SUBMISSION TO THE EXPERT PANEL FOR THE ACT INQUIRY INTO LITERACY AND NUMERACY

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I offer this submission as an educator who has extensive experience as an early years teacher, literacy coach, school leader, curriculum writer, and literacy consultant working across Australia. I lead the Early Years Literacy Initiative (EYLI) across the ACT Directorate beginning in 2017-2022.

The EYLI began as a pilot project in 2017 with an initial six schools. It expanded to involve nearly every ACT Education Directorate school over the next five years. 20 schools engaged in Phases 1, 2, 3 in 2017/18, 28 schools in Phases 4, 5, 6 in 2019, 25 schools in 2020 and 16 schools in 2021/22. In 2021 the initiative was extended to include years P-6 to enable schools to develop a whole school approach to literacy. Schools included early childhood schools, primary schools, specialist schools and P-10 schools. A number of these schools engaged with the Initiative in more than one phase.

The framework of the 10 Essential Instructional Practices in Literacy (EIPs) underpinned all areas of the Initiative. Through participation in the initiative, ACT Directorate schools had the opportunity to explore each practice with an expectation it will be embedded in their daily instruction. School leaders considered organisational practices that enhance literacy instruction and engaged in check-in processes to monitor the impact of their actions. The goal was for these practices to be implemented for every child in every classroom, throughout every day. Leaders and teachers used their 'professional learning community' processes to monitor the impact of their teaching on student literacy learning and intentionally planning to meet learner needs. Full implementation and support were affected by staffing shortages and the pandemic.

Section 2: The teaching of literacy and numeracy in ACT public schools

1.   What supports are required to ensure the literacy and numeracy outcomes within the Australian Curriculum are met? Are there examples of system-wide or school-based supports that have been found to be particularly effective?

The art of teaching is to dance between the key components of literacy learning adjusting the focus according to the instructional text and learner needs, (Australian Government's *In Teachers Hands* research, 2005). To choreograph such learning, it is essential to support teachers to understand what it means to 'be literate' and to see the literacy learning opportunities within every curriculum area. To be successful in this endeavour, the ACT must continue to develop leaders' pedagogical content knowledge about literacy learning, and leadership practices, such as coaching.

The ACARA 2023 website states: The Australian Curriculum can be used flexibly by schools to develop teaching and learning programs that meet the educational needs and interests of their students. The curriculum comes alive in the hands of teachers, who make expert decisions about the learning experiences each student needs to progress. Support teachers to bring the curriculum alive by:

- Expecting that teachers refer to the Australian Curriculum in their planning documentation. (For example, the curriculum mandates the teaching of phonics and word knowledge from foundation year onwards however it also highlights that phonics, comprehension and critical reading need to be developed concurrently. Purposeful planning will prevent poor practice.)
- Providing time and opportunities for teachers to explore the Australian Curriculum expectations for their year levels with the lens of 'what does this look like in the classroom'? (This will support the gap between knowing and doing.)
- Providing opportunities for teachers to work collaboratively to make connections between the Literacy and Numeracy standards; with time to think about 'what does that look like' in practice; and how does this relate to what the Australian Curriculum outlines we need to teach not only in English/literacy but in all learning areas?

- Encouraging the use of 'project-based' learning or similar to support the use of literacy and numeracy skills in meaningful contexts. Research suggests that this increases motivation, engagement and learning outcomes for students as it provides a context of use for the literacy and numeracy skills students are developing.

2. What teaching practices have been found to consistently improve literacy and numeracy outcomes?

The framework of the 10 Essential Instructional Practices in Literacy (EIPs) which underpinned all areas of the Early Years Initiative in the ACT includes Essential Instructional Practices in Literacy which have been identified by extensive research conducted by Prof Nell Duke et al (General Education Leadership Network, Michigan, 2016 and updated in 2023). Whilst these practices are not the only literacy practices that should be used in classrooms, these practices are essential to improving literacy outcomes. These practices align with the Australian Curriculum and Literacy Learning Progressions. It is important to note that such literacy practices need to be implemented for every child, every day, right across the day – meaning being connected to all learning areas. Research analysis has produced Essential Instructional Practices for groups of learners from 'Birth to Year 12'.

- Pre-K Essential Instructional Practices in Early Literacy 2023
- K-3 Essential Instructional Practices in Literacy 2023
- Grades 4-5 Essential Instructional Practices in Literacy
- Grades 6-12 Essential Instructional Practices in Discipline Literacy

These practices do not constitute a program, nor do they recommend any commercial programs, rather they offer flexibility and are a recommended framework for schools to use to ensure greater precision in practice.

Leader engagement and leader co-learning was crucial to successful implementation of the improvement strategies promoted through the Early Years Literacy Initiative. A strong layered approach to implementation reached school leaders, coaches and teachers as well as School Psychologists, ESO branches and mainstream and specialist schools building coherence across the system.

Other leading research on effective teaching practice includes:
- Ontario Canada- The Literacy Strategy led by Dr Mary Jean Gallagher.
- United Kingdom- research of Debra Myhill, Teresa Cremin
- Effective conditions for learning, for example, Gambrell, L. (2011), Cambourne and Crouch (2023).

In recent years, the science of reading has been promoted insinuating that previously literacy instruction had not been structured or guided by research. The term science of reading means different things to different people. However, it is important to note that the term refers to a very broad set of scientific findings and accumulation of an incredible amount of scientific knowledge over a period of 40 years, 'a corpus of objective investigation and accumulation of reliable evidence about how humans learn to read and how reading should be taught,' (Goodwin & Jiminez, 2020, p. S7). It is more appropriate to refer to this body of knowledge as the sciences of reading as many fields contribute to knowledge for the teaching of reading (e.g., education, psychology, linguistics, neuroscience, sociology, biology),' (Gabriel, 2020).

The sciences of reading encompass a range of theoretical approaches to the teaching of reading all of which share common components and overlapping process, but each build upon and elaborate on earlier models of reading to reveal the complex nature of reading.

- Simple view of reading, (Gough & Tunmer, 1986; Hoover & Gough, 1990)
- Scarborough's reading rope which illustrates the complexity and interconnectedness of skills needed to become a proficient reader, (Scarborough, 2001)
- Cognitive Foundations Framework and its knowledge skill set, (Hoover & Tunmer, 2020)
- The Active View of Reading Model, (Duke and Cartwright, 2021)
- Direct and indirect effects model of reading (DIER), (Kim, 2023)

The ACT Directorate should ensure its literacy practices align with the most recent models such as the Active View of Reading that outlines the complexity of reading. The key researcher for the 10 Essential Practices in Literacy, Professor Nell Duke, along with colleagues Burns and Cartwright, developed the Active View of Reading. This model requires educators to provide instruction in skills that bridge and contribute to both word recognition and language comprehension, in addition it highlights that self-regulation is an active process and crucial component of reading. Such instruction will provide the structures for successful reading.

The panel should pay close attention to the forth coming (June 2024) publication by authors Dominic Wyse and Charlotte Hacking who call for a paradigm shift in literacy education. The publication shows how and why education policies should be improved on the basis of unique analyses of research evidence from experimental trials, and the new theory and model *The Double Helix of Reading and Writing*. Teachers must teach about the reciprocity between reading and writing.

### 3.	Are there curriculum and teaching practices, approaches or supports in ACT public schools that are working well or are not having the desired impact? Are there any lessons the Education Directorate can take away from what is/is not working, and what should they stop, start or expand upon to improve outcomes?

After close on five years with over 70 schools, 1000s of teachers and 100s of leaders the Early Years Literacy Initiative (which included Preschool to Year 6 in the final two years) has shown that the leader engagement (knowledge building, collaboration and check in processes) and teacher engagement processes (professional learning, action research, PLCs) developed leader and teacher knowledge of literate practices and improved alignment and confidence to deliver effective instruction. Student learning was significantly impacted by this changed practice as evidenced by the 'small data' formative assessment processes used for ongoing monitoring of student progress, and the way larger data sets in literacy were trending in 2022.

The 10 EIPs in Literacy were shown to be as effective in specialist schools as they were in mainstream learning environments. Inclusion of all professionals involved in the education process (e.g. School Psychologists and ESO branches) built collaboration and cohesion in expectations, language and practice across the system.

Critical friends of the ACT Education Director, Dr Mary Jean Gallagher and Emeritus Helen Timperley have worked closely with the Directorate in recent years and shared insights supporting the continued implementation of the 10 EIPs in ACT primary schools.

> a)	*"Two sets of activities recently undertaken are particularly helpful in engaging more principals and school teams in leading appropriate work: the involvement of a growing number of schools in the literacy initiatives and the identification and highlighting of the work being done by some schools as potential models of successful approaches to reform. These projects serve to identify the improvement work as the core work of the district, work in which increased numbers of schools are engaged because it results in better learning and greater success for students. This is exactly the sense of momentum*

that should be developed and expanded if the reforms are to successfully spread across the system" (Mary Jean Gallagher 2019).

b) *"The ACT Directorate has been very active in supporting schools through a number of initiatives to make reporting systems more efficient, and leadership more effective through the "Empowered Learning Professionals Leadership Plan" (2018) together with a focus on high quality pedagogical practices. The quality of professional practices and their contribution to profiles of student learning and well-being are analysed. The analysis is based on collaboratively agreed criteria informed by the research literature on effective leadership, teaching and learning e.g. The 10 Essential Instructional Literacy Practices. Linking these practices to profiles of student learning is primarily an interpretive process but central to the idea is that improvement is about changing leadership and teaching practices in order to enhance student outcomes" (Helen Timperley 2021).*

Approaches to the texts that children access as they are learning to read vary across schools and sometimes within schools in the ACT. The issue of selecting texts to support emerging readers has a long history even though it is currently presented as a new consideration for our teaching practice. Phonetically regular texts (decodable texts) were frequently used to support reading development (e.g. Dan can fan Nan) as basal readers during the late 60's and 70's (Pearson, 2002). This form of text has continued to be used in countries across the world in the recent and not so recent past. The primary distinguishing feature of decodable texts since 1980's has been the design strategy of aligning the phonics content and sight words in individual books with previous classroom instruction—a design strategy called lesson-to-text matching, (Frey 2012).

The purpose of these kinds of texts is to provide children with an opportunity to practise what they have been taught explicitly in the classroom and to allow them to experience success in reading independently very early in reading instruction. However, it is possible that controlling the text, with the intention of simplifying the vocabulary, may result in many of the words having a similar prosody or stress pattern, thereby making it more difficult to comprehend for some (Goswami et al. 2016). These texts imply that reading is about isolated letters rather than orthographic structures.

ACT Directorate need to note that while 'texts (for children beginning to read) need to reward attention to letters in words by being mostly decodable based on the letter-sound relationships the children know so far…they also need to make sense so children can successfully monitor their comprehension—and they need to be worthy of comprehending, so that students want to figure out the meaning of unfamiliar words and the text as a whole.' Duke (Keynote address, national ALEA conference, Canberra 2023). If children are not monitoring for meaning, they cannot confirm that their decoding efforts are accurate (Johnson 2020).

Duke and Mesmer 2018, have sage advice for the ACT, be mindful that once children have learned a core set of grapheme-phoneme correspondences, they get no more opportunity to practise these in books marketed as decodable books than they do in other books they might be reading, that is, books not specifically written with decodability in mind. Mesmer, 2019 goes on to remind teachers that it is not necessary to have sets of decodable texts with hundreds of sequential books that stretch over an entire year.

ACT should provide clear messaging to schools to assist them to make informed choices regarding the need to buy texts for children at the beginning to read stage that are worthy of comprehending, are engaging and provide opportunities for children to develop a love of reading while developing the skills to read effectively.

4. Does the Education Directorate's approach of suggesting but not mandating teaching approaches support improved learning outcomes or would a greater degree of evidence-based prescription be more effective?

The ACT Education Directorate's school improvement mantra of 'precision not prescription' should be valued and continued. Differentiation according to student learning needs requires precision in classroom practice. Initiatives such as the Early Years Literacy Initiative can strengthen the capability of all teachers and all leaders to exercise precision in practice. By providing a clear framework or structure, in this case the Essential Instructional Practices in Literacy, and implementation guidance, coherence across schools can be garnered. Such a framework should enable teachers (working in PLCs) to use their professional knowledge from a suite of resources to meet the learning needs of the students in their context.

5. Are there examples of system-wide approaches to literacy and numeracy teaching in other jurisdictions that the Panel should examine?

- Victoria does not mandate a single approach to literacy instruction and it is the top performing state in NAPLAN in Australia. Teachers are supported by the provision of comprehensive resources, including videos and well-informed, quality literacy approaches.
- The Open University in the UK has successfully supported a broad reading for pleasure initiative (Mercers, 2023, Greene, 2022, Cremin, 2020) along with a Teachers as Readers project – and such approaches have been supported by cognitive science evidence findings (Sun et al., 2023)
- The Northern Territory has recently funded all new educators to join a professional learning association such as the AAMT and ALEA and PETAA in order to build teacher's knowledge, connectedness and identity as professionals.

6. How can school leaders and the Education Directorate be confident of what is being taught and the effectiveness of how it is being taught?

The ACT leadership strategy of using Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) continues to support ACT school leaders to see where to focus next in their school. This process has enabled the Directors of School Improvement to provide tailored supports to schools.

The ACT Directorate's precision question of 'What's working, for whom, under what circumstances and why?' drives leadership conversations and teacher professional learning community data conversations. It places the focus squarely on the impact on learning. Teachers are constantly reflecting on 'have I made enough of a difference?

ACT has been working on implementing Helen Timperley's Spiral of Inquiry to support the effectiveness of professional learning processes. This framework enables leaders and teachers to engage with student data and determine the teacher learning needs that need to be addressed in order to improve student learning outcomes.

The ACT developed What to Look for in Effective Reading/Effective Writing classrooms checklists to support schools to increase consistency and coherence of approach.

By building the capability and literacy pedagogical knowledge of each school's literacy champion/s, and by providing time for these leaders to meet together to discuss 'What is working for whom? And Why?' will support cohesion of literacy instruction, accountability and system-ness across the ACT.

Section 3: The assessment of literacy and numeracy

7. What approaches to assessment and screening would provide the most useful data to support educators and school leaders in understanding student progress, identifying need and ensuring consistent improvement in literacy and numeracy outcomes?

Harris and Jones (2020) make the case to 'realign education systems more closely to the needs of all young people (not just some) and to move away from large-scale international assessments and toward smaller data sets that are contextually appropriate and illuminate specific learner needs (Sharratt, 2018).'

A Grattan Institute Report (2018) identified a need for greater focus on student growth rather than achievement and for teachers to develop data literacy skills. A focus on growth will help to address the equity gap.

Sahlberg (2012) asserts the need to focus on small data and example of such data that should be adopted by the ACT is the [Listening While Reading; Watching While Writing](#) protocol developed by Professor Nell Duke. It is an assessment and monitoring tool designed to guide observation and place attention on specific aspects of student's reading and writing. It is a tool that is used during the process of reading and writing rather than administered as a test. Importantly the tool provides information that will guide next steps in instruction. It has been adapted and successfully implemented in a couple of ACT schools.

8. How do educators and school leaders currently understand and use student data to improve student learning outcomes and are any additional supports needed?

See response to No. 6. The NAPLAN 'big data' should be a starting point for the precision question of 'What is working, for whom, under what circumstances and why,' and not an end point.

9. What is the most effective way for schools to communicate student learning progress to students and their families to ensure a shared understanding of outcomes in relation to literacy and numeracy? Are there any effective approaches that are efficient and minimise impacts on teacher workload?

Using digital portfolios and apps is an effective way of sharing an individual student's learning. They are time efficient as students can be involved in creating such a portfolio of learning. As an Education System we need to ensure that what is being assess and captured is what we value, and not just the learning that is easy to tick off and assess.

Increase parent, child, teacher interactions both face to face and through the use of communication apps such as Seesaw so parents are able to participate as equal partners in collaboration with teachers to support their child's literacy and numeracy learning.

My research gathering for the Learning in Families Together initiative in Tasmania in 2015, included the following finding. Jeynes (2012) research indicates that parent involvement programs emphasising **parent-child shared reading** has an effect size of 0.51SD and parent-school partnerships (any efforts that **support parent and teacher collaboration as equal partners** in enhancing children's academic and/or behaviour outcomes) has an effect size of 0.35SD. These had the larger effect size compared to programs emphasising checking homework 0.27 SD and communication between parents and teachers 0.28SD.

10. Are there any examples of effective system-wide and school-based assessment, data informed teaching, and reporting for literacy and numeracy that the Panel should examine?

Focus on formative assessment processes – 'The fundamental purpose of assessment in education is to establish and understand the points that students (either as individuals or groups) have reached in their learning at the time of assessment' Masters, (2015).

Used alongside a set of clearly defined and challenging learning intentions, formative assessment is continuous feedback that allows a teacher to evaluate the impact of their teaching and to provide a student with ways to move their learning forward.

The ACT Directorate should further develop and strengthen a long-range view of literacy outcomes, including developing educational cultures that value reading and writing in and of themselves, and so that a love of reading and writing is an expected quality of our teachers. This should be instilled in AITSL and other articulations of the professional attributes we seek from the profession.

Section 4: Supporting all students to achieve literacy and numeracy outcomes

11.   What evidence-based supports and interventions are most effective for supporting students who have not yet reached expected proficiency in literacy and numeracy? Are there any particular supports that are more effective for students from specific equity cohorts (e.g. EALD, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students)?

Although a 3-tiered approach to instruction is a necessity for all schools, the truth is that supplemental instruction can never compensate for inadequate core instruction (Tier 1). Fisher & Frey (2010) remind us that we need to emphasise formative assessment (strengths-based approach) and refine core instruction rather than just relying only on multiple layers of intervention. Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions that ensure continuity and alignment among all levels of instruction enhance learning and enable every student to have opportunities to participate in rich literacy experiences. These Tiers of support should be implemented and monitored by expert teachers. Too often striving learners receive a reduced curriculum with learning tasks that are drill and practice delivered by para-professionals rather than tasks that require thinking and open-ended creative learning that other students are offered.

This is an equity issue. Engagement is enhanced by providing learning opportunities that respect student interests and needs and which demonstrate high expectations. Such tasks bolster agency in their own learning growing each student's realisation of what they might achieve.

Early equity for disadvantaged children can be achieved through high quality early learning environments and pedagogies. However, without deliberate action, children experiencing disadvantage or vulnerability face a 12-month development gap compared to their more advantaged peers in key early learning areas such as literacy (OECD, 2022). Children learn more during the first five years than at any other time in life so embedding the 10 Essential Literacy Practices in Early Literacy implemented in preschools, and the years prior, has the potential to redirect this trajectory.

12.   What specific supports would be most contextually appropriate for ACT public school students who have not yet reached expected proficiency in literacy or numeracy in the following learning phases: P-2, 3-6, 7-10 and 11-12?

Essential Instructional Practice in Literacy (P-6), Practice 3 states 'Small group and individual instruction, using a variety of grouping strategies, most often with flexible groups formed and instruction targeted to (i.e., differentiated by) children's observed and assessed needs in specific aspects of literacy, including both writing and reading development (and therefore not by perceived general "ability" or "level").' This practice provides important information for small group instruction including that most of students' time in small groups should be spent actually reading and writing (or work towards this goal in Kindergarten).

Upskill teachers on the implementation of this small group practice. Small group work must include a balance of instruction and application, including building world knowledge. Time management is crucial and students not working with the teacher must be engaged in productive, meaningful tasks. This is where the workshop model provides an excellent structure.

In the ACT schools should use their expert EAL/D teachers, Literacy coaches and Literacy Champions and others with expertise to plan and co-teach with classroom teachers to enable small group and individual instruction. Paraprofessionals should support students in these groupings, not instruct students.

13.   Should the Education Directorate consider targeted small group or individual tutoring to support students to improve literacy and numeracy? If so, what models should be adopted?

See response above.

It is important that the ACT Directorate does not outsource individual or small group instruction to commercial entities. Building capability of the workforce is essential and enhances continuity of learning for the student.

Over many years the Federal Government has designed and offered schools materials to support individual tutoring. These programs have come and gone without any significant impact on overall student learning outcomes.

14.   What current targeted supports and intervention policies and approaches are working well/not having the desired impact and how can the Education Directorate expand upon or leverage successful approaches to improve outcomes?

Reading instruction should be guided by the logic of the English writing system (Bowers & Bowers, 2017). Thus, it should be organised around morphology and phonology rather than just phonology. A phonics first, and fast approach may miss the teaching of all the linguistic threads that weave through words. Orthography, morphology, and etymology are not the preserve of the advanced learners. They are necessary skills, including for the students who are finding spelling and reading difficult and key to equity of outcomes in spelling. They may just be the pathway into spelling.' (ILA, 2019)

Shanahan, (2020) reminds us that 'often the adoption of new programs or reform efforts aimed at a particular piece of the puzzle lead to greater attention to certain abilities, but to diminished attention to other key parts of literacy.'

ACT must make sure that teachers aren't trading more phonics for less fluency work, or more vocabulary for less comprehension or more reading for less writing etc. It is essential to make sure that all components of reading and writing are receiving adequate attention.

Section 5: Supporting staff to deliver quality literacy and numeracy education

15.   What system-wide and school-based professional learning and coaching best support educators with literacy and numeracy instruction and improvement? Are there any that best support early career teachers as they commence, or middle leaders with literacy and numeracy instructional leadership?

The Directorate's PLC approach using the spiral of inquiry (Timperley) when implemented consistently support educators to identify their learning needs.

Each school has a Literacy Champion/s however this people resource will have more impact in schools when these literacy leaders are provided with ongoing capability and knowledge

development and adequately funded so they have time in the school to coach teachers and lead PLCs. This includes coaching and mentoring of early career teachers.

It will also be important to fund Mentor teachers to work with early career teachers providing clear guidelines for how such time can be utilised effectively.

16. What are the most effective ways for the Education Directorate and principals to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness/impact of professional learning and coaching support for educators and school leaders, particularly early career teachers and middle leaders?

Working in Professional Learning Communities, have teachers and leaders bring multiple sources of evidence of student learning collected within a given timeframe. Together explore the precision questions of 'what's working, for whom, under what circumstances and why?'. The discussion should include conclude with instructional decision about adjustments to instruction as a result of the analysis. This should be a usual way of working for a school and not an add on to workload.

The major Professional Learning that teams or whole staff groups undertake each year need to be evaluated at intervals following the delivery and implementation to check for ongoing impact on student learning.

17. What current professional learning and coaching policies and approaches are working well/not having the desired impact? How do we know? How can the Education Directorate expand upon or leverage successful approaches to improve outcomes?

The Essential Coaching Practices Guide has been introduced to the Literacy Champions and school leaders in ACT Directorate schools. Where schools have quarantined time for their expert teachers to coach; teacher knowledge, teacher efficacy and student learning have increased. Research underpinning the Essential Coaching Practices Guide indicate that it can take 3 or more years for the desired impact to come to fruition. It is a longer-term investment.

The ACT has a cascading approach to capability development has been effective. Leadership support begins with ACT central office leadership experts working with principal and deputy principles, the learning then cascades to middle level leader sessions, who in turn support teachers in schools.

One aspect that must be expanded is the development of an understanding for school leaders and teachers between 'Explicit Instruction' and 'Direct Instruction'. Teachers also need to understand the difference between a teacher being explicit in their instruction that follows formative assessment processes and reading from a scripted program.

Section 6: School-wide improvement of literacy and numeracy

18. How can the ACT use evidence-based school improvement planning cycles to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes?

A stronger focus on the impact of teaching on learning will support all schools to improve in all areas, including literacy and numeracy.

19. What are the best approaches to evaluation and monitoring of schools to ensure appropriate support and accountability in relation to literacy and numeracy outcomes?

The Panel should examine the 2024 School Improvement processes and artefacts (to be launched early 2024) which focus on the balance between external and internal accountability and the important shift to mutual accountability.

20. What current school improvement policies and approaches are supporting improved literacy and numeracy outcomes and how can the Education Directorate expand upon or leverage successful approaches to improve outcomes?

- See above.

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