus because they are 'phonics based'. If the 'reading wars', as outlined as an issue relevant to teachers in the literature review, are 'ending' (Castles et al., 2018) in the theory and research domain, it appears the associated 'either or' approach may still reign in some teachers' perceptions. Regardless, these responses seemed to implicitly assert that a prescribed program and its *content* could, on its own, represent classroom *execution*.

Commercial programs were considered in the first theme as contributing to variation in the literacy approaches of participating teachers, and their perceptions of those programs appeared to

represent this conflation of content and practice. It may be that the apparent reliance on commercial programs, as described earlier, is clouding the need for the kind of pedagogical reasoning that is required of teachers in enacting their professional knowledge via those programs (Enow, 2023; Shulman, 1987). If so, teachers may not be considering *practice* as an important enough variable over which they have some control. The emphasis among participants' responses on 'the 'big six' or SOR could suggest that they are privileging their supposed knowledge of theory and teaching *over* their knowledge of *students*. The latter approach would allow for an integrated application of those knowledge sources in the interest of individual learners (Adoniou, 2015). And yet, in the interviews, there was even mention of adjusting the pace of execution of a commercial program, not according to student needs but to match the pace of a teacher at a different school.

Further, there were gaps evident in the teachers' *content* knowledge associated with literacy (Adoniou, 2015; Shulman, 1986) which could undermine the supposed theoretical knowledge participants emphasised. Responses to the Phase One survey suggested that participating teachers' knowledge of literacy practice aligned with research, but there was a misalignment of this finding with the actual knowledge perceived in the observations and interviews.

During the observations, there was sometimes an emphasis on whole word reading using context to decode, which drew students' attention away from grapheme-phoneme correspondences (GPCs). Prompts related to orthographic patterns are more likely to assist students in future decoding attempts (Arrow et al., 2019; Ehri, 2022), and this encouragement of whole word reading appeared to contradict the emphasis on orthographic mapping that was otherwise observed. All three case study participants also referred on different occasions to some words being unable to be 'sounded out'. This is despite only a very small number of English words being truly irregular and requiring more than just the consideration of GPCs (Moats, 2020).

Additionally, during some literacy sessions, phoneme articulation was modelled incorrectly or using segmented phonation, with a notable pause between each phoneme (e.g., m-a-n), despite connected phonation (e.g., mmm-aaa-nnn) being recommended in the literature (Gonzalez-Frey & Ehri, 2021). There was also a conflation of graphemes and phonemes modelled for students. While this example may not fully represent the accuracy and extent of the teachers' literacy knowledge, given that even higher levels of knowledge are not always observed to be executed in practice (Arrow et al., 2019), the accuracy of teachers' own literacy knowledge is essential (Stark et al., 2016). Indeed, in the CLOS-R (Louden et al., 2008) used to analyse the classroom observations, 'explanation word' specifically requires accurate discernment between letter names and letter sounds.

This kind of conflation extended in both phases of the study to resourcing for literacy sessions, which was addressed as an important issue of current relevance to teachers in the literature review. In the interviews, all three teachers made mention of 'PMs' (Cengage Australia, 2024) to refer collectively to predictable texts and there was reference to decodables being organised into the numbered or 'levelled' boxes of predictable texts. While decodable texts are typically sequenced according to the

systematic and cumulative introduction of GPCs, the numbered levelling of predictable texts represents an increase in the complexity of vocabulary and themes, without this attention to sounds and spelling patterns (Pugh et al., 2023). The use of decodable texts in the earliest stages of reading acquisition is recommended in the literature (Birch et al., 2022; Castles et al., 2018), but the combining of these two types of text suggests a lack of understanding of this difference.

Responses from the broader sample of survey participants also commonly mentioned the use of decodable and predictable texts in equal measure. This conflation mirrors the tension noted above between prompting students to rely on orthographic knowledge for decoding and relying on context with no attention to GPCs and is not dissimilar from other recent Australian research (Pogorzelski et al., 2021).

Apparent gaps in participants' knowledge also extended to routine practices based on that knowledge, including assessment. There was mention in the survey responses and interviews of undertaking 'running records' using decodable *or* predictable text. Programs and assessments reliant on 'levelled' texts, including the 'running record' (Clay, 2000), are based on the 'three-cueing system' and are unreliable for measuring students' reading progress (Birch et al., 2022; M. K. Burns et al., 2015; Castles et al., 2018; Hoffman, 2017). If determining student progress via assessment is an essential component of *inclusive* practice (Finkelstein et al., 2021), the use of such unreliable measures appears to work against that aim.

The confusions and conflations inherent in participating teachers' literacy-specific knowledge could be regarded as representing the Dunning-Kruger effect (Kruger & Dunning, 1999). Participants appeared to deliberately emphasise the theoretical knowledge they had, by naming the 'big six', SOR and other academics or programs in their responses across both phases of the study. But this emphasis seemed to privilege only broad statements and naming of frameworks related to their 'knowledge', without representing a full appreciation of the knowledge development required within each of the relevant components. As such, it could be perceived that the participating teachers were unaware of their own lack of understanding (Kruger & Dunning, 1999).

But while there did appear to be a number of gaps in participating teachers' literacy knowledge, as has been found in previous studies (e.g., Stark et al., 2016; Tortorelli et al., 2021), it must be noted that participants held some awareness of these gaps and showed motivation to fill them. All three case study participants expressed uncertainty about the selection of decodable or other texts for student practice and this aligns with previous findings (Pogorzelski et al., 2021). They also expressed a general willingness to learn more and to upskill. Despite acknowledged gaps in their professional knowledge, participants expressed a desire to learn and improve for the benefit of their students and this commitment to professional development is a key assumption of the IPA (Brennan & King, 2022; Florian & Spratt, 2013).

Nonetheless, the conflations outlined here and inherent in participants' reliance on commercial programs addressed in the first theme appeared to represent some hinderance to the improvement of

the teachers' own literacy-specific knowledge, and to emphasising the needs of students in turning that enhanced knowledge into action (Rouse, 2008). If so, it may be that the conflation of content and practice hindered teachers' capacity to interrogate practice with sufficient criticality, and to refine their implementation as a result. The IPA (Florian & Spratt, 2013) can be seen as a tool for critical reflection related to teachers' mindsets being conducive to inclusive literacy practice (Brennan & King, 2022). But it also appeared that the types of professional learning to which some participants or their schools were committed acted against their desire to improve.

Professional 'Learning'. In other literature, the discussion of findings related to the insufficiency of classroom teachers' knowledge often attributes it to inadequate pre-service teacher education (e.g., Meeks et al., 2020; Paul et al., 2022; Sellings et al., 2018; Tortorelli et al., 2021). But if these gaps relate in particular to in-service teachers' code-related knowledge (e.g., Arrow et al., 2019; Meeks & Kemp, 2017; Moats, 1994), as they do in the present study, it could be argued that these gaps could have been addressed by the array of phonological awareness or phonics oriented professional learning courses schools were apparently investing in for their staff (see Figure 4.1 in Chapter 4).

And yet, in some instances, the professional learning in which participating teachers had apparently engaged may have worked *against* the aim of improving classroom literacy practice for the benefit of students. The most commonly cited literacy-specific 'qualifications' in Phase One were Language, Learning and Literacy (L3) and Reading Recovery (Clay, 2005a, 2005b). The L3 program was also mentioned nine times throughout survey participants' descriptions of the literacy session, either as generally informing teachers' practice or specifically in the context of 'guided reading'.

Despite previously being widely used in Australian schools to support students struggling to acquire early reading skills, Reading Recovery (Clay, 2005a, 2005b) was discontinued by the NSW Government due to reported ineffectiveness (May et al., 2024; Tunmer et al., 2013). Similarly, L3 was criticised for its lack of alignment with research, and a lack of evidence supporting its efficacy, and is no longer delivered as professional learning to NSW Department of Education teachers (CESE, 2020a; Meiers et al., 2013; Neilson & Howell, 2015). Participating teachers were evidently persisting with routine classroom practices such as those promoted by L3, despite its discontinuation. This represents another driver of practice and indeed, a knowledge source being privileged by participating teachers, that is *separate from* the needs of students (Florian, 2014).

The findings discussed within this theme indicate that while participating kindergarten teachers framed literacy in terms of cognitive components or skills, in response to the first research question identified for the study, they also demonstrated limited understanding of those components in practice. Participating teachers appeared to be privileging a broad range of different knowledge sources exemplified by their definitions of literacy, their selection and application of approaches drawn from professional learning, and their selection of commercial programs noted in the first theme, all of which align with research and potentially with student needs to varying degrees. The

findings therefore imply that kindergarten classroom teachers could benefit from support in filtering those knowledge sources according to research, and according to student needs, as two key imperatives for inclusive literacy practice.

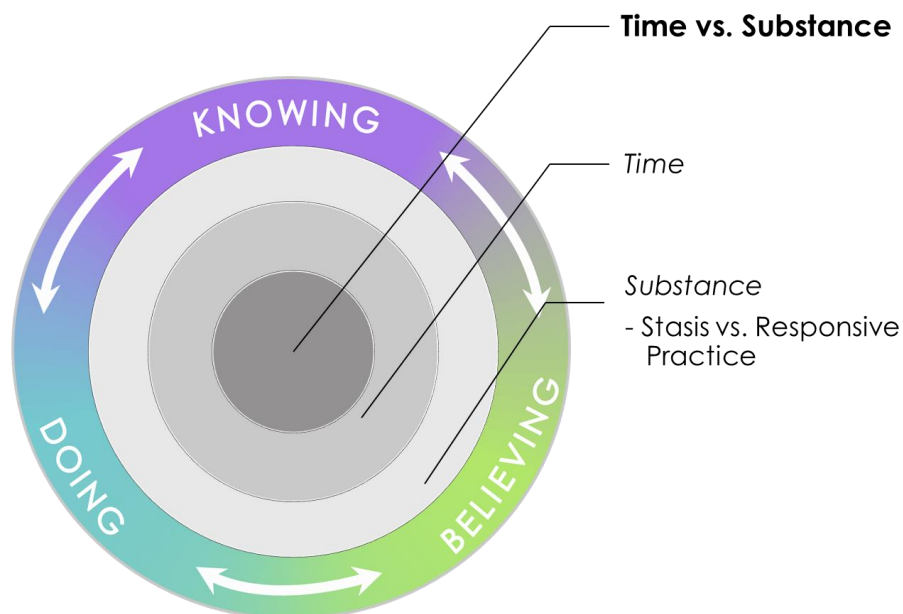
The identification of gaps in teachers' knowledge is not a novel finding. But the meta-inference drawn from both phases of the data that many examples of professional learning could be expected to have 'filled' those gaps, and that other discontinued and potentially detrimental professional learning may still be pursued, has important implications for education stakeholders and for teachers themselves, which are explored in the conclusion.

Time vs. Substance

The third theme elucidated by the present data is the tension between teachers' allocation of time and the substance associated with that time in terms of student engagement and learning (see Figure 6.5). A focused interpretation of the data which relates to the first research question reveals consistency in participants' broad allocation of time to core components of literacy practice.

Figure 6.5

Visual Overview of Theme 3



But a wider, more nuanced interrogation of the *nature* of that allocation of time via the IPA (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Florian & Spratt, 2013) reveals underlying tensions related to teachers' 'knowing', 'doing' and 'believing' in *inclusive* literacy practice. Within these tensions lies an additional conflict between teacher 'stasis' and the influence of teachers' 'believing' in student needs on the orchestration of literacy teaching. As such, this theme related to all three constructs identified for the research.

Time

The allocation of teaching time has been identified in previous research as a significant variable for facilitating student learning (Gay et al., 2021; Hattie, 2009). More importantly, it is determined by the teacher (Berliner, 1990; Cotton, 1989; Gromada & Shewbridge, 2016). Teachers' allocation of time within the literacy session may therefore provide insight into their chosen emphases on specific literacy practices, and into the knowledge, competencies and understanding they value and promote.

The rigid use of a literacy block which does not allow for the integration of other learning areas, or for flexibility in that allocation of time, has been lamented (Connor et al., 2017; A. Ryan & Lipp, 2025). Further, the inadequacy of time allocated to components of literacy, such as handwriting and writing, has been identified in the literature (McLean, 2022; Wyatt-Smith et al., 2018).

The results of the present study suggest that these concerns in existing research are warranted, but the findings go further than previous studies by considering the distribution of time *within* kindergarten literacy sessions. Some previous research has considered teachers' desired or self-reported allocation of time within the literacy session, but not with a comparison of their actual allocation of time (Cunningham et al., 2009; Smith et al., 2023, 2025; Spear-Swerling & Zibulsky, 2014). Other recent research which has considered the actual division of time within the literacy block was not conducted in the Australian, kindergarten-specific context (e.g., Ahmadi, 2021; Reed, 2024).

Data from both phases answer the first research question by indicating that participants' time for 'doing' literacy practice was broadly allocated to the 'big six' (Konza, 2014; NICHD, 2000) and writing (see Table 5.4 in Chapter 5). Further, participants' allocation of time to some key components of literacy in representing their 'knowing' about literacy practice aligned with recommendations in the literature (see Table 2.1 in Chapter 2). While this excluded adequate coverage of the explicit teaching of some components, such as vocabulary and comprehension, others were sufficiently addressed. For example, the allocation of time to writing has been correlated with the *quality* of students' writing (S. Graham et al., 2012; S. Graham et al., 2016) and all three case study participants allocated a comparable proportion of time to writing (25-34%).

But the actual nature and substance of allocated time required interrogation, and the findings indicate that teachers may not be *maximising* their allocated time (Lemov, 2021).

Substance

Maximising allocated time is central to an inclusive pedagogical approach which strengthens whole class, core classroom practice that is available to all students and necessitates 'believing' in all students' capacity to succeed (Florian & Spratt, 2013). Previous research has distinguished between 'allocated time', which teachers determine, and 'engaged' or 'actual learning' time during which students are actively involved in, and adequately challenged by, learning tasks (Berliner, 1990; Cotton, 1989; Gromada & Shewbridge, 2016).

In both the survey and observational data, ‘independent literacy activities’, alongside small group reading, were afforded the most substantial allocated time. Proportionally, this sometimes represented over half of the literacy session in the observations. Given that all three teachers’ attention seemed to be so frequently diverted from this focus to the rest of the classroom, the researcher observed during analysis that the allocated time calculated to be spent on ‘independent literacy activities’ (see Table 5.3 in Chapter 5) may not have been representative of the ‘engaged’ or ‘actual’ learning time for students.

If so, this indeed indicates that teachers may not be maximising allocated time and its potential to facilitate actual learning time for all students. All three case study participants noted in their interviews that ‘independent literacy activities’ were deliberately selected for their accessibility to students but in practice, they were often observed to lead to ‘busy work’. Such activities related to word reading or spelling but ultimately involved more time being spent, for example, on searching for letter blocks than on any actual word building. This kind of ‘busy work’ is specifically noted as contradicting ‘substance’ within the CLOS-R (Louden et al., 2008). While the activities may have been enjoyable and well-meaning, they lack research support (Pan et al., 2021).

More importantly, such activities were always completed in the context of independent learning which did not afford the majority of students any opportunities to respond as part of responsive, differentiated teaching (Lindner & Schwab, 2020; MacSuga-Gage & Simonsen, 2015; Sayeski et al., 2019). If engaged time, including opportunities to respond, is associated with superior student outcomes, and if an emphasis on student-directed time may minimise this kind of engagement, the ‘independent literacy activities’ which were characterised by this student-directed approach and emphasised in the present findings could be detrimental to students’ literacy learning (e.g., M. K. Burns et al., 2022; Lekwa et al., 2019). This inference suggests a need for classroom teachers to reconsider their existing allocations of time to ‘independent literacy activities’ in the interest of maximising explicit teaching, which is characterised by opportunities to respond (Hughes et al., 2017), in order to enhance student learning.

A substantial proportion of the simultaneous small group time also often appeared to be devoted to conversations between the teacher and students, leaving minimal time for students to practise decoding: the intended purpose, according to the participant interviews. Additionally, there was significant potential for student *misreading* to go unnoticed as the teacher’s attention was so frequently diverted to other students in the group or to the remainder of the class working ‘independently’. The CLOS-R (Louden et al., 2008) used in video analysis refers to the practice of ‘assessment’ as involving the teacher’s clear, supportive approach *reducing* “the need for individualised teaching” (p. 112), in favour of whole class reinforcement. This practice was notably infrequently coded in all three case study classrooms.

The IPA (Florian & Spratt, 2013) includes student choice as a cornerstone of differentiation, and as an important feature for promoting student participation (Brennan et al., 2021; Florian & Spratt,

2013), and this choice was evident during the 'independent literacy activities'. But queries as to how this feature can align with teacher-directed learning have previously been raised in the literature (Koutsouris et al., 2024). Indeed, student choice should not come at the expense of 'substance' (Louden et al., 2008) or targeted teacher time. Florian and Beaton (2018) clarify that the actual enactment of a strategy, such as student choice, is much more important than the strategy itself. In the classroom observations gathered for the purpose of this study, the enactment of student choice appeared to detract from the 'substance' of allocated time.

Within the tension between time and substance, there was an additional conflict perceived by the researcher between teacher 'stasis' and amending practice according to student need. Based on the present data, the researcher conceptualised 'stasis' as participating teachers' continuation of the broad allocation of time within the literacy block, and of the practices within that time, despite their own lamentations related to the drawbacks associated with those approaches. Inherent in that 'stasis' seemed to be some cognitive bias or belief perseverance; that is, teachers persisting with practices despite contradictory evidence as to how responsive those practices may be to the needs of students.

Stasis vs. Responsive Practice. Participating teachers were concerned about time pressures associated with the literacy session. Data gleaned from both phases of the study involved teachers lamenting the limited time per student or per group in the small group reading and 'independent literacy activities' structure outlined above. Some even criticised the significant time required to complete lessons associated with commercial programs.

The potential for an overemphasis on small group structures to undermine inclusive principles arose in the review of the literature (e.g., Losberg & Zwozdiak-Myers, 2024; Reed, 2024; Woodcock et al., 2022), but the significance of the responsiveness of teaching and student opportunities to respond in that context emerged as a key consideration in the data. The purposeful combining of both the literacy and inclusive fields of education allowed for this inference to be drawn.

If the teacher's attention is limited to only a small number of students who are otherwise entirely independent for such a significant portion of the available classroom literacy time, it is difficult to understand how such practice can be responsive to the needs of all students. In the video observations, while it appeared that all three teachers were cognisant of student behaviour occurring in the rest of the classroom in maintaining firm control of the environment, they were not in a position to monitor and respond to individual students' progress or 'actual learning time' in this format with any kind of depth. Their attention was necessarily drawn to the learners directly in front of them. If inclusive practice is characterised by the teacher *facilitating* an environment in which all students' social, emotional and behavioural needs are met (Finkelstein et al., 2021), this facilitation would appear to be challenging in the context of this small group and independent structure.

Further, the selection of students for the simultaneous small groups generally appeared to rely on students' supposed 'ability' to drive the conceptualisation of differentiation in participating

teachers' classrooms. Teachers' conceptions of 'ability' can influence their perceptions of students and the learning opportunities they provide (Ladwig & McPherson, 2017). Survey participants commonly referred to students being 'grouped by ability' or selecting texts based on students' 'ability' or 'level'. Importantly, participants' mentions of groupings across both phases of the study generally did not refer to their flexibility according to student needs. If the IPA (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Florian & Spratt, 2013), as the framework for this research, involves teachers rejecting student labels of 'ability' and focusing on the influence of their practice on student learning, this was not explicitly evident from the data gathered.

Teachers' beliefs about students and their literacy development impact the level of responsiveness of their teaching (Hu et al., 2023). Responsive teaching is characterised by an increase in students' opportunities to respond, as a result of direct teacher interaction, and this approach in turn increases student engagement, academic achievement and positive behavioural outcomes (MacSuga-Gage & Gage, 2015; Wanzek et al., 2014). Despite this, previous research has shown that students, including those at risk of literacy difficulties, can sometimes be afforded minimal opportunities to respond via teacher-facilitated practice and that independent tasks are instead emphasised (e.g., Reed, 2024; Wanzek et al., 2014). The present study findings mirror this result in terms of the allocation of *less* time to teacher-facilitated practice.

The researcher noted an important contradiction inherent in participants' emphasis on small group teaching. Participating teachers across both phases of the study alluded to their use of the small group format specifically because it was teacher-directed and they needed to 'get through' reading with all of their students in that setting. They therefore seemed to value responsive teaching within the teacher-facilitated practice associated with that small group format (MacSuga-Gage & Gage, 2015; Wanzek et al., 2014). But participants simultaneously allowed for long periods of time allocated to 'independent literacy activities' which often involved *no* teacher-directed practice.

A very small number of survey participants referred to 'paired reading' in the absence of the 'small group reading' executed by most teachers involved in the study. While small group or 'guided' reading involves only a group of three to four students engaging in teacher-led reading at a time, paired or partner reading involves *all* students engaging in reading practice simultaneously (Aldhanhani & Abu-Ayyash, 2020; Nicholas et al., 2021; T. Young, 2022). The amount of direct teacher input in each structure must also vary and success is contingent on exactly how the teacher facilitates teaching and learning in each context (Nicholas et al., 2021). But the difference in required *allocated time* is significant. While participants alluded to small group reading, within 'independent literacy activities', accounting for 30-100 minutes of allocated time, participants who referred to paired reading only needed to allocate 5-10 minutes of daily literacy practice.

Despite this difference and the teachers' concerns about time, participants did not suggest that these issues would lead to them making changes to their classroom literacy practice, in terms of the allocation of time or structures included. This kind of inflexible approach to practice in making it

accessible for all students has been reported in recent literature (Chow et al., 2024). Over half of survey participants agreed that their overall approach to classroom literacy practice remains consistent each year, although most of those in agreement only 'somewhat agreed'. Consistency from year to year could be appropriate if teachers are implementing an evidence-informed and differentiated approach to enacting syllabus requirements.

But an inclusive pedagogical approach must be driven by the needs of individual learners. Some 'standardising' or 'stasis' may be possible to some extent, based on the key content, components and associated practices recommended for literacy teaching in the research literature. And yet the present data suggests that the typical practices associated with participants' literacy block teaching are not fully aligned with literacy-specific research, given the omission of the explicit teaching of some core components.

Nonetheless, even with an evidence-informed approach as the foundation, that approach must still be characterised by some variation if it is to be responsive to student needs. There is an inherent instability about genuine learning and therefore about the classroom ecosystem (Hardy, 2025), including in the context of literacy, and as such, the *execution* of practice must be somewhat messy, unpredictable and context (and student) specific. Indeed, teachers' inclusive practices cannot be fully predetermined. They are predicated on a responsiveness to students which involves proactively personalising learning as the initial basis for pedagogical choices (Lindner & Schwab, 2020; Spratt & Florian, 2014).

If cognitive change occurs as a result of an *interaction* between classroom experience and teachers' beliefs (Brennan & King, 2022; Kang & Cheng, 2014; Rouse, 2008), the present results suggest a conflict between those two factors. Indeed, teachers' beliefs regarding literacy and literacy teaching are complex, dynamic and negotiated in different ways in practice (Arya et al., 2024) but they may also be resistant to change (Broemmel et al., 2021; Parsons et al., 2017). According to both phases of the data, classroom teachers' experience *was* indicating to them that the allocation of time in terms of teacher-student interactions, among other issues, was important but often insufficient. But the teachers were *persisting* with practices about which they admitted scepticism, perhaps because of underlying beliefs.

Teachers' acceptance and pursuit of changes to their pedagogical approaches are contingent on whether they perceive them as a 'threat', or as a 'challenge' for which they have the capacity, time and resources to address (Gregoire, 2003). Similarly, teachers' acceptance and incorporation of inclusive practice relies on their cognitive appraisal of strategies (Dignath et al., 2022). Given the complexity of teachers' literacy-specific knowledge and associated uncertainties, differences in autonomy, leadership expectations and direction provided by professional learning, it may be that any changes are indeed considered more as 'threats' than challenges.

The notion of cognitive appraisal relates to teacher autonomy, addressed via the first theme, and also to conceptions of 'ability' extrapolated via the final theme. It also further exemplifies the

complexity of the inclusive literacy domain. If effective literacy practice is characterised by complex and spontaneous decision-making to meet the diverse needs of *all* learners (Tschannen-Moran & Johnson, 2011), the results suggest that there may be several potential and complex hinderances to that spontaneity. This inference links back to the conflation of and tension between literacy 'knowledge' or 'content' and 'execution' noted within the first two themes. Despite participants' acknowledgement of gaps in their knowledge, and their motivation to improve, which were exemplified via the second theme, the 'stasis' considered within this sub-theme seemed to apply to both the teachers' sense of literacy 'content' or 'knowledge' and to their 'execution' of literacy practice.

The researcher sensed across the phases of data that there was a tendency among participants to move through literacy content – including that of commercial programs – at an 'expected' pace or using a typical progression of GPCs, without a nuanced and purposeful consideration of all student needs. A commercial program can lend itself to this kind of forward motion to meet program requirements with an assumption of homogeneity among learners (Mantei et al., 2022).

But a flexible and inclusive pedagogical approach is "driven by needs of learners rather than 'coverage' of material" (Florian, 2015, p. 21). An emphasis on the 'coverage' or 'delivery' of content due to a sense of pressure to 'get through' previously implemented approaches, prescribed lessons (or commercial programs), rather than on the *process* of learning with students in mind, has previously been observed, including among primary teachers (Poulton, 2025; Poulton & Mockler, 2024). It has also been associated with the notion of teacher 'stasis' (Mitton-Kukner & Orr, 2018) and this association was evident in the present data.

The findings that kindergarten teachers' allocation of time is not appropriately distributed or being maximised to benefit student engagement, and that differentiation, in practice, is being driven almost exclusively by 'ability grouping', are significant. 'Inclusion' as noted as a practice in the CLOS-R (Louden et al., 2008) involves the use of small group opportunities for targeted teaching but in the observations, there appeared to be an overemphasis on this structure which ultimately led to an inefficient allocation of time. An emphasis on 'ability' as a driver of that small group practice undermines intentions of inclusive and responsive practice (Florian & Spratt, 2013; Woodcock et al., 2022).

As discussed within this theme, the findings add to the field by explicitly outlining *existing* classroom literacy practice, not just a reliance on self-reported practice. This outline indicates that kindergarten teachers' allocation of time to components of literacy is relatively consistent, in answering the first research question regarding approaches to literacy practice. But in response to the second research question, that allocation of time may not fully align with recommendations from the literature, and it may represent an *inefficient* use of time which could be more skilfully and flexibly distributed to benefit the learning of *all* students (Florian, 2014).

Teachers need to be critical consumers of professional literature to inform practice, but they also need to ask themselves why they are using existing practices, and if they serve the purpose they

think they do. Participants were apparently capable of perceiving insufficiency in terms of the amount of time to 'get through' predetermined structures for the literacy block. But this perception did not appear to extend to reflection on the impact of those selected structures on time or on students, or to overcome the constraints associated with pedagogical change.

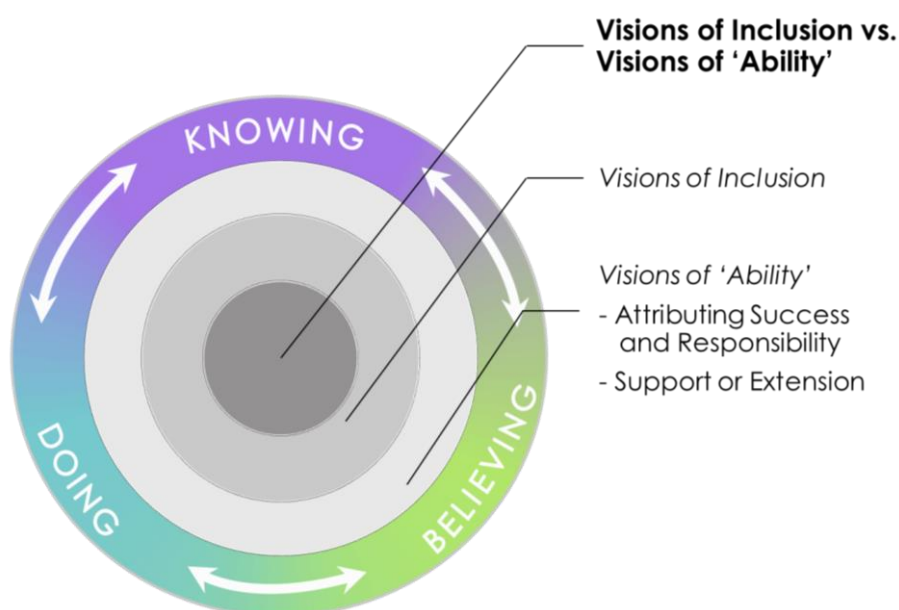
Given the emphasis on small 'ability' grouping discussed here, it may be that participating teachers' literacy practice was responsive, *not* to the needs of individual students, but to their preconceived notions of 'ability'. A potential undermining of teachers' intentions for inclusive practice (Woodcock et al., 2022), as a result of their beliefs and recourse to student categorisation (Dignath et al., 2022; Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011), was evident here in the present data and is extrapolated further via the final theme.

Visions of Inclusion vs. Visions of 'Ability'

The final and perhaps most illuminating theme drawn from the data reflects the tension between participants' visions of or intentions for inclusion and their conceptions of student 'ability' (see Figure 6.6). To answer the first research question, a narrow consideration of literacy practice alludes to participants' broad alignment with inclusive principles. But the application of the framework conceptualised for this study using the IPA (Florian & Spratt, 2013) provides a more nuanced consideration of participants' conceptions of 'ability' and responsibility which challenges that broad alignment. There lay some conflict between participants 'believing' in students' capacity to learn and in their perceived responsibility to cater for them.

Figure 6.6

Visual Overview of Theme 4



Visions of Inclusion

Across both phases of the study, there was evidence of participating teachers' commitment to an inclusive literacy approach. Teachers' belief in their capacity to successfully promote learning for all students has previously been identified as an outcome of research involving the IPA (Florian & Spratt, 2013). Ninety six percent of survey participants agreed that all students are capable of becoming literate. This could suggest a broadly positive conception of students' capacity to learn in the kindergarten context among classroom teachers. But it has previously been suggested that simply espousing idealistic notions of inclusion does not necessitate inclusive practice (Finkelstein et al., 2021), making this finding limited in isolation.

To corroborate this finding from the survey, there was some evidence of teachers promoting the participation of *all* students in all three observed classrooms. This included the deliberate selection of different students to contribute during discussions or shared reading. Facilitating the involvement of all students to ensure equitable participation in this way has been identified in previous research as being associated with high efficacious teachers (Woodcock et al., 2022). There seemed to be some general 'belief' in all students and from the interviews in particular, the researcher perceived a desire among participating teachers to ensure participation and engagement for all.

But this desire appeared to be somewhat hindered by the teachers' implicit conceptions of student 'ability' in their categorising of some learners. With regard to the three constructs identified for the research, teachers appeared to 'believe' in the benefits of inclusion in relation to student capability and promoting all students' participation. But a broader consideration of *all three* constructs (knowing, doing, believing; Rouse, 2008), using the IPA (Florian & Spratt, 2013) as a critical lens, indicated that participants' 'knowing' about student needs and their 'doing' of literacy practice painted a different picture of those 'beliefs' in practice, which served to potentially undermine those broader intentions for inclusion. This consideration specifically addresses the second research question.

Visions of 'Ability'

Widespread, traditional paradigms related to student 'ability' frame it as fixed, pre-determined and unchanging (Brennan et al., 2021; Fendler & Muzaffar, 2008; Florian, 2015; S. Hart, 1998). Conceptions of 'ability' reflect teachers' beliefs about learners and are important in determining an inclusive pedagogical approach (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). The results of the present study suggest that participating teachers' conceptions of 'ability' may be impeding their intended inclusive pedagogical approaches to classroom literacy practice, and this finding aligns with previous research involving NSW primary teachers (Woodcock et al., 2022). Importantly, *misconceptions* about students' capacity to learn can influence the learning opportunities teachers provide (Howell & Nolet, 2000).

'Ability' in literacy seemed to be front of mind for teachers involved in the present study. The word 'ability' was frequently used in survey participants' definitions of literacy. This word choice was noticeable, given the common use of the term to underestimate students' capacity to learn and achieve

(Ladwig & McPherson, 2017). It also exemplifies the connection between teachers' 'knowing' about inclusive literacy practice and their beliefs which underpin and stem from this knowledge (Rouse, 2008). Many participants began their definitions with '(Literacy is) the ability to...'. While it may simply have been a matter of ease of word choice for survey participants, word choice matters, particularly because teachers' perceptions of literacy can provide a window into their approaches to classroom practice (Opoku-Amankwa & Brew-Hammond, 2011). The notion of literacy as an 'ability' seemed to imbue it with a dichotomous nature as something that one *does* or does *not* have.

Not only was 'ability' prevalent in the definitions of literacy but it was also used eight times in survey participants' outlines of their literacy sessions. On all eight occasions, the word 'ability' was used in reference to 'ability groups' for reading withdrawal by the classroom teacher. Although the use of 'ability groupings' has been found to be common in the primary years (Hong et al., 2012; Steenbergen-Hu et al., 2016), this deterministic view of 'ability' is rejected by the IPA (Florian & Spratt, 2013) but has been observed in previous research on inclusive practice (e.g., Brennan et al., 2021; Losberg & Zwozdiak-Myers, 2024).

While the use of a range of small group and whole class instructional approaches may be associated with effective classroom practice (Hough et al., 2013; Topping & Ferguson, 2005), the effectiveness of the use of small group teaching was perceived to be undermined by participating teachers' approaches to that structure. It was noted in the third theme, 'time vs. substance', that such grouping appeared to be the core representation of differentiation in the survey and in the case study observations. In the drawing of meta-inferences across the phases of data, an important distinction between teacher- and student-related variables was considered by the researcher, in line with the conceptualisation of the IPA in Figure 1.2 in Chapter 1.

The descriptions of almost all practices in the CLOS-R coding manual used for analysis of the video observations in Chapter 5 begin with 'The teacher...', as though the teacher's role is emphasised. Although informed by the needs of students, the practices appear to rely on the *teacher's* flexibility in the selection of activities, opportunities for modelling or assessment in planning and teaching (Louden et al., 2008). But the descriptions of the practices in the 'differentiation' dimension appear to more clearly emphasise the role of students' prior knowledge, experiences and self-regulation in informing this decision-making by the teacher. If the other four dimensions of the CLOS-R (Louden et al., 2008) related more strongly to the *teachers* 'knowing' about and 'doing' literacy practice in the early years classroom, it seemed that 'differentiation' reflected the *students'* 'doing' of literacy learning in the context of the teachers 'believing' in their capacity to learn.

Notably, practices within the 'differentiation' dimension were observed with the lowest frequency overall in the case study classrooms (see Figure 5.5 in Chapter 5). Examining classroom practice in any learning area, including literacy, from an inclusive pedagogical perspective prioritises the role of teachers as catalysts for educational change. In the context of teachers' conflation of 'content' and 'practice', it was noted earlier that participants in the present study may not be

adequately emphasising the teacher-related variables within the IPA that are within their control. The data from the observations adds to that assertion by also suggesting that participating teachers were not sufficiently driven by the needs of their *students*, and that their conceptions of ‘ability’ represented a major hinderance to that drive. Teachers need to be aware that their practical choices – including those relevant to grouping for differentiation – convey values and meaning which can be perceived by their students (Alexander, 2001; Florian & Spratt, 2013; S. Hart & Drummond, 2014). Participating teachers’ persistence with practices that were so inflexibly driven by conceptions of ‘ability’ may suggest that they lacked such an awareness.

The framing of literacy practice around conceptions of student ‘ability’ was mirrored in the case study interviews. All three participants frequently used terms such as ‘low’ and ‘high’ to describe students. Such language could indicate some adherence to the ‘bell-curve’ thinking rejected by the IPA (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Florian & Spratt, 2013).

The apparent hinderance of teachers’ implicit views of ‘ability’ was further evident in their attributions of success and delegations of responsibility according to different student needs. This evidence is discussed below under two key sub-headings: attributing success and responsibility; and support or extension.

Attributing Success and Responsibility. Participants seemed to attribute at least some of students’ success in literacy to the home environment. The majority of survey participants agreed that the home literacy environment may account for students’ literacy success (see Figure 4.5 in Chapter 4) and this attribution of success to parents and carers was mirrored in the interviews. This is significant in the context of this study which focused on *teachers’* content and pedagogical choices as a variable which is within their control, unlike children’s home literacy environments.

Although the home literacy environment is indeed impactful (Konza, 2014), this result reveals the potential for teachers to attribute students’ success in literacy to this variable and not to the literacy practice they design. A similar majority of teachers agreed that students *succeed* or *excel* in literacy as a result of their classroom practice (see Figure 4.5 in Chapter 4), but teachers commonly attribute student *difficulty* to factors other than the design of their classroom practice and its implementation (Wang & Hall, 2018; J. Wilson & Colmar, 2008; Woodcock et al., 2019).

The allocation of responsibility was evident elsewhere in the data and existed at odds with participating teachers’ apparent broader intentions for inclusion. It has been noted in the literature that the enactment of inclusive pedagogy requires teachers’ acceptance of *primary* responsibility for the teaching of *all* students (Florian & Spratt, 2013). In the classroom setting, there appeared to be some reliance on additional personnel, including teaching assistants, to undertake at least some responsibility for student literacy engagement and achievement. This reliance among teachers has been noted elsewhere in the literature on inclusion (Carter et al., 2022; Chow et al., 2024; Woodcock et al., 2022).

While the availability of additional personnel for supporting all students can align with an inclusive pedagogical approach, employing that support only with some, not all, students in mind may work against that aim (Woodcock et al., 2022). In one of the case study settings, the provision of a teaching assistant was described as benefiting the whole class, including during the ‘independent literacy activities’ portion of the literacy session. This approach may also have alleviated the perceived underemphasis on opportunities for students to respond in that independent format. But in another case study classroom, the specific and ongoing application of teaching assistant time to an individual student was exemplified via the observations and interview and it is this narrow approach that has attracted concern in the literature (Giangreco, 2021).

Similarly, the assignment of responsibility for students with the highest needs and requiring the most expert teaching to the least experienced personnel has been noted in the literature (e.g., Butt & Lowe, 2012; Causton-Theoharis et al., 2007; Giangreco, 2021) and was observed in the case study data. While this practice could have signified some targeted support for which the classroom teacher had planned and maintained overall responsibility, there was also an assertion in one of the interviews that it was ‘not worth’ the classroom teacher engaging individually with some students to meet their needs. Although this represents a singular example, it exists in the context of ability-laden vocabulary employed by participants. If “inclusive practice begins with the mindset of teachers and schools” (Brennan & King, 2022, p. 178), despite some overall commitment to inclusion, this example adds weight to the suggestion that teachers’ underlying mindsets were interfering with that commitment.

This finding is significant because in the presence of student diversity, teachers’ perceptions of their responsibility to cater for different student needs is important (J. Anderson & Boyle, 2019). The belief perceived from the present data, and from previous research, that support staff are required to *enable* the participation of some students has been shown to undermine inclusive practice (Chow et al., 2024; Woodcock & Hardy, 2017; Woodcock et al., 2022).

Allocating time to evidence-informed components within a literacy session does not necessarily equate to adequate execution or to student learning. Indeed, generating a list of ‘evidence-based practices’ does not immediately translate to changed classroom practice and the adoption of practices should be context- and student-dependent (Cook & Cook, 2013). Similarly, allocating students to a classroom teacher does not necessarily equate to their genuine acceptance of responsibility for catering for all students and conceiving student difficulties as “dilemmas for teaching” (Florian & Spratt, 2013, p. 124). Teachers’ perceptions of responsibility matter and they may represent enablers or barriers to inclusion, and indeed to students’ success in literacy, as in the present study.

The inference drawn from this theme regarding participating teachers’ attributions of responsibility, and their associated beliefs about the necessity of support staff, has important implications for both the literacy and inclusive fields. If it is expected that teachers are primarily responsible for catering for all students’ literacy needs via classroom practice in the interest of lifting literacy achievement as a priority (AITSL, 2022; NSW Department of Education, 2024; United Nations,

2015), the interpretation of the findings suggests that their perceptions of that responsibility may need to be changed. Similarly, if teachers' provision of quality classroom practice is characterised by teacher-directed differentiation to cater for the diverse needs of all students (e.g., Beamish et al., 2025; Scarparolo & Porta, 2025), the present findings suggest that participating teachers' delegation of responsibility to support personnel may conflict with that characterisation.

In both fields, the findings indicate that in-service professional learning and initial teacher education may be required to enhance teachers' perceptions of their own responsibility in the classroom as a core component of inclusive literacy practice which caters for all students. It was noted in the third theme, time vs. substance, that some participating teachers' approaches to literacy practice were yet to change, despite their recognition of drawbacks in their execution in terms of teacher-student interactions for reading practice. If cognitive change is contingent on classroom experience and teachers' beliefs (Brennan & King, 2022; Kang & Cheng, 2014; Rouse, 2008), the findings in this final theme support the inference that it is teachers' beliefs that may need to be explicitly prioritised in order for such change to occur. Indeed, teachers' beliefs are commonly identified in the literature as forming the foundation on which inclusive practice can be developed (e.g., Rosenberg et al., 2025).

An inclusive pedagogical approach is characterised by teachers believing in student competence for the purpose of attending to individual differences within their whole class teaching (Brennan et al., 2021). But these differences were framed very differently by participants in the contexts of support and extension.

Support or Extension. Whether or not they require intervention or support, the needs of all learners are the responsibility of the classroom teacher (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). In the interviews, catering for 'low' students seemed to be framed as a necessary priority but possibly a burden, while the task of extending 'high' students was conceived as a positive challenge. Importantly, although commonly applied specifically to the inclusion of students with disabilities, the concept of inclusive practice within the IPA relies on a broader acceptance of diversity without *any* categorisation of students, be they requiring support or challenge (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). But an emphasis on categorisation was prevalent in the present study and the use of 'ability'-laden language was evident across both phases.

With regard to support, over half of the survey participants agreed that withdrawal would be employed by a different teacher to cater for students struggling with literacy acquisition (see Figure 4.5 in Chapter 4). But inspection of the raw data indicated that most of those participants agreed or strongly agreed, suggesting some certainty as to the use of this format for support. Withdrawal could be appropriate if it is flexible, tailored to student needs and aligned with, not replacing, Tier 1 practice (Al Otaiba et al., 2025), but this is highly dependent on its execution. Even scripted, evidence-informed Tier 2 interventions and commercial programs, including those used by participating teachers' schools, can be hindered by issues with instructional fidelity (e.g., Quach et al., 2019; Reynolds et al.,

2021). Further, a growing demand for intervention or withdrawal programs could suggest insufficiency with regard to Tier 1 literacy practice which caters for all, or that teachers are attributing student difficulties to student-related variables that are not within their control (de Bruin et al., 2023; K. S. Rowe et al., 2004; Wang & Hall, 2018; J. Wilson & Colmar, 2008; Woodcock et al., 2019).

The findings discussed in this final theme indicate an emphasis on 'ability' and student categorisation which did not appear to align with the IPA (Brennan & King, 2022; Florian & Spratt, 2013). Participating kindergarten teachers' use of language and categorisation of student 'ability' as a representation of their 'believing' could be interpreted as undermining their broad intentions for inclusion, but the reality of inclusive literacy practice is far more complex than such a causal inference would elucidate. While teachers' beliefs are heavily implicated in their enactment of inclusive practice, they are far from the only factor influencing teachers' classroom approaches (Rosenberg et al., 2025).

This discussion of the findings has illuminated many competing influences and potential barriers to inclusive literacy practice which impacted participating teachers in different ways, including teachers' pedagogical knowledge, time and resources. While some of those factors cannot be addressed or alleviated by teachers, their own use of language in categorising students and therefore their acceptance of responsibility for all students *is* a teacher-related variable which can and should be addressed.

Regarding the first research question, the researcher perceived a broad intention of inclusion within participants' literacy approaches. This intention should be emphasised as the catalyst for critical reflection on the extent to which teachers' language use and practices align with the IPA in answering the second research question. It was evident in the first discussion theme that participating teachers were agreeable to participation in professional development and in the context of inclusive education, professional development and reflective practice have been identified as essential for enhancing inclusive classroom approaches (Rosenberg et al., 2025). The present findings suggest a need to draw teachers' attention to certain components of their literacy teaching, and to beliefs embedded in it, for the purpose of refinement to bolster that inclusive commitment in practice.

Reflections and Refractions

The outcome of the discussion of themes outlined in this chapter in answering the research questions is three-fold. Firstly, the discussion validated the conceptualisation, application and interpretation of the theoretical framework of the study in understanding existing classroom literacy practice. The 'big six' (Konza, 2014; NICHD, 2000), with the addition of writing, provided a framework of essential components which was demonstrated to be applicable to the data in both phases of the study. The content and components outlined by survey and case study participants aligned with the framework which allowed for a valuable interrogation of literacy-specific practice.

As to the first research question, the overall approaches of participating teachers to the kindergarten literacy block in inner Sydney, NSW appeared to be relatively consistent. But there were important implications gleaned from the exploration of the nature and substance of those approaches and the relevant allocations of time. Teachers were evidently valuing somewhat evidence-informed practices, but the findings suggested that their execution of those practices could be more flexibly and efficiently achieved in the interest of all students' needs. In answering the second research question, while the findings provided some evidence of an IPA (Florian & Spratt, 2013) in participants' self-reported and actual classroom literacy practice, there are factors, including teachers' own conceptions of 'ability', that are influencing the enactment of a fully inclusive approach which caters for all learners.

By appreciating both literacy and inclusive education as the dual focus of this research, the interpretation of the findings using the theoretical framework became more revealing regarding the tensions inherent in both fields. The IPA (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Florian & Spratt, 2013) allowed for a broader interrogation of participating in-service teachers' literacy practice in terms of the complexities and underlying decision-making related to their knowing, doing and believing (Rouse, 2008) within that practice, and the professional judgements that underpin it.

Secondly, the discussion of the findings justified the use of a mixed methods approach within the study in applying the theoretical framework. While participating teachers' self-reported practice gleaned from the survey proved informative on its own regarding their apparent knowledge, practices and beliefs, the *actual* practices outlined in Phase Two provided additional context which deepened the understanding drawn from the findings (Leko et al., 2023; Love et al., 2022; McKim, 2017). In particular, the observations and interviews provided a different angle on participating teachers' 'believing' in inclusive literacy practice and some of the benefits and barriers facilitated by those beliefs. This angle helps to illuminate a new and more inclusive direction for classroom teachers that is explored in the implications.

Thirdly, the discussion exemplified some of the complex challenges associated with the early literacy context and with applying the IPA (Florian & Spratt, 2013) in the early literacy classroom. Given these challenges (including the pressures of commercial programs, different levels of autonomy and knowledge, 'stasis' and conceptions of 'ability') which contributed to the themes outlined here and to the complexity of the inclusive literacy classroom, it could be deemed impossible to find any way of moving forward in alleviating those challenges or seeking improvements in practice. If there are so many apparent barriers to student-driven, inclusive literacy practice, it may appear futile to try to remedy them. But the present study does reveal a way forward which can be applicable for teachers, and which is exemplified via the conclusion.

Implications

The field of literacy education is complex and the examination of classroom literacy practice through the lens of inclusion in this exploratory study has important implications for the decision-

making of teachers, education sectors and teacher educators. It also lays the foundation for further research in this domain (Swedberg, 2020). Given the potential benefits of applying the IPA (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Florian & Spratt, 2013) and the relatively recent implementation of the current *English K-10 Syllabus* (NESA, 2025b) in 2023, NSW kindergarten classrooms were a significant context in which to consider teachers' approaches to inclusive literacy practice. The complexity of this context, especially in relation to literacy, cannot be properly understood using a single method (Florian & Spratt, 2013). The mixed methods approach for this research therefore acknowledged this complexity, the challenges teachers face in designing and executing classroom practice, and the nuance required in interpreting their contexts.

The kindergarten teachers involved in this study demonstrated that they had a broadly evidence-informed understanding of classroom literacy practice but that they were influenced by a significant range of strategies, resources, professional knowledge, personal beliefs, traditional approaches, academics, commercial programs and other external stimuli including social media. This broad but inconsistent alignment with the research literature in the teachers' self-reported and actual classroom practice highlighted the challenges inherent in designing core literacy practice that caters for all students. There was a consistent syllabus for the teaching of *English K-10* (NESA, 2012) at the time of data collection. But the NSW kindergarten teacher participants in this study were evidently interpreting the syllabus and applying their already varied professional knowledge in many divergent and sometimes conflicting ways which at times differed from research recommendations.

Further, the findings of this study highlighted that while participating teachers were demonstrating some practices which could be counted as meeting the expectations of the framework for the Inclusive Pedagogical Approach (Florian & Spratt, 2013) for the benefit of students, the range of influences listed above represented just some of the tensions and demands which appeared to be barriers to that approach. Despite their intentions to enact literacy practice in ways that: acknowledged a commitment to improving their professional knowledge; responded to that knowledge and the needs of their students in their classrooms; and were underpinned by a belief in student capacity, participants were at least somewhat hindered by the 'noise' of competing pressures and challenges related to both the fields of literacy and inclusive education.

The findings of this exploratory study clearly addressed the identified research questions, but they cannot produce some ideal of kindergarten literacy practice, nor can they form a 'blueprint' of an inclusive approach in that context. Indeed, there is no such 'silver bullet' (Spiegel, 1998). But this study has provided insight into a sample of NSW in-service kindergarten classroom teachers' approaches to literacy practice. It has demonstrated the benefit of applying the IPA (Florian & Spratt, 2013) as a paradigm for examining inclusive classroom literacy practices through the English curriculum area in NSW. If the findings had been examined only in the context of the first research question identified for the study, they may have appeared positive in their broad alignment of teachers' practice with research. But the IPA (Florian & Spratt, 2013) allowed for a further, important interrogation of the

data which revealed sometimes conflicting impressions of participating teachers' alignment with an inclusive approach.

As such, the present study has important implications for education sectors and teacher education institutions preparing graduates for the complexity of the kindergarten literacy context which are described in the conclusion. It adds impetus to calls for greater translational research, such as this, which involves teachers and is relevant to classroom implementation (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Seidenberg et al., 2020). There is a need for teachers and other education stakeholders to pursue improvements in student literacy achievement (United Nations, 2015). The findings of the present study suggest that some critical reflection – not only on the *content* of kindergarten literacy practice but on its *execution* in terms of the allocation and utilisation of instructional time – could be of benefit to students, and to teachers who evidently feel the weight of a myriad of pressures. Further, there is a need to revisit the principles of the Salamanca Statement to enrich inclusive education in Australia (J. Anderson & Boyle, 2019). Despite some evidence of progress towards an inclusive approach, the findings of this study support that imperative.

Conclusion

The present data suggests that there is a need for teachers to refocus their approaches to prioritise *students* as drivers of practice, to the extent that they can in the face of many external factors. Further, there is an apparent need for teachers to critically reflect on their knowledge and beliefs by evaluating the emphases inherent in their literacy sessions, including their allocation of time. There is an important symbiosis about these two imperatives: the action involved in the second requires a commitment to the first. And importantly, both relate to the teacher variables that are within teachers' control and established as the basis of the theoretical framework for this study.

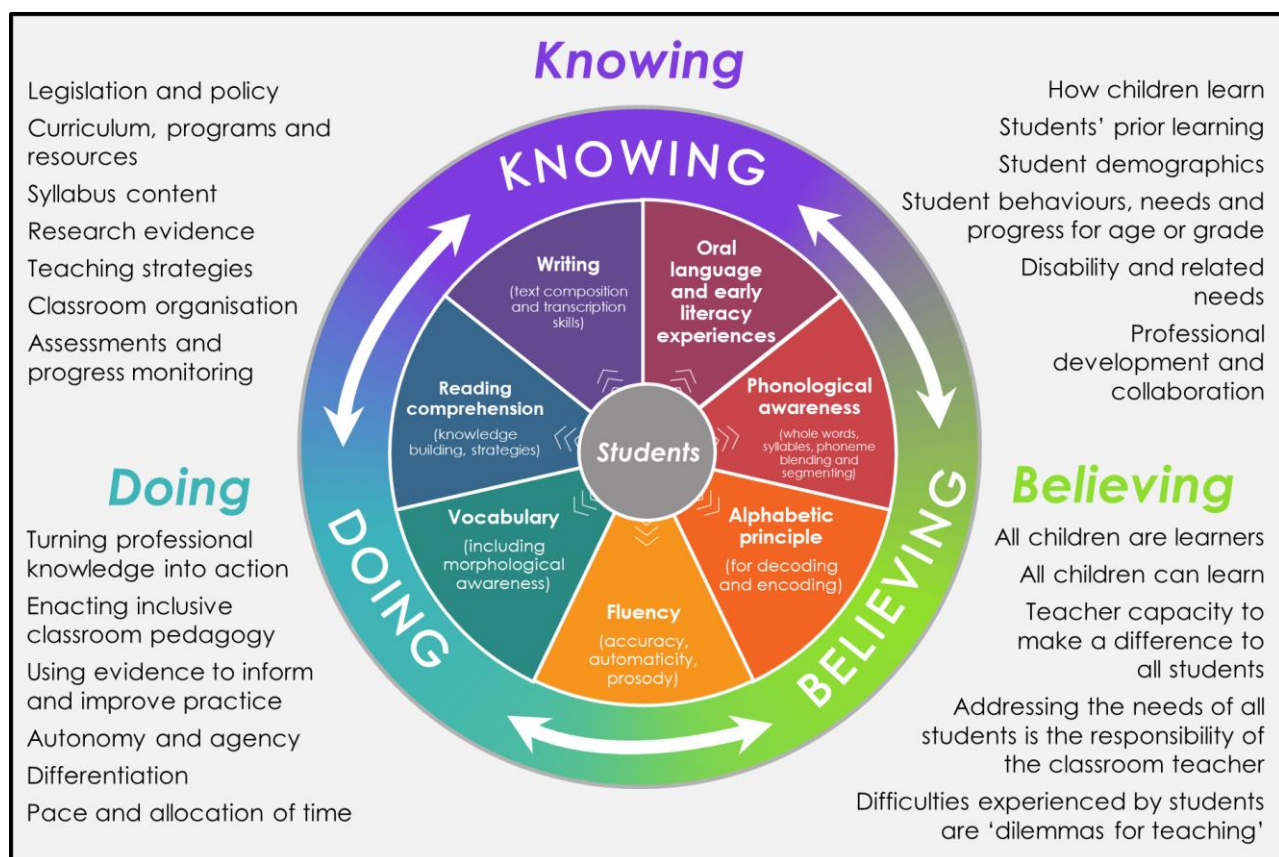
Participating in-service teachers' approaches to inclusive literacy practice were simultaneously characterised by consistency (in their selection of literacy practices and programs, and allocations of time) and difference (in their perceived 'stasis', execution of practices, levels of autonomy and enactment of responsibility in catering for all students). This characterisation was broadly underpinned by their beliefs relevant to literacy and inclusive education. Within this consistency and difference, the findings pointed to a general commitment to inclusive literacy practices which broadly cater for the diverse needs of students.

But it appears that participating teachers could benefit from the 'zooming out' afforded by the theoretical framework developed for this research and used to underpin the discussion (Figure 2.3 in Chapter 2), to enable a constructively critical evaluation of the extent to which their existing practices actually align with research evidence related to literacy and inclusive principles. Such a process of professional reflection could also illuminate ways in which those practices may subsequently be refined for the benefit of their kindergarten students.

This study used the 'big six' (Konza, 2014; NICHD, 2000), with the addition of writing, as a framework for considering inclusive practice for the purpose of research. But it has been refined by the researcher for use as a framework for teachers' critical reflection, with students placed at the centre (see Figure 6.7). It incorporates the three constructs identified by Rouse (2008) and the key assumptions necessary for teachers to enact an IPA (Florian & Spratt, 2013), as exemplified through the present study. Such a framework is intended as a tool for teachers to reflect on the extent to which their classroom practice is driven by research findings relevant to the explicit coverage of key components of literacy *and* informed by the needs of their students.

Figure 6.7

Literacy Education Through the English Curriculum Area within the Constructs Identified by Rouse (2008) and the IPA (Florian & Spratt, 2013) with Students at the Centre: A Reflection Framework for Teachers



This study offers a significant contribution to the fields of literacy and inclusive education. But, more importantly, the publication of the findings in academic journals will allow them to be impactful at both a policy and practical level. In relation to policy, the findings of this study should be examined by education stakeholders as a window into the ways in which in-service teachers are currently interpreting and implementing the many policy requirements, including syllabus documents, related to inclusion and literacy. At a practical level, pre-service teacher educators can use the study as a springboard for the consideration of key findings, including the allocation of time and potential

hinderances to inclusive pedagogy, ahead of their transition to classroom teaching. Similarly, the findings can be used during professional learning opportunities to prompt in-service kindergarten teachers to reconsider, evaluate and refine their beliefs, and their classroom practice, for the benefit of their future students.

Limitations and Future Research

The mixed methods, exploratory design for this study was significant in that it considered participating teachers' approaches to 'knowing', 'doing' and 'believing' in inclusive literacy practice, with data collection points designed to provide insight into each construct. The use of the qualitative case study observations and interviews served to address the potential drawbacks of engaging only with the self-reported, quantitative survey data in isolation. The research design was appropriate for both the literacy education context – for which the field has yet to address in-service teachers' approaches to the literacy session in this broader, practical way – and for the examination of the IPA in practice (Brennan & King, 2022; Florian & Spratt, 2013; Rouse, 2008).

There were some challenges and limitations that arose during the research process which can be informative for subsequent research in the inclusive literacy domain. Collection of data in both phases of the research was dependent on kindergarten teachers volunteering to participate. This impacted the sample size which was not representative of the broader population of NSW kindergarten teachers. Despite repeated email contact with schools, within ethical boundaries, and the use of snowballing to extend distribution within the profession, participant recruitment was extremely difficult. The timing of data collection during the pandemic, and associated teacher shortages, increased workload pressures and restrictions on research in schools, may have contributed to this.

The aim of the present study was not to produce generalisable results but to conceptualise, examine and interpret inclusive literacy pedagogy in an exploratory way. This interpretation may provide a springboard for in-service teachers to reflect on and improve their own practice, and a foundation for future research (Haile, 2023; Swedberg, 2020). Nonetheless, the results of the present study must be interpreted with caution, particularly given the case study basis of Phase Two.

But the present study does establish the possibility for similar research designs to be implemented in future studies. The involvement of teachers in research is important (MacPhee et al., 2021) and the researcher's own experience as a classroom teacher, which may have presented a challenge, was ultimately perceived as a strength in allowing for an interpretation of the data with the complexity of the profession in mind.

Some decades ago, Edmonds (1979) posited that whether teachers cater for the needs of all students relies on their perceptions of their success (or failure) thus far. Indeed, teachers' beliefs, values and perceptions related to literacy and inclusive education were refracted throughout the present findings. If professional development is essential in orienting those perceptions towards *inclusive* practice (Rosenberg et al., 2025; Van Mieghem et al., 2020), the reflection framework

provided in the conclusion of this thesis may empower teachers to undertake at least some of this professional development for themselves.

The discussion in this chapter began with ‘consistency vs. difference’ as the first theme. Although all four themes were deemed equally important, the findings and their implications have facilitated a circling back to that first theme to enable some further, final introspection regarding the theoretical framework and the three constructs identified for this research. If teachers aim for consistency by ‘doing’ classroom literacy practice in the ways they have always believed they needed to, according to their existing ways of ‘knowing’ and any of the other myriad factors influencing them, their practice will remain broadly evidence-informed and somewhat aligned with an inclusive approach.

But if we strive for difference – not in the categorisation of students but in reflecting on, evaluating and enhancing practice – it is in that messy, complex journey (Hardy, 2025; LaBoskey, 1998) of refinement and refocusing that teachers can more fully bridge the dual fields of literacy and inclusive education, and view the inclusive literacy classroom through the lens of their students.

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Appendices

Appendix A
Glossary of Companies, Programs and Resources

Table A1

Commercial Programs and Companies Cited by Participants

Program or resource	Description
<i>CARS (Comprehensive Assessment of Reading Strategies) & STARS (Strategies to Achieve Reading Success)</i>	A pair of commercial programs designed for the assessment and teaching of reading comprehension strategies for students in preschool to year 8. The program is available via a digital platform .
<i>Get Reading Right</i>	A whole class synthetic phonics program promoted by an Australian company that also publishes books and other reading and spelling classroom resources.
<i>Heggerty</i>	A phonemic awareness program promoted by an American company which is designed for whole class teaching or small group intervention in years K-5. The company also promotes other reading and writing programs and resources.
<i>InitialLit</i>	A whole class, Tier 1 literacy program designed for students in K-2 by Australian company, MultiLit .
<i>Jolly Phonics</i>	A British synthetic phonics program designed for addressing reading and spelling via whole class teaching. The company promotes other print and digital resources for classrooms.
<i>Language, Learning and Literacy (L3)</i>	An early literacy program and professional learning initiative that was previously promoted in NSW government schools (CESE, 2020a).
<i>Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS)</i>	An American literacy professional development program for teachers of students in years K-5.
<i>Letters and Sounds</i>	A systematic, synthetic phonics program developed in the United Kingdom. It is designed for whole class teaching in K-3 classrooms.
<i>Little Learners Love Literacy</i>	An early literacy program developed in Australia with accompanying resources, decodable books and digital tools. It is designed for whole class teaching or use in small group intervention.
<i>Orton-Gillingham</i>	A structured, multisensory method for teaching reading and writing, developed in America. Its use is emphasised to support students with dyslexia.
<i>Price Milburn (PM) Readers</i>	A collection of 'levelled' fiction and non-fiction texts designed for students of ages 5-12 to practise independent or guided reading.

Table A1 (continued)

Program or resource	Description
<i>Promoting Literacy Development (PLD)</i>	A systematic literacy program designed by an Australian publisher with an emphasis on synthetic phonics. It is intended for whole class teaching with students in preschool to year 5.
<i>Reading Recovery</i>	An early literacy intervention program developed in New Zealand and previously used as a Tier 2 intervention with students in K-2 in Australian schools (Clay, 2005a, 2005b).
<i>Seven Steps to Writing Success</i>	An Australian commercial writing program designed for whole class teaching in primary schools to guide students through the writing process.
<i>SMART Spelling</i>	A structured spelling program designed in Australia for whole class teaching with students in primary schools.
<i>Sound Waves</i>	A systematic synthetic phonics program , published by Firefly Education, that is designed for students in K-6 and was developed in Australia. It is intended to address reading, writing and spelling and the company promotes accompanying resources including student workbooks and decodable texts.
<i>Sounds-Write</i>	A synthetic phonics program designed for whole class teaching and developed in the United Kingdom. The company also promotes relevant professional learning and resources including decodable texts.
<i>Story Champs</i>	A whole class commercial program developed in Australia which is designed to support primary school students' language, storytelling and narrative skills.
<i>Talk for Writing</i>	An Australian, whole class teaching approach designed to develop students' language and writing skills.
<i>The Writing Revolution</i>	An approach to explicit teaching in writing, drawn from a text of the same name (Hochman & Wexler, 2017). The company promotes professional learning and resources to accompany the text.
<i>Teaching Handwriting, Reading and Spelling Skills (THRASS)</i>	An Australian commercial phonics-based program designed for whole class teaching related to reading, spelling and handwriting in primary schools.
<i>Word Study (previously titled Words Their Way)</i>	A commercial spelling program developed in the United States and published by Pearson Education. It is designed for students from ages 5-14 and it includes spelling assessments, lessons and activities.

Appendix B

Pilot Study Procedure, Results and Analysis

Survey Instrument: Pilot Study

The pilot survey instrument was divided into four sections (see Appendix C). Section One began with participant information. Questions in this section of the survey elicited participating teachers' personal demographic information including their age, gender, qualifications and years of teaching.

Section Two asked participants to define 'literacy' in their own words. Participants' responses in Section Two were captured and unable to be amended once participants moved on to Section Three of the questionnaire. The definition of literacy for the purpose of this research was then included at the beginning of Section Three to contextualise the subsequent questions with this definition in mind for all participants.

Section Three gathered information about participating teachers' beliefs and knowledge regarding early literacy practice. Participants responded to items in this section on a seven-point Likert scale from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. Section Four featured an open-ended question which asked participants to outline their approach to their classroom literacy session.

Pilot Study: Procedure

The survey was created using REDCap via the University of Sydney for online distribution. The researcher consulted an expert in survey design in REDCap via the University of Sydney Informatics Hub for feedback on the structure, organisation and format of the survey questions. This led to minor changes being made to the wording of some questions, and the setup of the feedback question as a separate survey not linked to the previous answers captured, to maintain participant anonymity. The researcher also consulted with an informal focus group of MTeach students during pilot data collection for feedback from a teacher perspective on the content and wording of the survey questions.

A pilot trial of the survey was conducted in 2019-2020. Primary independent schools within a 25km radius in the centre of Sydney ($n = 139$) were identified using the Association of Independent Schools (AIS) NSW website school finder function (AIS NSW, n.d.). The website also features individual schools' general email addresses which enabled survey distribution. Each school was assigned a number and a randomized sequence of numbers from 1-139 was generated. This list was used to determine the random selection of independent schools to email each week to invite kindergarten teachers to participate in a pilot trial of Phase One of the research.

The participation of non-government schools was approved by individual school principals and consent for participation was assumed by participants' online submission of survey responses. A total of 14 survey responses was recorded. One response was incomplete, and a second record had no responses to any questions. These responses were removed prior to the commencement of analysis, leaving a total of 12 useable responses. The timing of pilot survey distribution during the COVID-19

pandemic, given the additional pressures on teachers to adapt to online learning during this time, may have explained the low response rate. The impact of the pandemic on response rate has been acknowledged in other recent studies (e.g., Smith et al., 2023, 2025).

Pilot Study: Results and Analysis

Pilot data analysis focused on participants’ ($n = 12$) responses to the Likert scale items in Section Three. Items 3, 15, 21, 26, 28, 29, 30 and 31 of Section Three were reverse coded. Reverse coding can be used to ensure that all items and associated scores have the same directionality (Weems & Onwuegbuzie, 2001; Weems et al., 2006). This required the researcher to examine the Likert scale items and select the items for which disagreement could be considered to align with an evidence-informed, inclusive approach. With reverse coding, a higher response on the Likert scale would indicate a more ‘inclusive’ approach. For example, Item 3 ‘*My teaching of literacy is mostly informed by my beliefs and experience*’ was selected for reverse coding. Given that educators commonly rely only on their beliefs and experience to inform their practice, even in the face of opposing evidence (Fellowes & Oakley, 2020; Shanahan, 2020a), it could be expected that participants *disagreed* with this statement to demonstrate an inclusive, evidence-informed approach. This would require a response from 1-3 on the Likert scale which would become a response of 5-7 with reverse coding.

Following reverse coding, mean scores were generated for each participant (see Table B1) according to each of the three constructs *with* reverse coding: Knowing (3a), Doing (3b) and Believing (3c). Means were lower for all participants for ‘believing’ (Section 3c). Notably, this section included five of the eight items selected for reverse coding.

Table B1

Mean Scores By Construct for Each Participant, with Reverse Coding

Participant	‘Knowing’	‘Doing’	‘Believing’
1	6.08	5.69	5.08
2	6.38	5.69	5.15
3	6.38	6.15	5.15
4	6.38	6.15	5.15
5	6.08	5.31	4.77
6	6.23	6.46	5.15
7	5.31	6.54	4.85
8	5.92	5.62	5.23

Table B1 (continued)

Participant	'Knowing'	'Doing'	'Believing'
9	6.08	5.54	5.00
10	5.46	4.85	4.69
11	6.46	5.69	5.38
12	5.31	5.15	4.92

As an indicator of internal consistency, Cronbach's alpha should be above .70 but can be sensitive to the number of items in a scale (Nunnally, 1978; Pallant, 2020). Small scales of fewer than 10 items typically generate low Cronbach values of .50 or less (Pallant, 2020). With a small scale, reporting of the mean inter-item correlation for the items is recommended, and between .20 and .40 is the desired range (Briggs & Cheek, 1986; Pallant, 2020). Although the number of items in each of the Sections 3a, 3b and 3c of the pilot survey was greater than the minimum 10 ($n = 13$), given the new development of some scale items and the small sample size, mean inter-item correlations were generated and are included in Table B2. Correlations were notably higher overall without reverse coding, but noticeably lower for Section 3c.

Table B2

Mean Inter-Item Correlations by Construct for Pilot Study

Construct	With reverse coding	Without reverse coding
3a Knowing	0.243	0.350
3b Doing	0.241	0.359
3c Believing	0.081	0.115

Cronbach's alpha was also calculated for each construct, with and without reverse coding, to check for internal consistency (see Table B3). Items in Section 3c generated a much lower internal consistency than the other constructs, with a negative average covariance among items with reverse coding. Analysis was repeated *without* reverse coding for Section 3c by only including items which had a positive corrected item-total correlation (Items 22, 25, 29, 32, 33 and 34). This increased the internal consistency significantly for Section 3c without reverse coding ($\alpha = .532$). The internal consistency increased further with the exclusion of Item 29 ($\alpha = .720$).

Table B3*Cronbach's Alphas by Construct for Pilot Study*

Construct	With reverse coding	Without reverse coding
3a Knowing	.617	.820
3b Doing	.565	.782
3c Believing	-1.594	.256
3c Believing (select items only)	.678	.532

Following the analysis of the data from Section Three of the pilot survey, amendments were made to the survey instrument based on feedback from the focus group of MTeach students and the results related to internal consistency. Items 3 (*My teaching of literacy is mostly informed by my beliefs and experience*), 4 (*I am aware of evidence-based approaches to literacy instruction*), 18 (*I support and extend literacy learning through reinforcement, modification and modelling*), 23 (*A child's success in literacy can be attributed to my teaching*), 24 (*A child's difficulties in literacy can be attributed to my teaching*) and 26 – 31 were removed in order to increase internal reliability. Wording of all survey items, including Likert scale items, was reviewed to avoid ambiguity or confusion for participants. This included the removal of some adverbs such as 'infrequently'.

Pilot survey data indicated that participants may have closed the survey after completing the Likert scale items, without devoting attention to the open-ended question regarding their literacy block structure. Sections Three and Four were therefore reversed in the main study survey to promote completion of the open-ended question prior to the Likert scale items. Section Four, which involved participants describing their 'literacy block', was moved after Section Two (defining literacy) to ensure that participants provided longer responses to describe their literacy sessions in greater detail, before moving on to the Likert scale items. The definition of 'literacy' (ACARA, n.d.-a) was included at the beginning of this section.

Appendix C

Pilot Study Survey Instrument



Discipline of Education
School of Education and Social Work
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

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EXAMINING APPROACHES TO THE KINDERGARTEN LITERACY BLOCK

SECTION 1

Gender: Male Female

Age: _____ years

Current School Suburb Postcode: _____

Current School Sector: Government Independent Catholic

Grade you are currently teaching: _____

Total years teaching: ____ years

Total years teaching kindergarten: _____ years

Number of kindergarten classes currently at your school: _____

Highest level of teaching qualification:

- Bachelor of Education
- Master of Teaching
- Graduate Diploma in Education
- Graduate Certificate in Education
- Postgraduate Research

Please indicate any specific qualifications you have in early years' literacy pedagogy:

Please indicate any specific professional learning you have undertaken in early years' literacy pedagogy:

Please indicate any mandated or commercial programs you are required to use in your literacy teaching:

SECTION 2

In your own words, define 'literacy'.

SECTION 3

The definition of literacy adopted for the purpose of this survey is that of ACARA (n.d.-a): "Literacy involves students listening to, reading, viewing, speaking, writing and creating oral, print, visual and digital texts, and using and modifying language for different purposes in a range of contexts." We refer specifically to literacy in the context of the English curriculum area in the kindergarten classroom.

Please provide your level of agreement with the following statements.

Section 3a

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1 Reading and writing are related processes.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2 I plan the literacy session based on the learning needs of my students.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3 My teaching of literacy is mostly informed by my beliefs and experience.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4 I am aware of evidence-based approaches to literacy instruction.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5 Evidence-based approaches to literacy instruction inform my teaching.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6 The following six key elements of literacy must be taught explicitly and systematically.							
a) Oral language	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
b) Phonological awareness	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
c) Phonics	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
d) Vocabulary	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
e) Fluency	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
f) Comprehension	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

7 I keep up to date with research in the field of literacy by attending professional learning.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

8 I keep up to date with research in the field of literacy by reading academic articles.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

Section 3b

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
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9 I have autonomy to plan what and how I teach literacy in my classroom.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

10 Literacy routines (e.g. reading groups) are consistent and understood by the children in my class.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

11 I schedule time every day for student-selected reading, writing, speaking and listening experiences.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

12 I use a variety of student groupings to teach reading and writing, including whole class, guided and independent.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

13 My literacy instruction sometimes prioritises certain elements (e.g. phonics, comprehension) depending on the needs of my students.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

14 At the end of each literacy session, I reflect on the effectiveness of my instructional decisions.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

15 My overall approach to literacy instruction is generally the same each year.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

16 My literacy instruction changes according to student responses, needs and assessment.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

17 I use my knowledge of my students' literacy performance when planning and teaching.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

18 I support and extend literacy learning through reinforcement, modification and modeling.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

19 Children in my class take some responsibility for their own literacy learning.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
20 I provide literacy tasks in which students can participate at their own level of understanding.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
21 If a child is struggling with literacy acquisition, support is usually provided by a different teacher in a withdrawal setting.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Section 3c

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
22 All students are capable of becoming literate.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
23 A child's success in literacy can be attributed to my teaching.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
24 A child's difficulties in literacy can be attributed to my teaching.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
25 Children's home literacy environment impacts their literacy development.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
26 A child who is having difficulty learning to read or write is usually struggling because of an influence (e.g. a specific learning difficulty) that is separate from my teaching.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
27 Literacy difficulties are dilemmas for me to address in my teaching.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
28 My literacy instruction caters for the needs of <i>most</i> students, with additional or different learning experiences provided for children struggling with literacy.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
29 Addressing the needs of a child who is struggling with literacy is mainly the responsibility of the learning support teacher or other support staff.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

30 Student groupings for literacy (e.g. guided reading) are usually based on 'ability'.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
31 Student groupings for literacy (e.g. guided reading) change infrequently.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
32 Some students succeed or excel in literacy because of:							
a) My teaching	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
b) Their home literacy environment	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
c) Giftedness	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

SECTION 4

Please describe your approach to kindergarten literacy instruction in as much detail as possible.

- What is involved in the daily literacy routine?
- What literacy practices or activities are typically involved in your literacy sessions?
- How do you decide what is included?

Please be as specific as possible about pedagogy and time spent on particular activities.

Expression of Interest for Further Participation

We are seeking the names and contact details of kindergarten teachers who are willing to take part in classroom video observations and interviews as part of the next phase of this study. We will contact you with further information. If you do not wish to participate further, you can complete this survey anonymously and leave this section blank.

Name: _____

Phone number: _____

Email address: _____

SECTION 5

I would like to receive feedback about the overall results of this study YES NO

If you answered YES, please provide your preferred email address:

Email: _____

Thank you for your participation.

Appendix D

Main Study Survey Instrument



Discipline of Education
School of Education and Social Work
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

ABN 15 211 513 464

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Professor of Special and Inclusive Education

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EXAMINING APPROACHES TO THE KINDERGARTEN LITERACY BLOCK

SECTION 1

Gender: Male Female

Age: _____ years

Current School Suburb Postcode: _____

Current School Sector: Government Independent Catholic

Grade you are currently teaching: _____

Total years teaching: ____ years

Total years teaching kindergarten: _____ years

Number of kindergarten classes currently at your school: _____

Highest level of teaching qualification:

- Bachelor of Education
- Master of Teaching
- Graduate Diploma in Education
- Graduate Certificate in Education
- Postgraduate Research

Please indicate any specific qualifications you have in early years' literacy pedagogy:

Please indicate any specific professional learning you have undertaken in early years' literacy pedagogy:

Please indicate any mandated or commercial programs you are required to use in your literacy teaching:

SECTION 2

In your own words, define 'literacy'.

SECTION 3

The definition of literacy adopted for the purpose of this survey is that of ACARA (n.d.-a): "Literacy involves students listening to, reading, viewing, speaking, writing and creating oral, print, visual and digital texts, and using and modifying language for different purposes in a range of contexts." We refer specifically to literacy in the context of the English curriculum area in the kindergarten classroom.

Please describe your approach to kindergarten literacy instruction in as much detail as possible.

- What is involved in the daily literacy routine?
- What literacy practices or activities are typically involved in your literacy sessions?
- How do you decide what is included?

Please be as specific as possible about pedagogy and time spent on particular activities.

SECTION 4

Please provide your level of agreement with the following statements.

Section 4a

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1 Reading and writing are related processes.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2 I plan the literacy session based on the learning needs of my students.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3 Evidence-based approaches to literacy instruction inform my teaching.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4 The following six key elements of literacy must be taught explicitly and systematically.							
a) Oral language	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
b) Phonological awareness	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

c) Phonics	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
d) Vocabulary	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
e) Fluency	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
f) Comprehension	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5 I keep up to date with research in the field of literacy.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Section 4b

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
6 I have autonomy to plan what and how I teach literacy in my classroom.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7 Literacy routines (e.g. reading groups) are consistent and understood by the children in my class.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8 I schedule time every day for student-selected reading, writing, speaking and listening experiences.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9 I use a variety of student groupings to teach reading and writing, including whole class, guided and independent.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10 My literacy instruction sometimes prioritises certain elements (e.g. phonics, comprehension) depending on the needs of my students.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11 At the end of each literacy session, I reflect on the effectiveness of my instructional decisions.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12 My overall approach to literacy instruction is the same each year.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
13 My literacy instruction changes according to student assessment.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
14 I use my knowledge of my students' literacy performance when planning for teaching.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

15 Children in my class take some responsibility for their own literacy learning.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
16 I provide literacy tasks in which students can participate at their own level of understanding.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
17 If a child is struggling with literacy acquisition, support is provided by a different teacher in a withdrawal setting.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Section 4c

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
18 All students are capable of becoming literate.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
19 Children's home literacy environment impacts their literacy development.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
20 Some students succeed or excel in literacy because of:							
a) My teaching	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
b) Their home literacy environment	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
c) Giftedness	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Expression of Interest for Further Participation

We are seeking the names and contact details of kindergarten teachers who are willing to take part in classroom video observations and interviews as part of the next phase of this study. Participants for the next phase will be selected based on their survey responses, including their definition of literacy and teaching practices. The researchers aim to select a small number of participants with different approaches to literacy teaching. All volunteers will be contacted with further information and notified if they are selected to participate.

If you do not wish to participate further, you can complete this survey anonymously and leave this section blank.

Name: _____

Phone number: _____

Email address: _____

SECTION 5

I would like to receive feedback about the overall results of this study YES NO

If you answered YES, please provide your preferred email address:

Email: _____

Thank you for your participation.

Appendix E

Example Responses to Survey Section Three with Evidence of Coding

Coding	'Who'
	'What'
	'How'
	'Why'

Participant	Response
4	Daily literacy includes the Big 6 as per Deslea Konza. Phonological awareness is targeted through Heggerty activities and/or Kilpatrick 1 minute drills. A whole class phonics session follows, where students learn code knowledge, blending and encoding, and also morphology concepts. Students then participate in differentiated reading groups where they complete activities targeting decoding, fluency and comprehension. We then read a quality text, targeting new vocab explicitly, and discuss for comprehension. We practise writing daily, either sentence structure activities or more extended whole texts. I use data such as decoding assessments, Phonological awareness assessments, running records, spelling assessments, and writing samples samples to set goals for students and determine my teaching sequence.
61	Phonics and spelling activities (InitialLit) approx 40 minutes Handwriting approx twice a week for 15 minutes Teacher led reading/ independent group reading-30-40 minutes Modelled reading and comprehension activities approx 20 minutes Writing-modelled and independent approx 30 minutes
93	-Familiar read with home reader to themselves and to a partner/teacher - 15 mins - explicit writing lesson (1hr) usually linked to a quality piece of literature - joint construction, whole class modelled reading, exploration of vocabulary in the text, turn and talk discussion, role play - Explicit phonics lesson (45 mins)- noughts and crosses (revision of sounds game), videos to support the sound being taught, discussion of sounds, making sound in the air, worksheet/activity to accompany the sound learnt - Guided Reading - small group explicit guided reading, read text, discuss the text, questioning, exploration of strategies that are suited to each group I am working with. - Roaming Activities - 10-15 roaming activities set up around the room that explore differing aspects of literacy - phonics, writing, CVC words, letter formation & identification, sensory activities, sight words - Each days literacy session has a similar structure, I am guided by the ES1 syllabus, students needs and learning requirements, weekly programs developed by the ES1 team, letters and sounds phonics scope and sequence,. oi try and read/work with each guided reading group 1-2 times a week.
152	Term one: Guided writing in small groups of three students with the focus on students learning to write high frequency words, hear and record sounds, deferment words into syllables. This is usually 45-60 minutes. Guided reading in small groups of three students. This is usually 45-60 minutes. Depending on the day these are both completed or writing is completed on one day and reading on another day as it is difficult to fit in. Whilst complete small group reading and writing the remainder of the class are completing independent literacy activities which are selected based on their learning needs. Activities include sound work, familiar reading (practice reading readers they have completed in guided reading), fine motor, construction, handwriting, drama, word work, math games, technology - typing skills / iPads After these activities we usually complete modelled reading or modelled writing. Modelled reading involves students listening to a quality picture

	<p>book related to a theme/focus and discussing the book to develop comprehension. Books are chosen when we have stage planning days and usually follow a theme eg. Friendship, families, etc. themes are selected to fit in with other KLA content focuses to incorporate content across KLA. When discussing our modelled reads we incorporate aspects of speaking and listening content. Modelled writing with a focus on one writing skill for the week eg capital letters at the beginning of sentences. Modelled writing is usually quick and can go for 10-15 minutes. The skill focus changes each week and is usually based on students needs. We have a scope and sequence that we follow but we adjust and adapt this to suit our individual student and class needs throughout the term/year. Modelled writing focuses on writing about something that all students have experienced together eg. Trip to the library, excursions or a response to a book we have read. We also spend 30minutes daily on soundwaves. In term on it focus on phonological skills - hearing sounds. We introduce one sound each day using the interactive videos and games included in the sound waves program and then students complete a worksheet for that sound. In term two, three and four it is phonics based. Students are taught two sounds a week using the same structure as above. In term three we complete soundwaves four times a week and each sound is given 1 hour of targeted teaching per week. Eg Monday and Tuesday for 30 minutes is one sound then Thursday and Friday 30 minutes on another sound. In term two the structure of writing changes- students move from guided writing which is highly structured by the teacher to independent writing with the teacher providing individual and small group support depending on individual student needs. Students write about a shared experience they have had with the class or a response to a shared book read.</p>
213	<p>Literacy in the K-2 classroom begins with oral language - implementing the Heggerty's Phonemic Awareness program with Kindergarten and Year 1. This is also introduced to Transition to School students when they are able to attend school consistently (unable at the moment due to covid). This program runs for about 15 minutes after which, All students break into SoundsWrite Lesson - this is a synthetic phonics program where each group is explicitly taught a sound (initial sounds in sequential order for Kindergarten) and spelling (year 1 and 2) over the course of a fortnight. Matching decodables are read daily with students individually / and or in small groups. These decodables are also sent home as home readers. Students have a chance to apply explicitly taught knowledge in independent activities (consolidation activities via worksheet and games that match decodable text and taught spellings / and or initial sounds). This runs for approximately 30 minutes for Year 2, and with Kindergarten and Year 1 alternating with a second teacher, roughly around 50 minutes. After SoundsWrite, a writing session is broken into two parts (to allow for morning tea), where we teach Talk for Writing - an explicit approach to developing the written word through oral language. Year 2 (working with another teacher) work for around 1.5 hours, and K-1 work with a second teacher for around 1 hour. Talk for Writing also incorporates an early year program and so this is exposed to Transition to School students also (when they are able to attend). For pre-primary students, this will include learning to tell a familiar story orally (e.g. The Gingerbread Man or We're Going on a Bear Hunt), and consolidated with puppet play, craft, drama etc. As a whole school focus, our goal is to improve Creating Texts aspect of learning progressions, with a focus on spelling and vocabulary. We are also basing our programs on evidence-based pedagogy and have seen huge improvement in opting for explicit teaching programs such as Sounds-Write and Talk for Writing. We have been employing both for the last 2.5 years consistently in the K-2 room and have seen extraordinary growth from our Year 2's who have had the most experience with the programs. Both are a non-negotiable for me as a teacher, so our literacy sessions are definitely a priority for at least 3 solid learning days a week. We have also found the children enjoy writing particularly as it is a far more engaging program that encourages and</p>

	<p>demands the inclusion of the creative arts in the initial process of a new topic. The children are experiencing success and thus more confident to write and enjoy it.</p>
307	<p>Literacy usually taught in the morning session 9-11 but can be changed as needed with timetable issues. My approach is the literacy needs to be taught very explicitly with a modelled/guided/independent sequence. Phonics must be taught with in a systematic and sequential way as should phonemic awareness. Students are taught to read and to write using grapheme/phoneme correspondence (plus some high frequency words) What's included -Morning Routine - roll, date, weather, visual timetable, fine motor skills, some quick review. -Phonemic Awareness (oral) - first term we were doing explicit lessons on Phonological and phonemic awareness, one week per concept (eg syllables or hearing initial sounds) but revisited over the week and during group work. From Term 2 using Heggerty scripted PA book every day for 10 mins per day. -Phonics - very explicit modelled/guided lessons (based on Get Reading Right but I have made more explicit lessons) started around Term 1 Week 6 4 lessons per week 30 mins - teaching grapheme/phoneme correspondence and handwriting of those graphemes, reading and writing words/sentences with these graphemes. Blending instruction started the following week. -Writing/English Concept/Comprehension program - 4 lessons per week 30 mins- Term 1 weeks 2-5 fine motor skills focus= prewriting shapes etc Term 1 started with nursery rhymes- linked to Tales Toolkit and story structure. Term 1 second half also started with big books ,focussing on story parts. Term 2 - big books program continued focussing on codes and conventions. Term 2 writing used an explicit sentence starter writing program. NOTE: Transcription taught through phonics lessons as well. Term 3 - common fairytales/stories with character/setting focus. -Reading a story to students (oral comprehension) - (in reality sadly this sometimes goes for lack of time) -Walker learning type session (curriculum derived, play based learning) for around 45 minutes 4 times per week. During this the play based activities are set up that are linked to phonics, PA, handwriting, numeracy, maths concepts, geography, sciences concepts, fine motor skills, creative arts, drama, free reading etc. -While Walker learning is going on, teacher takes small groups (3-4 students) for differentiated literacy instruction in what we call the engine room - my groups are based on phonics needs, or writing needs. They can be flexible as needed. My school uses decodable readers . I use decodable readers for all early reading in my classroom and then may use predictable texts eventually (eg PM Readers above level 6) after students are confidently used decoding strategies. Currently at my school there are differences between teachers in this regard of using decodables and predictable texts. In reality I don't always fit all this into 2 hours. Often something goes after recess!!! We still do a sight word program at my school (though I know may not be best practice).</p>
332	<p>Our daily literacy routine includes: • Morning routine (approx. 15 minutes) - classroom talk about the date, weather and seasons, timetable for the day, word of the week (first half of the year)/sentence of the week (second half of the year). • Reading groups (20 minutes) - students are organised into 5 levelled groups. Each group has 1 teacher for 20 minutes. In this time, students practice writing phonemes, camera words (sight words) and reading decodable text books. Sometimes other small group games like snakes and ladders or spot the phoneme are played. After each phonics unit test, the organisation of the students in the groups is re-evaluated to ensure they are performing at the expected level of their group, if more support or extension is needed, they are swapped groups. Students are not told these groups are levelled. • Synthetic phonics (Get Reading Right program) (approx. 20-25 minutes) - students sit on the floor in levelled rows (front row are support students, to the back row which are extension students). The Get Reading Right program is followed for these lessons, including the use of instructional powerpoints and workbook activities. Students always use mini-whiteboards to respond and interact with the instruction. The program unit is not</p>

	<p>progressed until 80% of the cohort achieves 80% on the unit test. • Shared reading (approx. 20 minutes) - a reading program has been developed by the school to introduce other literacy texts. Each term has a 'theme' to the texts used. E.g. starting school, weather, information texts, imaginative texts. One text per week is re-read with associated activities that focus on writing, speaking, listening and responding.</p> <p>• Handwriting (approx. 10 minutes) - each day there is a focus phoneme for handwriting - printed booklet is used. This routine is followed by all kindergarten classes, and happens daily in the first morning session until recess (8:40am-10:15am). I have only been at the school for the one year, and the programs we have used (e.g. shared reading and morning routine) are copies from 2020, with some minor changes or updates.</p>
351	<p>Literacy instruction in all 3 Kindergarten classrooms at the school is modelled off Deslea Conza's 'Big 6' approach to literacy, as well as the Science of Reading and Scarborough's Reading Rope. The foundation of literacy is oral communication, which is built upon as students are ready. The literacy block adjusts over 4 terms, with Term 1 focused heavily on oral language, naming letter shapes, and phonological awareness skills such as rhyme and syllable awareness. At this stage, the literacy block (2 hours morning session) is timetabled to reflect the literacy demands for the rest of the year. In Term 1 this may look as follows- 9-9:30- Yarning Circle, Daily Routine, Singing and Revision (including movement break) 9:30-9:45 Fruit Break and Read To (Read for enjoyment) 9:45-10 Explicit Instruction (Letter names, rhyme, syllables etc.) 10-10:30 Small group activities- fine motor, phonological awareness, letter name, name writing etc.) 10:30-10:50 Read To Procedures (Following the L3K procedural reading- 1 focus text for the week, 3-4 reads including think aloud, quality talk etc.) 10:50-11:10 Draw, Talk, Share- Day 1- draw, Day 2- Add Detail, Day 3- Share Toward the end of Term 1 (Weeks 7-8), explicit phonics instruction is introduced and fits in to the 9:45-10:30 space in the timetable. This follows a week long (I do, We do), (I do, We do), (We do, You do), (We do, You do) routine which is carried into Term 2. This is modelled from the SPELD [Specific Learning Difficulties] phonics instruction and is supported by the Little Learners Love Literacy Scope and Decodable readers. In Term 2, the content shifts focus to support more explicit whole class phonics instruction. Revision in the 9-9:30 session becomes more explicit and addresses the common areas for improvement identified in phonics assessment. The small group rotational routine shifts to a differentiated group focus, with activities to support the stage of phonological/phonemic awareness or phonics learning students are at. The 10-10:30 session eventually splits to also accommodate 10 minutes of letter/ word/ phrase level fluency practice. The 10:50 writing session develops to support students to begin labelling their drawings. In this term, interactive writing (Dr Noella Mackenzie) also begins to introduce students to sentence conventions as well as considering the purpose and audience of the class texts and drawings that they are creating. Throughout Terms 2-4, a Write Start session is conducted either by Occupational Therapists or Classroom Teachers on Monday to support the correct formation of the focus grapheme/s for the week. Term 3, the focus shifts again to phrase and sentence level fluency in both reading and writing. The timetable remains the same as Term 2, and students are encouraged to begin using writing aids such as word walls and dictionaries to support their writing. Individual and small group conferencing is incorporated more formally into the writing sessions, and students are encouraged to begin writing sentences independently at the end of the writing cycle. This routine is carried into Term 4.</p>
449	<p>Daily literacy block includes: 25 minutes - phonological awareness whole class lesson based on need of majority of class - phonological awareness groups where students work in activities to develop their skills where they are at and students work with teacher in small group to develop new skills 30 minutes - phonics whole class lesson based on need/next concept of class (sounds, double letters, do graphs, etc) - phonics groups for students to consolidate known skills and work</p>

	with teacher in small group to develop/practice new skill using decodable texts - reading - decoding using blending/segmenting skills 35 minutes writing - adapted from writers workshop/daily 5 - students draw picture, count words in sentence and attempt to spell/write We decide what to teach through assessment - best start and NSW literacy progressions tracking as well as pre/post assessments and work samples
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Appendix F

CLOS-R Summary of Teaching Practices by Dimension (Louden et al., 2008, p. 107)

CLASSROOM LITERACY OBSERVATION SURVEY - REVISED (CLOS-R)

Respect	1	Rapport	The teacher creates a warm, positive and inviting classroom where relationships with children encourage literacy learning.
	2	Credibility	Children's respect for the teacher enables her to maintain order and lesson flow.
	3	Citizenship	The teacher promotes equality, tolerance, inclusively and awareness of the needs to others.
Knowledge	4	Purpose	Children's responses indicate tacit or explicit understanding of the purpose of the literacy task.
	5	Substance	The teacher provides a lesson/task that leads to substantial literacy engagement, not busy work.
	6	Explanation word	The teacher clearly explains specific word, letter or sound strategies or concepts.
	7	Explanation sentence	The teacher clearly explains specific grammatical strategies or concepts.
	8	Explanation text	The teacher clearly explains Textual strategies or concepts.
	9	Metalanguage	The teacher provides children with language for talking about and exemplifying literacy concepts.
	10	Oral language	The teacher focuses on the development of children's oral language.
	11	Oral/written language	The teacher makes logical connections between oral and written language.
Orchestration	12	Awareness	The teacher has a high level of awareness of literacy activities and participation by children.
	13	Environment	The teacher uses the literate physical environment as a resource.
	14	Structure	The teacher manages a predictable environment in which children understand consistent literacy routines.
	15	Independence	Children take some responsibility for their own literacy learning.
	16	Pace	The teacher provides strong forward momentum in literacy lessons.
	17	Transition	The teacher spends minimal time changing activities or uses this time productively.
	18	Attention	The teacher ensures that children are focused on the literacy task.
Support	19	Stimulation	The teacher motivates interest in literacy through the creation of a pleasurable, enthusiastic and energetic classroom.
	20	Assessment	The teacher uses fine-grained knowledge of children's literacy performance in planning and teaching.
	21	Scaffolding	The teacher extends literacy learning through reinforcement, modification or modelling.
	22	Feedback	The teacher intervenes in timely, focused, tactful and explicit ways that support children's literacy learning.
	23	Responsiveness	The teacher is flexible in sharing and building on children's literacy contributions.
Differentiation	24	Persistence	The teacher provides many opportunities to practise and master new literacy learning.
	25	Challenge	The teacher extends and promotes higher levels of thinking in literacy learning.
	26	Inclusion	The teacher differentiates literacy instruction to recognize individual needs.
	27	Connection	The teacher makes connections between class or community literacy-related knowledge for individuals or groups.

Appendix G

Example of Researcher and Research Assistant Coding Comparison Using CLOS-R (Louden et al., 2008)

Time Stamp	Action/Activity
0:47:26	Teacher asks students to sit on floor, finishes with small group.
0:49:32	Teacher shows visual on IWB and sends students to small group table, iPads.
0:50:58	Teacher with three students, gives decodable and asks students to predict story from cover.
0:53:17	Teacher introduces exclamation and comma from text, asks one student to read at a time.
0:55:07	Other small groups working on writing words in Elkonin boxes to match pictures, sound match game with teacher, iPads.
0:58:04	Small group finishes reading, teacher asks different students what happened in the book.
1:00:42	Teacher asks about the word 'ill' and any other similar words know, students share.

	Same coding initially
	Agreed to include coding
	Agreed to exclude coding
	No agreement reached

	Researcher CLOS-R				Researcher Notes	RA CLOS-R				RA Notes
Excerpt 3	14	15				17	14			17 - students understood the instruction to sit down in the floor 14 - students understood the instruction to put worksheets on the finishing tab and immediately responded; 2nd student immediately tidying up the stationeries at the table;
	14	17				17	26			17 - teacher organise efficient distribution of resources using the colours on the floor and making groups, children clearly understood and immediately responded to the instruction 26 - teacher gave opportunity to work effectively with small groups
	11	12			11 - links oral discussion of text with subsequent reading of it 12 - teacher aware of other students in the room, looks up often to monitor	26	8			26 - teacher gave opportunity to work effectively with small groups 8 - teacher explicitly instructed students to predict the plot of the book
	14	15	9	7	15 clearer of next time stamp	7	8	9		7 - teacher explaining exclamation mark and comma followed by its function in a sentence 8 - teacher asking about children's opinion on why the character shouted; the discussion on comprehension were present throughout the activity (based on the audio) 9 - students explain exclamation marks in their own word (e.g. to indicate something loud)
	14	15	12		6 relates to small group with other teacher without permission for filming - small group with teacher focus is not on 6 but vocab in 8	15	6	8		15 - children work on small groups without teacher direct supervision, only 1 group were supervised 6 (small group with teacher) - teacher seemed instructed to find a letter with giving a gesture of letter 'c', a girl responded by giving the card with the letter 'b'
	8	10			Students read one at a time compared to choral reading in small group (with teacher tuning into one student at a time) at School A	8	11			8 - teacher consistently guides students in discussion to develop comprehension (e.g. why do you think not is splitting? do you think not is very happy? what about the pictures...? etc) 8 - teacher explaining the meaning of 'spit'
	8	10	12		8 includes discussion of vocab in text, not 6 Possibly include 12 (Awareness) instead of 16 for the behaviour prompt	6	16	8		16 - teacher reminding a student from other group to focused on task 6 - asking the word ill to students, children mentioned the word sick and virus -> children demonstrate understanding of word level concepts they were taught 8 - teacher guides students in a discussion based on the book 'who's ill in the story?'

Appendix H

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol



Discipline of Education
School of Education and Social Work
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

ABN 15 211 513 464

David Evans
Professor of Special and Inclusive Education

Room 707
Education Building | A35
The University of Sydney
NSW 2006 AUSTRALIA
Telephone: +61 2 9351 8463
Facsimile: +61 2 9351 2606
Email: david.evans@sydney.edu.au
Web: <http://www.sydney.edu.au/>

EXAMINING APPROACHES TO THE KINDERGARTEN LITERACY BLOCK

PREAMBLE

The aim of this interview is to gather more insight into your approach to kindergarten literacy instruction following the video observations of your classroom practice. This information will help to explain your thinking and decision-making behind the literacy practices that were observed.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Overall, what is your approach to literacy instruction with kindergarten?
 - a. What pedagogy/content do you routinely include? Why?
 - b. How is it organized?
 - c. When/why does it change?
2. What does differentiation in literacy involve in your classroom?
 - a. How do you address the needs of all students in literacy, including:
 - i. Students who are struggling with literacy acquisition?
 - ii. Students whose learning in literacy is accelerated?
3. Please describe the case study students you have chosen to discuss.
 - a. At what stage are they in their literacy acquisition? What are the areas of focus over the coming months?
 - b. What is your approach to supporting these students?
 - c. How do you know if this support is successful?
4. Do you have any further comments you would like to add about promoting literacy in your Kindergarten classroom?

Appendix I

Example Transcripts of Semi-Structured Interviews with Evidence of Coding

<i>Coding</i>	Knowing
	Doing
	Believing

Participant	Transcript
April	<p>April: ...I think the thing especially maybe in kindergarten is that repetition and consistent routine and they know what they're doing, so it makes it really easy for them. I think my kids are pretty independent in literacy groups because they know exactly what they need to do. That's really helpful from a management perspective. As far as the instruction goes, I'm probably getting a bit quicker with the on the mat stuff, which is really good, because it was taking even longer at the beginning of the year. But I'm getting faster through it and obviously just identifying the low ones, because they're the main ones and things like that make it...But yeah no it's pretty repetitive. And I think it'll be the same next year except we'll be better because we know how to pace it out.</p>
Kathy	<p>Kathy: Yeah so parent contact and also they all, I really encourage them to sit there...if you'd like help you can come and, come sit with me at the jelly bean table, I'll help you and most of them will accept it. I always have the phonics mats over there. I get mini whiteboards out so that I can help them with sounds and individually help them with bits. So I just support them more. Do I test them more often? No, because I have that extra contact. I feel like I can mould whatever I'm doing right then to what they need. And we test them throughout the year, all of the kids throughout the year. So in the beginning of school, the end of term one, the end of term two. Actually in the middle of term two, we assess them all on the single sounds, on all of the digraph blends. So we test them at different points in the year anyway. I don't feel like I need to do extra to test them, because I can just see it...</p>
Robin	<p>Robin: ... we used to do like worksheets that went with their reading groups, and now it's more like talking and then off they go and play. But for my higher achieving children, they might have once or twice a week I'll say, we're gonna use Keynote or Pages or something on the iPad, and you're going to make an information report or you do like a poster to tell me all the facts that sort of that way, and the lower kids, they get a little bit more support. I'll make sure that I pull my lower readers every day, whereas my highers, I might say I'm gonna give you this book, and you go away and read it, make me a list of things that you want to know, we can sort of go that way, which is tricky, because you don't want to, because they equally need the same amount of input as everybody else. But sometimes it's just, well go and read it to yourself, and I'll listen to you later, but it's not as deep I guess.</p> <p>...</p> <p>Robin: ... I don't know about that, I really wonder how the two marry like, yeah, that's one thing that I am interested to see how that goes, what the department suggests, how do you benchmark for the decodables, like, not bench, you know what I mean, like instead of those regular books, like levelled books, how do you assess their..... I don't know...And that's where I wonder, where do you stop with the decodables, because I know that they are only good for a certain amount of time, right? But then when is the cutoff and where do you jump off the decodables and go to the...so my children that can't read a PM level four, they can read some of the decodables quite well, because they can decode them, but once it's quite a tricky, yeah, it's a good question...</p>

Appendix J

University of Sydney HREC Approval



Research Integrity & Ethics Administration
HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 17 July 2019

Prof David Evans
Sydney School of Education and Social Work Administration; Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
Email: david.evans@sydney.edu.au

Dear David,

The University of Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) has considered your application. I am pleased to inform you that after consideration of your response, your project has been approved.

Details of the approval are as follows:

Project No.: 2019/413
Project Title: Examining Approaches to the Kindergarten Literacy Block
Authorised Personnel: Evans David; Goddard Corrina;
Approval Period: 17/07/2019 to 17/07/2023
First Annual Report Due: 17/07/2020

Documents Approved:

Date Uploaded	Version Number	Document Name
07/07/2019	Version 4	PCF ClassObs ParentCarer v4-0 Clean
07/07/2019	Version 5	PIS ClassObsInterview Teacher v5-0 Clean
07/07/2019	Version 5	PIS ClassObs ParentCarer v5-0 Clean
07/07/2019	Version 3	PIS Survey Teacher v3-0
07/07/2019	Version 3	Recruitment Email Prindpal SurveyObsInterviews v3-0 Clean
07/07/2019	Version 4	Recruitment Email Teacher Survey v4-0 Clean
07/07/2019	Version 4	Interview Protocol v4-0 Clean
07/07/2019	Version 4	Survey v4-0 Clean
07/07/2019	Version 4	PCF ClassObsInterview Teacher v4-0 Clean
07/07/2019	Version 3	PCF SurveyObsInterviews Prindpal v3-0 Clean

Special Condition/s of Approval

- It will be a condition of final approval that you obtain SERAP, School Principal and the Catholic Education Office approvals prior to any research commencing at each relevant site.

Condition/s of Approval

- Research must be conducted according to the approved proposal.
- An annual progress report must be submitted to the Ethics Office on or before the anniversary of approval and on completion of the project.
- You must report as soon as practicable anything that might warrant review of ethical approval of the project including:
 - Serious or unexpected adverse events (which should be reported within 72 hours).
 - Unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project.
- Any changes to the proposal must be approved prior to their implementation (except where an amendment is undertaken to eliminate *immediate* risk to participants).

Research Integrity & Ethics Administration
Research Portfolio
Level 3, F23 Administration Building
The University of Sydney
NSW 2006 Australia

T +61 2 9036 9161
E human.ethics@sydney.edu.au
W sydney.edu.au/ethics

ABN 15 211 513 464
CRICOS 00026A



- Personnel working on this project must be sufficiently qualified by education, training and experience for their role, or adequately supervised. Changes to personnel must be reported and approved.
- Personnel must disclose any actual or potential conflicts of interest, including any financial or other interest or affiliation, as relevant to this project.
- Data and primary materials must be retained and stored in accordance with the relevant legislation and University guidelines.
- Ethics approval is dependent upon ongoing compliance of the research with the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research*, the *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research*, applicable legal requirements, and with University policies, procedures and governance requirements.
- The Ethics Office may conduct audits on approved projects.
- The Chief Investigator has ultimate responsibility for the conduct of the research and is responsible for ensuring all others involved will conduct the research in accordance with the above.

This letter constitutes ethical approval only.

Please contact the Ethics Office should you require further information or clarification.

Sincerely,

[Redaction]

Professor Glen Davis
Chair
Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC 2)

The University of Sydney of Sydney HRECs are constituted and operate in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council's (NHMRC) [National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research \(2007\)](#) and the NHMRC's [Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research \(2007\)](#)

Thursday, 28 January 2021

Prof David Evans
Education; Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
Email: david.evans@sydney.edu.au

Dear David,

Your request to modify this project, which was submitted on 07/12/2020, has been considered.

This project has been approved to proceed with the proposed amendments.

Protocol Number: 2019/413
Protocol Title: Examining Approaches to the Kindergarten Literacy Block

Documents Approved:

Date Uploaded	Version Number	Document Name
07/12/2020	Version 6	Survey v6 2019/413 Clean

Please contact the ethics office should you require further information.

Sincerely,

[Redaction]

Dr Kieron Rooney
Acting Chair
Modification Review Committee (MRC 2)

The University of Sydney of Sydney HRECs are constituted and operate in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council's (NHMRC) [National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research \(2018\)](#) and the NHMRC's [Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research \(2018\)](#)

Appendix K

NSW Department of Education SERAP Approval and Extension, and Catholic Dioceses Ethics Approvals

| NSW Department of Education

Miss Corrina Goddard
[Redacted]

DOC21/431178
SERAP 2019232

Dear Miss Goddard

I refer to your application to conduct a research project in NSW government schools entitled *Examining Approaches to the Kindergarten Literacy Block*. I am pleased to inform you that your application has been approved.

You may contact principals of the nominated schools to seek their participation. You should include a copy of this letter with the documents you send to principals.

This approval will remain valid until 23 April 2022.

The following researchers or research assistants have fulfilled the Working with Children screening requirements to interact with or observe children for the purposes of this research for the period indicated:

Researcher name	WWCC	WWCC expires
Corrina Goddard	WWC0268857E	15-Feb-2024
David Evans	WWC0099948E	16-Sep-2023

I draw your attention to the following requirements for all researchers in NSW government schools:

- The privacy of participants is to be protected as per the NSW Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998.
- School principals have the right to withdraw the school from the study at any time. The approval of the principal for the specific method of gathering information must also be sought.
- The privacy of the school and the students is to be protected.
- The participation of teachers and students must be voluntary and must be at the school's convenience.
- Any proposal to publish the outcomes of the study should be discussed with the research approvals officer before publication proceeds.
- All conditions attached to the approval must be complied with.

When your study is completed please email your report to: det_serap@det.nsw.edu.au. You may also be asked to present on the findings of your research.

I wish you every success with your research.

Yours sincerely

[Redacted]

Dr Robert Stevens
Manager, Research
Strategic Analysis and Research
Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation
23 April 2021

education.nsw.gov.au

Strategic Analysis And Research

Centre For Education Statistics And Evaluation

NSW Department Of Education

Level 9, 105 Phillip Street, Parramatta NSW 2150 | GPO Box 33, Sydney NSW 2001

Telephone: 7814 2547 – Email: det_serap@det.nsw.edu.au



Miss Corrina Goddard
[Redacted]

DOC21/13936
SERAP 2019232

Dear Miss Goddard

I refer to your application for extension to the research project being conducted in NSW government schools entitled *Examining Approaches to the Kindergarten Literacy Block*. I am pleased to inform you that your application for extension has been approved.

This extension approval will remain valid until 23-Apr-2023.

The following researchers or research assistants have fulfilled the Working with Children screening requirements to interact with or observe children for the purposes of this research for the period indicated:

Researcher name	WWCC	WWCC expires
Corrina Goddard	WWC0268857E	15-Feb-2024
David Evans	WWC0099948E	16-Sep-2023

When your study is completed please upload your report to SERAP online <http://serap.det.nsw.edu.au>.

Yours sincerely

[Redacted]

Brianna McCourt
Senior Policy Analyst
Strategic Analysis and Research
Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation
1 March 2022

education.nsw.gov.au
Strategic Analysis And Research
Centre For Education Statistics And Evaluation
NSW Department Of Education
105 Phillip Street, Parramatta NSW 2150 | GPO Box 33, Sydney NSW 2001
Email: det.serap@det.nsw.edu.au





17 June 2021

Ms Corrina Goddard



Dear Corrina

Thank you for the submission of your application to conduct research in Archdiocesan Catholic Schools under the jurisdiction of the Sydney Catholic Schools.

Approval is given by Sydney Catholic Schools to conduct this study. This approval is granted subject to full compliance with NSW Child Protection and Commonwealth Privacy Act legislation.

It is the prerogative of any Principal or staff member whom you might approach to decline your invitation to be involved in this study or to withdraw from involvement at any time.

Any study involving the participation of students will require written, informed consent by parents/ guardians.

Permission is given for you to approach the Principals of the schools across Sydney Archdiocese, requesting participants for your study: **Examining Approaches to the Kindergarten Literacy Block**

COMMONWEALTH PRIVACY ACT

The privacy of the school and that of any school personnel or students involved in your study must, of course, be preserved at all times and comply with requirements under the Commonwealth Privacy Amendment (Private Sector) Act 2000. In complying with this legislation, Sydney Catholic Schools has decided that individual research participants must not be identified in the report.

FURTHER REQUIREMENTS

Data collectors with contact with students must complete the SCS Child Safe Communities (CSC) Contractors and Volunteers Working with Children (WWC) Accreditation Process (WWC Accreditation Process), which involves being inducted in child protection, reading and understanding the obligations and procedures under the relevant child protection legislation and SCS policies, as well as providing their Working With Children Check (WWCC) clearance number for verification by SCS. Please select the nature of your engagement (i.e. contractor or volunteer) to begin the WWC Accreditation Process. See this [Link](#) for details. The approval letter from this CSC must accompany the research approval letter.

It is a condition of approval that when your research has been completed you will forward a summary report of the findings and/or recommendations to this office as soon as results are to hand. All correspondence relating to this Research should note the following Reference Number: **201878**

You are required to have read through the Volunteer Resource kit [here](#). Please download a copy of the [2021 Safe School Expectations form](#) and take with you to each school who has agreed to participate in the Research.

I wish you well in this undertaking and look forward to learning about your findings. If you have any questions, please feel free to email research.centre@syd.catholic.edu and a member of our team will be in touch with you.

Yours sincerely

[Redaction]

Dr Kate O'Brien
Director: Education and Research

38 Renwick Street Leichhardt NSW 2040 • Ph (02) 9569 6111
PO Box 217 Leichhardt NSW 2040

www.sydcatholicsschools.nsw.edu.au

SYDNEY CATHOLIC SCHOOLS LIMITED ACN 619 137 343
AS TRUSTEE FOR THE SYDNEY CATHOLIC SCHOOLS TRUST ABN 26 150 447 002





RD2109

19/05/21

Corrina Goddard
University of Sydney



E: cgod4570@uni.sydney.edu.au

Dear Corrina Goddard,

Thank you for your Application to Conduct Research entitled: *Examining Approaches to the Kindergarten Literacy Block*, with primary schools under the auspices of Catholic Education, Diocese of Parramatta (CEDP).

This research has been approved.

This letter approves you and/or your research team to approach the principals of identified schools in the Parramatta Diocese.

Please note the following points in relation to the research request:

1. This approval letter must accompany any approach by your team to a school principal
2. It is the school principal who will provide final permission for research to be carried out in the school
3. Confidentiality needs to be observed in reporting and must comply with the requirements of the Commonwealth Privacy Amendment (Private Sector) Act 2000.
4. Feedback should be provided to schools and a copy of the findings of the research forwarded to the email address shown below.
5. Conduct of the research – with respect to Item 6a of the Application Form, the principal will provide guidance as to the current Covid-safe conditions for in-person contact between researcher and participants.

I look forward to the results of this study and wish you the best over the coming months. If you would like to discuss any aspect of this research in our diocese, please do not hesitate to contact me on 0408 658 902 or research@parra.catholic.edu.au.

Yours sincerely,

[Redaction]

Dr Gavin Hays
Head of Contemporary Learning and Research

Abstract

The aim of this research is to investigate the extent to which kindergarten teachers' classroom environments and practice, specifically in the context of literacy instruction, are informed by and embedded in an Inclusive Pedagogical Approach (Florian & Spratt, 2013). This research will investigate approaches to kindergarten literacy pedagogy through teacher questionnaires, classroom literacy observations and semi-structured interviews. Prior research in this field has focused on the merits of individual pedagogical approaches in isolation, without consideration of the broader, diverse classroom contexts in which these approaches must be understood and implemented. The results of this study may provide a more detailed understanding of teachers' knowledge, practice and beliefs with regard to literacy instruction.

Ethics Approval

Human Research Ethics Committee (University of Sydney)

Approval Date: 17/07/2019

Expiry Date: 17/07/2023

Reference: 2019/413

Schools

- All primary schools

Working With Children Check

Surname	Goddard
First Name	Corrina
WWC number or equivalent	WWC0268857E
Expiry	15/07/2024

Surname	Evans
First Name	David
WWC number or equivalent	WWC0099948E
Expiry	16/09/2023

Bethany Centre 470 Church Street Parramatta NSW 2150
 Locked Bag 4 North Parramatta NSW 1750
 9840 5600 www.parra.catholic.edu.au

Appendix L

Participant Information Statements and Consent Forms



Sydney School of Education and Social Work
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

ABN 15 211 513 464

David Evans
Professor of Special and Inclusive Education

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Facsimile: +61 2 9351 2606
Email: david.evans@sydney.edu.au
Web: <http://www.sydney.edu.au/>

Examining Approaches to the Kindergarten Literacy Block

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION STATEMENT

(1) What is this study about?

You are invited to take part in a research study about the kindergarten literacy block. The aim of this research is to examine kindergarten teachers' approaches to literacy pedagogy. Previous research in this field has focused on specific aspects of literacy in isolation. This study is significant in that it considers the literacy block more broadly in the context of the classroom.

You have been invited to participate in this study because you are a kindergarten teacher. This Participant Information Statement tells you about the research study. Knowing what is involved will help you decide if you want to take part in the research. Please read this sheet carefully and ask questions about anything that you don't understand or want to know more about.

Participation in this research study is voluntary.

By giving your consent to take part in this study you are telling us that you:

- ✓ Understand what you have read.
- ✓ Agree to take part in the research study as outlined below.
- ✓ Agree to the use of your personal information as described.

You will be given a copy of this Participant Information Statement to keep.

(2) Who is running the study?

The study is being carried out by the following researchers:

- Dr David Evans, Professor of Special Education, Sydney School of Education and Social Work, University of Sydney
- Corrina Goddard, PhD Candidate, Sydney School of Education and Social Work, University of Sydney

Corrina Goddard is conducting this study as the basis for her doctoral degree (PhD in Education) at The University of Sydney. This will take place under the supervision of David Evans, Professor of Special and Inclusive Education.

(3) What will the study involve for me?

We are asking kindergarten teachers to complete a survey online via a digital survey tool. The survey will investigate kindergarten teachers' understanding of literacy and approaches to the teaching of the literacy block, including teaching strategies.

(4) How much of my time will the study take?

It is anticipated the survey will take approximately 30 minutes to complete.

(5) Who can take part in the study?

This study involves teachers who are currently teaching Kindergarten.

(6) Do I have to be in the study? Can I withdraw from the study once I've started?

Being in this study is completely voluntary and you do not have to take part. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relationship with the researchers or anyone else at the University of Sydney, your school or the Department of Education.

If you decide to take part in the study and then change your mind later, you are free to withdraw at any time. You can do this by sending an email to the Chief Investigator of the study [david.evans@det.nsw.edu.au]. There are no consequences for exercising your right to withdraw.

Submitting your completed questionnaire is an indication of your consent to participate in the study. You can withdraw your responses any time before you have submitted the questionnaire. Once you have submitted it, your responses cannot be withdrawn because they are anonymous and therefore we will not be able to tell which one is yours.

(7) Are there any risks or costs associated with being in the study?

Aside from giving up your time, we do not expect that there will be any risks or costs associated with taking part in this study.

(8) Are there any benefits associated with being in the study?

We cannot guarantee that you will receive any direct benefits from being in the study.

(9) What will happen to information about me that is collected during the study?

By providing your consent, you are agreeing to us collecting personal information about you for the purposes of this research study. Your information will only be used for the purposes outlined in this Participant Information Statement, unless you consent otherwise.

Your information will be stored securely and your identity/information will be kept strictly confidential, except as required by law. Study findings may be published, but you will not be individually identifiable in these publications.

We will keep the information we collect for this study, and we may use it in future projects. By providing your consent you are allowing us to use your information in future projects. We don't know at this stage what these other projects will involve. We will seek ethical approval before using the information in these future projects.

(10) Can I tell other people about the study?

Yes, you are welcome to tell other people about the study.

(11) What if I would like further information about the study?

When you have read this information, Ms Corrina Goddard [cgod4570@uni.sydney.edu.au] will be available to discuss it with you further and answer any questions you may have. If you would like to

know more at any stage during the study, please feel free to contact David Evans [Professor of Special and Inclusive Education, david.evans@sydney.edu.au; +61 2 9351 8463].

(12) Will I be told the results of the study?

You have a right to receive feedback about the overall results of this study. You can tell us that you wish to receive feedback by ticking the box at the end of the survey. This feedback will be in the form of a one-page lay summary. You will receive this feedback after the study is finished.

(13) What if I have a complaint or any concerns about the study?

Research involving humans in Australia is reviewed by an independent group of people called a Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the HREC of the University of Sydney [Protocol No: 2019/413]. As part of this process, we have agreed to carry out the study according to the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007)*. This statement has been developed to protect people who agree to take part in research studies.

If you are concerned about the way this study is being conducted or you wish to make a complaint to someone independent from the study, please contact the university using the details outlined below. Please quote the study title and protocol number.

The Manager, Ethics Administration, University of Sydney:

- Telephone: +61 2 8627 8176
- Email: human.ethics@sydney.edu.au
- Fax: +61 2 8627 8177 (Facsimile)

This information sheet is for you to keep

ABN 15 211 513 464

David Evans
*Professor of Special and Inclusive Education*Room 707
Education Building | A35
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NSW 2006 AUSTRALIA
Telephone: +61 2 9351 8463
Facsimile: +61 2 9351 2606
Email: david.evans@sydney.edu.au
Web: <http://www.sydney.edu.au/>

Examining Approaches to the Kindergarten Literacy Block

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

I, [PRINT NAME], agree to take part in this research survey.

In giving my consent I state that:

- I understand the purpose of the study, what I will be asked to do, and any risks/benefits involved.
- I have read the Participant Information Statement and have been able to discuss my involvement in the study with the researchers if I wished to do so.
- The researchers have answered any questions that I had about the study and I am happy with the answers.
- I understand that being in this study is completely voluntary and I do not have to take part. My decision whether to be in the study will not affect my relationship with the researchers or anyone else at the University of Sydney, my school or the Department of Education, now or in the future.
- I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time.
- I understand that personal information about me that is collected over the course of this project will be stored securely and will only be used for purposes that I have agreed to. I understand that information about me will only be told to others with my permission, except as required by law.
- I understand that the results of this study may be published, and that publications will not contain my name or any identifiable information about me.

.....
Signature.....
PRINT name.....
Date

ABN 15 211 513 464

David Evans
*Professor of Special and Inclusive Education*Room 707
Education Building | A35
The University of Sydney
NSW 2006 AUSTRALIA
Telephone: +61 2 9351 8463
Facsimile: +61 2 9351 2606
Email: david.evans@sydney.edu.au
Web: <http://www.sydney.edu.au/>

Examining Approaches to the Kindergarten Literacy Block

PRINCIPAL CONSENT FORM

I, [PRINT NAME], agree to my school taking part in this research study.

In giving my consent I state that:

- I understand the purpose of the study, what teachers will be asked to do, and any risks/benefits involved.
- I have read the Participant Information Statements and have been able to discuss my school's involvement in the study with the researchers if I wished to do so.
- The researchers have answered any questions that I had about the study and I am happy with the answers.
- I understand that being in this study is completely voluntary and my school does not have to take part. My decision whether to be in the study will not affect my relationship with the researchers or anyone else at the University of Sydney, my school or the Department of Education, now or in the future.
- I understand that I can withdraw my school from the study at any time.
- I understand that the results of this study may be published, and that publications will not contain my name or any identifiable information about me or my school.

I consent to:

- Circulation of the online survey to kindergarten teachers at my school YES NO

I consent to the following being conducted at my school:

- Video, including audio, recording YES NO
- Audio-recording of interviews YES NO

I would like to receive feedback about the overall results of this study YES NO

If you answered YES, please indicate your preferred form of feedback and address:

Postal: _____

Email: _____

.....
Signature

.....
PRINT name

.....
Date

ABN 15 211 513 464

David Evans
Professor of Special and Inclusive Education

Room 707
Education Building | A35
The University of Sydney
NSW 2006 AUSTRALIA
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Facsimile: +61 2 9351 2606
Email: david.evans@sydney.edu.au
Web: <http://www.sydney.edu.au/>

Examining Approaches to the Kindergarten Literacy Block

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION STATEMENT

[Teacher]

(1) What is this study about?

You are invited to take part in a research study about the kindergarten literacy block. The aim of this research is to examine kindergarten teachers' approaches to literacy pedagogy. Previous research in this field has focused on specific aspects of literacy in isolation. This study is significant in that it considers the literacy block more broadly in the context of the classroom.

You have been invited to participate in this study because you are a kindergarten teacher and you volunteered to be contacted about the second phase of this research. This Participant Information Statement tells you about the research study. Knowing what is involved will help you decide if you want to take part in the research. Please read this sheet carefully and ask questions about anything that you don't understand or want to know more about.

Participation in this research study is voluntary.

By giving your consent to take part in this study you are telling us that you:

- ✓ Understand what you have read.
- ✓ Agree to take part in the research study as outlined below.
- ✓ Agree to the use of your personal information as described.

You will be given a copy of this Participant Information Statement to keep.

(2) Who is running the study?

The study is being carried out by the following researchers:

- Dr David Evans, Professor of Special Education, Sydney School of Education and Social Work, University of Sydney
- Corrina Goddard, PhD Candidate, Sydney School of Education and Social Work, University of Sydney

Corrina Goddard is conducting this study as the basis for her doctoral degree (PhD in Education) at The University of Sydney. This will take place under the supervision of David Evans, Professor of Special and Inclusive Education.

(3) What will the study involve for me?

We are asking you to allow us to collect audio-visual recordings of 4-5 literacy block sessions in your classroom. These recordings are needed so we can carefully examine your teaching of literacy, engagement with students, and the organisation of materials and activities in your literacy block. Your literacy block will be videoed using a recording system suitably located in your classroom that will follow your presence in the classroom using a device/tag worn by you.

After obtaining these audio-visual recordings, we would like to conduct an interview with you. This interview will ask you about your approach to literacy pedagogy with kindergarten students. You will be asked to discuss three students in your class and how you address their literacy needs: a student who is succeeding in literacy, a student who requires support in their literacy learning, and a student who is excelling in literacy acquisition.

The purpose of the interview is to provide further insight into your approach to planning and promoting literacy opportunities, and approaches to literacy pedagogy. This information will help to explain your thinking and decision-making behind the literacy practices observed in the audio-visual recordings.

(4) How much of my time will the study take?

This study will involve about 8 to 12 hours of your time. This will comprise 1-2 hours of acclimatising you and your students to the recording device in your class, then 4-5 literacy block sessions of about 1.5 to 2 hours. Times and dates for collection of audio-visual recordings will be negotiated with you to minimise disruption to your program.

The 1-2 hours of acclimatising you and your students to the recording device will include instructions about wearing and looking after the device during recording. The researcher will set up and pack up the recording device each time for the recordings of the literacy block sessions.

The interview will require between 45 and 60 minutes of your time. The time for conducting the interview will be negotiated with you, and conducted at your school.

(5) Who can take part in the study?

This study involves teachers who are currently teaching Kindergarten.

(6) Do I have to be in the study? Can I withdraw from the study once I've started?

Being in this study is completely voluntary and you do not have to take part. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relationship with the researchers or anyone else at the University of Sydney, your school or the Department of Education.

If you decide to take part in the study and then change your mind later, you are free to withdraw at any time. You can do this by sending an email to the Chief Investigator of the study [david.evans@det.nsw.edu.au]. There are no consequences for exercising your right to withdraw.

You are free to stop the *audio visual recordings* at any time. Unless you say you want us to keep them, any recordings will be erased and the information you have provided will not be included in the study results.

You are free to stop the *interview* at any time. Unless you say you want us to keep them, any recordings will be erased and the information you have provided will not be included in the study results. You may also refuse to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer during the interview.

- (7) **Are there any risks or costs associated with being in the study?**
Aside from giving up your time, we do not expect that there will be any risks or costs associated with taking part in this study.
- (8) **Are there any benefits associated with being in the study?**
We cannot guarantee that you will receive any direct benefits from being in the study.
- (9) **What will happen to information about me that is collected during the study?**
By providing your consent, you are agreeing to us collecting personal information about you for the purposes of this research study. Your information will only be used for the purposes outlined in this Participant Information Statement, unless you consent otherwise.

Your information will be stored securely and your identity/information will be kept strictly confidential, except as required by law. Audio-visual and interview recordings will be viewed/accessed only by the researchers. Study findings may be published including quotes from the interview transcripts, but you, your school and your students will not be identifiable in these publications.

We will keep the information we collect for this study, and we may use it in future projects. By providing your consent you are allowing us to use your information in future projects. We don't know at this stage what these other projects will involve. We will seek ethical approval before using the information in these future projects.

- (10) **Can I tell other people about the study?**
Yes, you are welcome to tell other people about the study.
- (11) **What if I would like further information about the study?**
When you have read this information, Ms Corrina Goddard [cgod4570@uni.sydney.edu.au] will be available to discuss it with you further and answer any questions you may have. If you would like to know more at any stage during the study, please feel free to contact David Evans [Professor of Special and Inclusive Education, david.evans@sydney.edu.au; +61 2 9351 8463].
- (12) **Will I be told the results of the study?**
You have a right to receive feedback about the overall results of this study. You can tell us that you wish to receive feedback by ticking the box at the end of the Participant Consent Form. This feedback will be in the form of a one-page lay summary. You will receive this feedback after the study is finished.
- (13) **What if I have a complaint or any concerns about the study?**
Research involving humans in Australia is reviewed by an independent group of people called a Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the HREC of the University of Sydney [Protocol No: 2019/413]. As part of this process, we have agreed to carry out the study according to the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007)*. This statement has been developed to protect people who agree to take part in research studies.

If you are concerned about the way this study is being conducted or you wish to make a complaint to someone independent from the study, please contact the university using the details outlined below. Please quote the study title and protocol number.

The Manager, Ethics Administration, University of Sydney:
• Telephone: +61 2 8627 8176

- Email: human.ethics@sydney.edu.au
- Fax: +61 2 8627 8177 (Facsimile)

This information sheet is for you to keep

David Evans
Professor of Special and Inclusive Education

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Education Building | A35
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NSW 2006 AUSTRALIA
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Examining Approaches to the Kindergarten Literacy Block

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM [Teacher Observations]

I, [PRINT NAME], agree to take part in this research study.

In giving my consent I state that:

- I understand the purpose of the study, what I will be asked to do, and any risks/benefits involved.
- I have read the Participant Information Statement and have been able to discuss my involvement in the study with the researchers if I wished to do so.
- The researchers have answered any questions that I had about the study and I am happy with the answers.
- I understand that being in this study is completely voluntary and I do not have to take part. My decision whether to be in the study will not affect my relationship with the researchers or anyone else at the University of Sydney, my school or the Department of Education, now or in the future.
- I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time.
- I understand that I may stop the interview at any time if I do not wish to continue, and that unless I indicate otherwise any recordings will then be erased and the information provided will not be included in the study. I also understand that I may refuse to answer any questions I don't wish to answer.
- I understand that personal information about me that is collected over the course of this project will be stored securely and will only be used for purposes that I have agreed to. I understand that information about me will only be told to others with my permission, except as required by law.
- I understand that the results of this study may be published, and that publications will not contain my name or any identifiable information about me or my school.

I consent to:

- Video, including audio, recording

YES NO

• Audio-recording of the interview YES NO

• Being contacted about future studies YES NO

I would like to review my interview transcripts YES NO

I would like to receive feedback about the overall results of this study YES NO

If you answered YES, please indicate your preferred form of feedback and address:

Postal: _____

Email: _____

.....
Signature

.....
PRINT name

.....
Date

ABN 15 211 513 464

David Evans
Professor of Special and Inclusive Education

Room 707
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Web: <http://www.sydney.edu.au/>

Examining Approaches to the Kindergarten Literacy Block

PARENTAL/CARER INFORMATION STATEMENT

(1) **What is this study about?**

Your child is invited to take part in a research study about the teaching of literacy in kindergarten and how it is approached in your child's classroom. Previous research in this field has focused on specific aspects of literacy (e.g. reading), and not the full literacy session or block. This study is significant in that it considers the literacy block more broadly in the context of your child's classroom.

Your child has been invited to participate in this study because his/her class teacher has volunteered to be involved in this project. While the focus of this study is the teacher, your child may be part of data that we capture (i.e. captured audio-visual recordings in the classroom) This Participant Information Statement tells you about the research study. Knowing what is involved will help you decide if you want to let your child take part in the research. Please read this sheet carefully and ask questions about anything that you don't understand or want to know more about.

Participation in this research study is voluntary.

By giving your consent you are telling us that you:

- ✓ Understand what you have read.
- ✓ Agree for your child to take part in the research study as outlined below.
- ✓ Agree to the use of your child's personal information as described.

You will be given a copy of this Parental Information Statement to keep.

(2) **Who is running the study?**

The study is being carried out by the following researchers:

- Dr David Evans, Professor of Special Education, Sydney School of Education and Social Work, University of Sydney
- Corrina Goddard, PhD Candidate, Sydney School of Education and Social Work, University of Sydney

Corrina Goddard is conducting this study as the basis for her doctoral degree (PhD in Education) at The University of Sydney. This will take place under the supervision of David Evans, Professor of Special and Inclusive Education.

(3) What will the study involve?

The study involves making audio-visual recordings of 4-5 literacy sessions planned and delivered by the teacher to your child's class. These are literacy sessions your child would normally participate in.

Audio-visual recordings will be made using a recording device located in the classroom. This device will 'follow' or rotate to capture what the teacher is doing in the classroom. All communication with students will be captured via a tag worn by the teacher. This tag will also alert the recording system to where the teacher is in the classroom.

In making these recordings, your child may be captured as part of the typical literacy routines, exchanges and learning activities led by the teacher. While this study is not looking specifically at your child, there is a chance he/she will be captured on recordings that will later be analysed.

At the end of the study, the researchers will interview the teacher about his/her understanding of literacy and approaches to teaching literacy in kindergarten. We may discuss some of the audio-visual recordings to gain further insight into the teacher's approach and decision-making.

(4) How much time will the study take?

The study will involve about 8-10 hours of your child's time. This includes 1-2 hours of acclimatising the class to the recording device in the classroom, followed by 4-5 literacy sessions of about 1.5 to 2 hours each.

(5) Who can take part in the study?

The focus of this study is the class teacher, and how they approach literacy instruction with kindergarten students. Therefore, any student who is part of a class in which we are working with teachers is welcome to be part of this study.

(6) Does my child have to be in the study? Can they withdraw from the study once they've started?

Being in this study is completely voluntary and your child does not have to take part. Your decision whether to let them participate will not affect your/their relationship with the researchers or anyone else at the University of Sydney or the school, now or in the future. If you do not give permission for your child to participate in the study, your child may be allocated to another Kindergarten classroom during recording of sessions in their regular class.

If you decide to let your child take part in the study and then change your mind later (or they no longer wish to take part), you are free to withdraw your child from future recordings at any time. You can do this by emailing Dr David Evans [david.evans@sydney.edu.au]. In this event, your child may be allocated to another Kindergarten classroom during recording of sessions in their regular class.

If you decide to withdraw your child from the study, we will not collect any more information about them. Any information that we have already collected, however, will be kept in our study records and may be included in the study results as it will not be possible to withdraw recordings that involve other students.

(7) Are there any risks or costs associated with being in the study?

We do not expect that there will be any risks or costs associated with taking part in this study. If you do not give permission for your child to participate in the study, your child may be allocated to another Kindergarten classroom following the same program during recording of sessions in their regular class.

- (8) **Are there any benefits associated with being in the study?**
We cannot guarantee that your child will receive any direct benefits from being in the study.
- (9) **What will happen to information that is collected during the study?**
By providing your consent, you are agreeing to us collecting personal information about your child for the purposes of this research study. Their personal information will only be used for the purposes outlined in this Participant Information Statement, unless you consent otherwise.

The information collected in this study involving your child will be part of audio-visual recordings. While the focus of this study is on the teacher, your child may be captured on recordings. The engagement of the teacher with students, including your child, is central to the outcome of this study.

Your child's information will be stored securely and their identity/information will be kept strictly confidential, except as required by law. All audio-visual recordings will be viewed only by the researchers. Study findings may be published, but your child will not be individually identifiable in these publications.

- (10) **Can I or my child tell other people about the study?**
Yes, you are welcome to tell other people about the study.
- (11) **What if we would like further information about the study?**
When you have read this information, Ms Corrina Goddard [cgod4570@uni.sydney.edu.au] will be available to discuss it with you further and answer any questions you may have. If you would like to know more at any stage during the study, please feel free to contact David Evans [Professor of Special and Inclusive Education, david.evans@sydney.edu.au; +61 2 9351 8463].
- (12) **Will we be told the results of the study?**
You and your child have a right to receive feedback about the overall results of this study. You can tell us that you wish to receive feedback by ticking the box on the Participant Consent Form. This feedback will be in the form of a one-page lay summary. You will receive this feedback after the study is finished.
- (13) **What if we have a complaint or any concerns about the study?**
Research involving humans in Australia is reviewed by an independent group of people called a Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the HREC of the University of Sydney [Protocol No: 2019/413]. As part of this process, we have agreed to carry out the study according to the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007)*. This statement has been developed to protect people who agree to take part in research studies.

If you (or your child) are concerned about the way this study is being conducted or wish to make a complaint to someone independent from the study, please contact the university using the details outlined below. Please quote the study title and protocol number.

The Manager, Ethics Administration, University of Sydney:

- Telephone: +61 2 8627 8176
- Email: human.ethics@sydney.edu.au
- Fax: +61 2 8627 8177 (Facsimile)

This information sheet is for you to keep

ABN 15 211 513 464

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Web: <http://www.sydney.edu.au/>

Examining Approaches to the Kindergarten Literacy Block

PARENT/CARER CONSENT FORM

[Parent/Carer]

I, _____, consent to my child
[PRINT PARENT'S/CARER'S NAME]

_____ participating in this research study.
[PRINT CHILD'S NAME]

In giving my consent I state that:

- I understand the purpose of the study, what my child will be asked to do, and any risks/benefits involved.
- I have read the Participant Information Statement and discussed it with my child. I have been able to discuss my child's involvement in the study with the researchers if I wished to do so.
- The researchers have answered any questions that I had about the study and I am happy with the answers.
- I understand that being in this study is completely voluntary and my child does not have to take part. My decision whether to let them take part in the study will not affect our relationship with the researchers or anyone else at the University of Sydney or the school, now or in the future.
- I understand that I can withdraw my child from future recordings at any time.
- I understand that personal information about my child that is collected over the course of this project will be stored securely and will only be used for purposes that I have agreed to. I understand that information about my child will only be told to others with my permission, except as required by law.
- I understand that the results of this study may be published, and that publications will not contain my child's name or any identifiable information about my child, their teacher or their school.

I consent to:

Video, including audio, recording of my child

YES NO

Would you like to receive feedback about the overall results of this study?

YES NO

If you answered YES, please indicate your preferred form of feedback and address:

Postal: _____

Email: _____

Parent's/carer's signature:

.....
Signature

.....
PRINT name

.....
Date

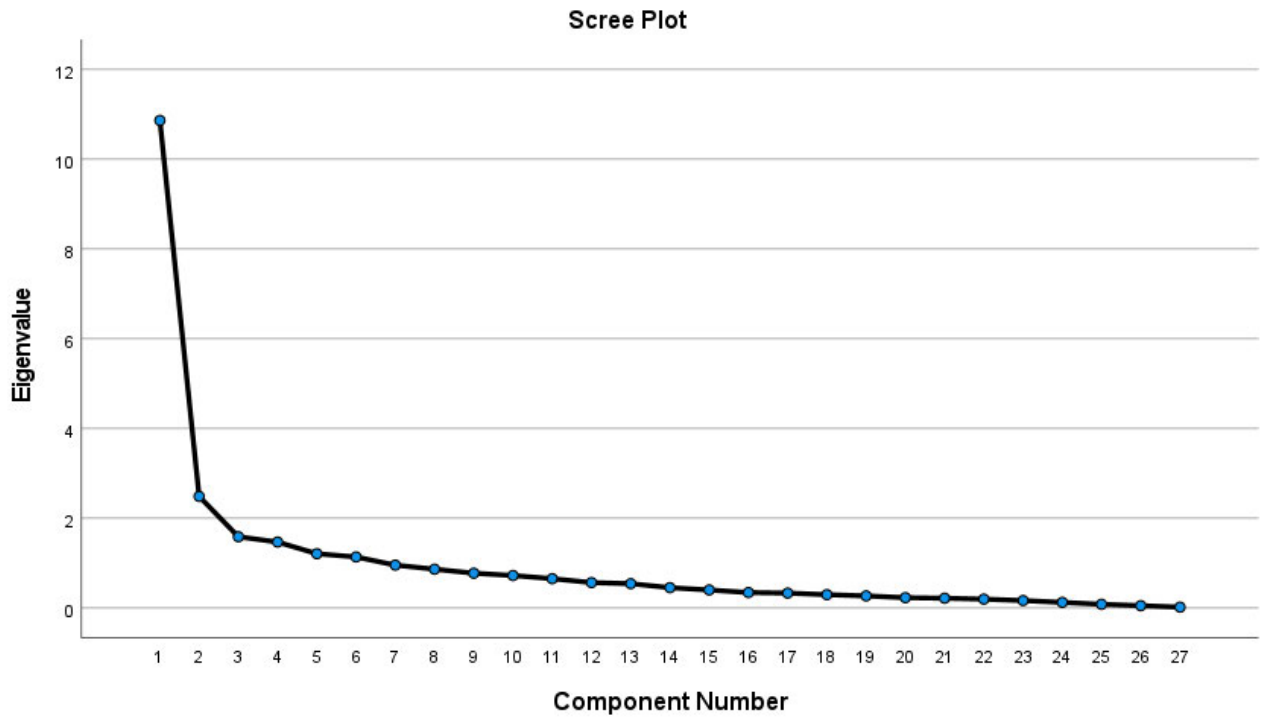
Child's signature:

.....
Signature

.....
PRINT name

.....
Date

Appendix M
Principal Component Analysis Scree Plot



Appendix N
Principal Component Analysis Component Matrix of Unrotated Loadings

Component Matrix^a

	Component					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
c) Phonics	.876					
1 Reading and writing are related processes.	.875					
b) Phonological awareness	.873					
d) Vocabulary	.831	-.337				
e) Fluency	.822	-.342				
f) Comprehension	.806					
2 I plan the literacy session based on the learning needs of my students.	.801					
14 I use my knowledge of my students literacy performance when planning for teaching.	.775					
16 I provide literacy tasks in which students can participate at their own level of understanding.	.739					
3 Evidence-based approaches to literacy instruction inform my teaching.	.707			-.322		
7 Literacy routines (e.g. reading groups) are consistent and understood by the children in my class.	.705					
10 My literacy instruction sometimes prioritises certain elements (e.g. phonics, comprehension) depending on the needs of my students.	.699					
4 The following six key elements of literacy must be taught explicitly and systematically: a) Oral language	.690	-.362				
5 I keep up to date with research in the field of literacy.	.675	-.303				
18 All students are capable of becoming literate.	.646					

9 I use a variety of student groupings to teach reading and writing, including whole class, guided and independent.	.644	.338	-.359			
13 My literacy instruction changes according to student assessment.	.594					
11 At the end of each literacy session, I reflect on the effectiveness of my instructional decisions.	.574			-.401	.325	
15 Children in my class take some responsibility for their own literacy learning.	.542					
b) Their home literacy environment		.682	.481			
c) Giftedness		.565	.558			
19 Childrens home literacy environment impacts their literacy development.	.453	.462	.300			
20 Some students succeed or excel in literacy because of: a) My teaching			.431	-.420	.305	
8 I schedule time every day for student-selected reading, writing, speaking and listening experiences.	.339	.404	-.316	.433		
12 My overall approach to literacy instruction is the same each year.				.414	.617	.462
17 If a child is struggling with literacy acquisition, support is provided by a different teacher in a withdrawal setting.					-.319	.657
6 I have autonomy to plan what and how I teach for literacy in my classroom.	.362				.327	-.553

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

a. 6 components extracted.

Appendix O
Principal Component Analysis Pattern Matrix and Structure Matrix

4a Knowing
 4b Doing
 4c Believing

Pattern Matrix^a

	Component		
	1	2	3
d) Vocabulary	.924	-.032	.054
e) Fluency	.905	.003	.008
b) Phonological awareness	.880	.077	.068
c) Phonics	.867	.095	.075
f) Comprehension	.844	.039	.047
4 The following six key elements of literacy must be taught explicitly and systematically: a) Oral language	.830	-.084	.000
5 I keep up to date with research in the field of literacy.	.724	.077	-.094
1 Reading and writing are related processes.	.714	.314	.022
3 Evidence-based approaches to literacy instruction inform my teaching.	.598	.273	-.078
2 I plan the literacy session based on the learning needs of my students.	.578	.303	.184
18 All students are capable of becoming literate.	.425	.400	-.059
11 At the end of each literacy session, I reflect on the effectiveness of my instructional decisions.	.409	.288	.002
12 My overall approach to literacy instruction is the same each year	-.184	.175	-.013
9 I use a variety of student groupings to teach reading and writing, including whole class, guided and independent.	.116	.764	-.003
16 I provide literacy tasks in which students can participate at their own level of understanding.	.290	.675	-.003
8 I schedule time every day for student-selected reading, writing, speaking and listening experiences.	-.142	.639	.042
10 My literacy instruction sometimes prioritises certain elements (e.g. phonics, comprehension) depending on the needs of my students.	.253	.637	.058
14 I use my knowledge of my students literacy performance when planning for teaching.	.329	.617	.117
15 Children in my class take some responsibility for their own literacy learning.	.126	.562	.087
7 Literacy routines (e.g. reading groups) are consistent and understood by the children in my class.	.345	.562	-.012
13 My literacy instruction changes according to student assessment.	.253	.424	.187
6 I have autonomy to plan what and how I teach for literacy in my classroom.	.030	.414	.122
b) Their home literacy environment	-.248	.063	.840
c) Giftedness	-.134	-.066	.828
19 Childrens home literacy environment impacts their literacy development.	.101	.222	.588
20 Some students succeed or excel in literacy because of: a) My teaching	.123	-.118	.524
17 If a child is struggling with literacy acquisition, support is provided by a different teacher in a withdrawal setting.	.031	.040	.185

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Oblimin with Kaiser Normalization.

a. Rotation converged in 17 iterations.

Structure Matrix

	Component		
	1	2	3
d) Vocabulary	.923	.306	.218
b) Phonological awareness	.920	.403	.250
c) Phonics	.914	.418	.259
e) Fluency	.907	.323	.176
f) Comprehension	.866	.347	.213
1 Reading and writing are related processes.	.828	.571	.233
4 The following six key elements of literacy must be taught explicitly and systematically: a) Oral language	.800	.207	.133
5 I keep up to date with research in the field of literacy.	.733	.308	.059
2 I plan the literacy session based on the learning needs of my students.	.719	.552	.367
3 Evidence-based approaches to literacy instruction inform my teaching.	.680	.464	.101
18 All students are capable of becoming literate.	.554	.534	.120
11 At the end of each literacy session, I reflect on the effectiveness of my instructional decisions.	.511	.432	.150
12 My overall approach to literacy instruction is the same each year.	-.124	.108	-.003
9 I use a variety of student groupings to teach reading and writing, including whole class, guided and independent.	.384	.804	.209
16 I provide literacy tasks in which students can participate at their own level of understanding.	.527	.777	.220
14 I use my knowledge of my students literacy performance when planning for teaching.	.568	.762	.333
10 My literacy instruction sometimes prioritises certain elements (e.g. phonics, comprehension) depending on the needs of my students.	.487	.740	.264
7 Literacy routines (e.g. reading groups) are consistent and understood by the children in my class.	.540	.680	.193
15 Children in my class take some responsibility for their own literacy learning.	.340	.628	.251
8 I schedule time every day for student-selected reading, writing, speaking and listening experiences.	.091	.600	.175
13 My literacy instruction changes according to student assessment.	.437	.560	.340
6 I have autonomy to plan what and how I teach for literacy in my classroom.	.198	.455	.231
b) Their home literacy environment	-.070	.186	.810
c) Giftedness	-.004	.094	.786
19 Childrens home literacy environment impacts their literacy development.	.288	.405	.662
20 Some students succeed or excel in literacy because of: a) My teaching	.179	.056	.518
17 If a child is struggling with literacy acquisition, support is provided by a different teacher in a withdrawal setting.	.079	.097	.200

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Oblimin with Kaiser Normalization.

Appendix P
CLOS-R Frequency Scores by Video

Table P1

Augustine School Frequency of CLOS-R Teaching Practices

Teaching practice	Video 1	Video 2	Video 3	Video 4	Video 5	Total
1. Rapport	2	0	3	1	1	7
2. Credibility	8	12	5	5	5	35
3. Citizenship	1	1	2	2	2	8
4. Purpose	1	0	1	2	0	4
5. Substance	0	0	1	0	0	1
6. Explanation word	17	17	7	12	6	59
7. Explanation sentence	5	4	4	2	4	19
8. Explanation text	5	4	8	5	5	27
9. Metalanguage	0	2	1	2	2	7
10. Oral language	4	6	5	3	4	22
11. Oral/written language	1	0	5	3	4	13
12. Awareness	3	8	7	3	9	30
13. Environment	0	1	3	0	0	4
14. Structure	7	9	5	7	7	35
15. Independence	0	4	4	1	5	14
16. Pace	2	1	4	0	1	8
17. Transition	8	6	5	7	4	30
18. Attention	9	14	7	10	4	44
19. Stimulation	3	2	5	2	0	12
20. Assessment	1	1	1	0	0	3
21. Scaffolding	8	5	7	7	8	35
22. Feedback	3	7	10	3	13	36
23. Responsiveness	1	1	5	0	6	13
24. Persistence	3	5	2	1	0	11
25. Challenge	0	1	3	0	3	7
26. Inclusion	7	5	4	5	3	24
27. Connection	1	2	3	1	2	9

Table P2*Kings School Frequency of CLOS-R Teaching Practices*

Teaching practice	Video 1	Video 2	Video 3	Video 4	Video 5	Total
1. Rapport	4	5	6	1	2	18
2. Credibility	2	7	6	4	5	24
3. Citizenship	1	4	4	1	3	13
4. Purpose	2	3	3	1	1	10
5. Substance	1	0	0	0	0	1
6. Explanation word	2	20	11	1	6	40
7. Explanation sentence	7	0	5	3	0	15
8. Explanation text	7	2	0	11	1	21
9. Metalanguage	3	2	2	3	0	10
10. Oral language	1	8	1	3	6	19
11. Oral/written language	6	5	3	1	3	18
12. Awareness	4	10	6	4	9	33
13. Environment	6	6	4	0	9	25
14. Structure	12	19	14	4	9	58
15. Independence	7	13	4	3	4	31
16. Pace	3	1	1	0	1	6
17. Transition	5	6	5	3	0	19
18. Attention	0	6	2	7	1	16
19. Stimulation	1	6	1	2	2	12
20. Assessment	1	0	0	0	1	2
21. Scaffolding	3	7	4	4	3	21
22. Feedback	6	7	10	3	9	35
23. Responsiveness	2	1	0	5	1	9
24. Persistence	2	6	0	0	1	9
25. Challenge	0	3	0	1	1	5
26. Inclusion	7	10	3	2	11	33
27. Connection	2	2	1	0	2	7

Table P3*Riverbank School Frequency of CLOS-R Teaching Practices*

Teaching practice	Video 1	Video 2	Video 3	Total
1. Rapport	3	4	7	14
2. Credibility	3	4	5	12
3. Citizenship	3	2	0	5
4. Purpose	0	1	1	2
5. Substance	0	0	0	0
6. Explanation word	12	9	9	30
7. Explanation sentence	1	6	1	8
8. Explanation text	8	3	6	17
9. Metalanguage	0	2	0	2
10. Oral language	7	2	3	12
11. Oral/written language	2	4	2	8
12. Awareness	8	9	8	25
13. Environment	0	0	4	4
14. Structure	13	14	7	34
15. Independence	12	5	5	22
16. Pace	1	4	2	7
17. Transition	5	5	6	16
18. Attention	4	4	3	11
19. Stimulation	1	1	2	4
20. Assessment	5	4	2	11
21. Scaffolding	8	12	6	26
22. Feedback	12	13	10	35
23. Responsiveness	2	1	2	5
24. Persistence	3	2	2	7
25. Challenge	4	3	3	10
26. Inclusion	8	4	3	15
27. Connection	3	0	1	4