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# Mapping the archive: An Examination of Research Reported in AJLL 2000-2005

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# Mapping the archive: An Examination of Research Reported in AJLL 2000-2005

## Abstract

Amidst commissioned research reports and policy reforms in literacy education, this paper examines research reported in the 2000–2005 archive of the Australian Journal of Language and Literacy (AJLL). This focus arises from the selective inclusion of literacy research in recent literacy education policy reform documents in Australia and overseas and the exclusion of other research, including research from this AJLL 2000/5 archive. Given the high national and international standing of AJLL, we felt it was timely and important to engage in a retrospective mapping exercise with this collection of research and critically examine its relationship to literacy education policy. So doing forms part of our broader concerns about connections between literacy research, policy and practice.

## Keywords

Mapping, archive, Examination, Research, Reported, AJLL, 2000, 2005

## Disciplines

Business | Social and Behavioral Sciences

# *Mapping the archive: An Examination of Research Reported in* AJLL 2000–2005

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### *Abstract*

*Amidst commissioned research reports and policy reforms in literacy educa-tion, this paper examines research reported in the 2000–2005 archive of the Australian Journal of Language and Literacy (AJLL). This focus arises from the selective inclusion of literacy research in recent literacy education policy reform documents in Australia and overseas and the exclusion of other research, including research from this AJLL 2000/5 archive. Given the high national and international standing of AJLL, we felt it was timely and important to engage in a retrospective mapping exercise with this collection of research and critically examine its relationship to literacy education policy. So doing forms part of our broader concerns about connections between literacy research, policy and practice.*

In recent years, literacy education has seen the selective use of literacy research as a lever for somewhat controversial policy reforms. While ostensibly setting out to establish evidence bases for literacy education policy and practice, policymakers have assembled like-minded researchers who have produced reports of consensus that support particular policy agendas (Allington & Woodside-Jiron, 1999). As a consequence, strained extrapolations have been made from research (Pearson, 2007), various perspectives of literacy and reading have been polarised (Harris, 2006a), and debates have intensified into 'reading wars' (Pearson, 2004; Snyder, 2008) that distort current and historical perspectives of literacy research (Allington, 2002; Freebody, 2007; Pearson, 2003).

Prominent among these research reports is Australia's *Teaching Reading Report* (DEST, 2005a), a product of the National Inquiry into Teaching Literacy that arose directly as a result of the USA's *Teaching Children to Read* (National Reading Panel, 2000) and the apparent success of the implementa-tion of literacy aspects of *No Child Left Behind* (United States Congress, 2001). Australian research reports predating *Teaching Reading* included *Closing the Gap between Research and Practice* (de Lemos, 2002) and *Balancing Approaches* (Ellis, 2005) and expressed similar views, as did UK's *National Literacy Strategy* (1998).

While produced in different international contexts, there are a number of striking similarities amongst these documents (Harris, 2007). They share an 'all children' frame in describing methods that allegedly work for all children. The reports are based on similar definitions of literacy, with a particular focus on reading in terms of basic skills that include oral language, phonemic awareness and phonics skills, vocabulary, grammar, fluency and comprehension. Evidence-based or scientific research methodology is portrayed as the 'gold standard' of research (National Reading Panel, 2000) and the only kind admissible to the policymaking arena, to the exclusion of other research approaches. Experimental research conducted in psychology meets this so-called 'gold standard' of scientific rules of evidence. Therefore these reports privilege psychology as the discipline to inform literacy policy and provide solutions to the problem of literacy deficits that these reports identify. Consequently, the potential for other research approaches to inform policy with their equally important insights, is undermined (Snow, 2004).

In this contentious context, studies of connections between literacy research and policy have provided converging evidence that policymakers overstate the strength of research findings (Coburn, Pearson & Woulfin, 2010, in press). Some studies have examined the research foundations of policy documents (Coburn, Pearson & Woulfin, 2010, in press; Camilli, Wolfe & Smith, 2006; Pearson, 2004; Pressley & Fingaret, 2007). Other studies have analysed documents that have been prominent in policy-making processes – such as Grossen's 1997 white paper in the formation of the California Reading Initiative (Allington & Woodside-Jiron, 1999; Dressman, 1999; Pressley & Fingaret, 2007; Snow, 2000).

In this paper, we take a different approach to the problem. As literacy researchers, we have been aware that there is a significant body of research that has been ignored in these reports. Thus we began to consider what literacy research was 'out there', what the research had to tell us about literacy learning at school, and the nature of this research. We developed a broad research question that was to become the focal question of our ARC Discovery project: namely, What are the relationships between literacy research, policy and practice? (Harris, Derewianka, Chen, Fitzsimmons, Kervin, Turbill, Cruickshank, McKenzie & Konza, 2006). In so doing, our research is responsive to calls for researchers to scrutinise intended and unintended consequences of recent literacy policy reforms (Hollingsworth et al., 2007).

As part of our project, we began mapping literacy research that was published in the *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy* 2000–2005 prior to the release of the Teaching Reading Report and concurrent with research reports and policy documents discussed above. The purpose of this paper is to share the key categories that emerged from this mapping exercise and discuss implications for the field of literacy research and its relationship with literacy policy and practice. This study is highly pertinent to understanding

what Pearson (2004, p. 238) has called the 'treacherous road' from literacy education research to policy, and raises issues that continue to be relevant to more current policy initiatives.

## Conceptual framework and related research

Bernstein's pedagogic device (2000) was chosen as the theoretical frame for our study as we believe it is a useful model for examining the relationship between literacy research and policy. The pedagogic device comprises three sites of educational endeavour. The field of knowledge production is the site where research and theory-building occurs; the field of recontextualisation of knowledge is where knowledge is converted into official discourses such as policy documents and related materials to guide, regulate and monitor practice; and the field of knowledge reproduction or classroom implementation sees teachers transform knowledge into pedagogic discourses that are accessible to their students.

While appearing simple, the relationship between research and policy is anything but straightforward, as reflected in Bernstein's identification of rules and procedures involved in the transformation of research into policy and practice. A key factor contributing to this complexity is the fact that literacy research speaks not with one voice but with many different voices. Researchers make up multiple interpretive communities, each with its own criteria for interpreting the field of literacy research through the lens of the particular paradigms, theories and knowledge that frame their work (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The literacy education research field is multi-disciplinary, including psychology, sociology, anthropology, philosophy, linguistics, and literary and media studies that contribute to informing literacy policy and practice. Within and across these disciplines, different research approaches are used and different perspectives of literacy are developed.

Further, knowledge produced in research contexts is not easily transferred to other contexts of policy or practice (Bernstein, 2000; Freebody, Maton & Martin, 2008; Wheelahan, 2007). When policymakers use research to support their work, they inevitably recontextualise research as they change it into official policy discourse and use research in such a way as to support the policy agenda at hand. This process of recontextualisation is shaped by ideological frames that policymakers bring to this work (Bernstein, 2000).

The potential for conflict exists throughout these sites of research, policy and practice and different groups struggle to take control – whoever does 'tilts the field in their favour' (Maton, 2000). From this angle, policymakers' commissioning of scholars to produce research reports that draw on so-called 'gold-standard' research associated with psychology can be seen in a new light – as a bid for control of the pedagogic device, a means for tilting the field in favour of such research and all those with a vested interest in this research and its follow-on effects for policy and practice.

*Research design*

Sometimes, we can be so engaged with reading or reporting research in journals, that we can overlook the significance of a journal such as *AJLL* as an object of research in its own right. As Patton (2002, p. 293) has written, 'Records, documents, artifacts, and archives – what has traditionally been called "material culture" in anthropology – constitutes a particularly rich source of information about many organisations and programs.' Yet, it can be all too easy to overlook the particular relevance of documents in this way (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Document analysis, a well-established research procedure (Guba & Lincoln, 1989), provides us with the means of using the *AJLL* 2000–2005 archive as an artefact for mapping the literacy research field in the context described above.

*AJLL* is Australia's long-standing peak literacy journal published by the Australia Literacy Educators' Association, an affiliate of the International Reading Association. The journal enjoys high academic standing and has an international readership that includes literacy teachers, teacher educators, consultants and researchers. Its review processes for publication are rigorous, involving blind peer reviews by well-known researchers in Australia and overseas. The journal's aims identified on its website are to:

- provide balanced and in-depth investigation of literacy practices and theories in everyday settings, including classrooms;
- enhance understanding of literacy issues in relation to their wider educational and social contexts;
- help readers keep abreast of current literacy research;
- examine current research with a view as to how it might be implemented for classroom teachers;
- encourage the identity of classroom teachers as researchers;
- provide a forum in which literacy professionals from all settings can exchange and discuss ideas and practices relevant to their work.
  (http://www.alea.edu.au/AJLL.htm, Accessed 10/3/2008)

We surveyed 81 research articles published from February 2000 to December 2005, listed in Appendix 1. Five questions guided analysis of these articles:

1. What are the professional roles of authors who have published in the *AJLL* 2000–2005 archive?
2. What have been the focal topics of research published in the *AJLL* 2000–2005 archive?
3. How has literacy been defined in the *AJLL* 2000–2005 archive?
4. What settings, participants and approaches have been involved in the *AJLL* 2000–2005 archive?
5. What implications and recommendations are identified across the *AJLL* 2000–2005 archive?

Each article was coded according to these five questions and the data entered into a large database. The coding process was cross-checked by several researchers so that we could be sure that the code was indeed credible and trustworthy (Guba and Lincoln, 1989). Once coded, data could be aggregated so that frequencies could be viewed and discussed, and categories compared with topics in reports such as the *Teaching Reading* and National Reading Panel reports.

## *FINDINGS*

Below we present findings in relation to each of our research questions. As we proceed, we discuss issues of practical and theoretical significance that arise taking into account relationships between literacy education research and policy.

### Professional roles of authors who have published in the *AJLL* 2000–2005 archive

Examining the roles of the 122 contributors who have participated in knowledge production in the *AJLL* archive, and where they are located in the three fields of the pedagogic device, we found that:

- 104 researchers working in universities and other types of research settings (e.g., private) comprising 85% of the total authors in this archive;
- 13 teachers comprising 11% of authors;
- 3 consultants, advisers, professional development providers comprising 2 % of authors; and
- 2 personnel in government departments comprising 2% of authors.

While perhaps not surprising, the large percentage of academic contributors has implications for *AJLL*'s catchment and readership with respect to the pedagogic device and connections between research, policy and practice. These implications concern who is developing research agendas, who decides what research is needed and why, and how this research is distributed amongst and construed by policymakers.

While *AJLL*'s aims clearly target teachers as both readers and providers of research, teachers do not figure prominently as authors of research in the archive. Moreover, policymakers are not identified in *AJLL*'s aims. Thus a possible shift in journal policy is suggested that directly encourages collaborative papers with policymakers as well as teachers, as argued by education researchers (Luke, 2003). Another shift would be to engage policymakers and teachers in identifying special themed issues that address policymakers' and teachers' needs and agendas.

In developing these collaborative links, educational researchers need to be mindful of their responsibility to carefully interpret their literacy research in

terms of its implications for policy as well practice. Standards for interpreting research this way might be raised, along with researchers delimiting findings from their studies and explicating how their studies relate to the bigger picture of literacy development that informs policymaking (Taylor, Anderson, Au & Raphael, 2000).

*Focal topics of research published*

Exploring what has been on literacy researchers' agendas in the *AJLL* 2000–2005 archive, the range of research topics is summarised in Table 1. Pedagogic frames for teaching literacy were enmeshed with related issues such as gender, resource constraints, rural contexts and indigenous perspectives. While some of these papers speak to broad pedagogic frames such as teaching literacy within a sociocultural framework, others addressed more specific teaching strategies such as the use of drama in literacy programs.

**Table 1. Research topics reported in the *AJLL* 2000–5 Archive**

| Topic | % | Topic | % |
|---|---|---|---|
| Literacies in classrooms | 20% | Teachers' professional development, engagement and education | 10% |
| Pedagogic frameworks and teaching strategies | 15% | Gender and literacy | 9% |
| Home/school relationships | 12% | Literacy before/after schooling | 6% |
| Assessment | 11% | Texts in classrooms | 5% |
| Special needs | 10% | Indigenous perspectives | 2% |

n = 81 articles

How relevant are these topics to policymakers' agendas as evidenced in recent literacy policy initiatives? Focal topics in the US *Teaching Children to Read* report (National Reading Panel, 2000, hereafter referred to as the NRP Report) were alphabetics, fluency, comprehension, teacher education and reading instruction; and computer technology and reading instruction. The NRP Report further identified phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension as the five pillars of effective reading instruction. These pillars did not come into clear or extensive focus in *AJLL*'s 2000–2005 archive.

However, these five areas were foregrounded in Australia's Teaching Reading Report (DEST, 2005a). The *Teaching Reading Report's* literature review explicitly examines 'the evidence base for effective teaching practices in the

early years, especially for children experiencing reading difficulties' (DEST, 2005b, p. 26). While acknowledging broader perspectives of reading and literacy, the *Teaching Reading Report* marshals research findings that support the explicit and effective instruction with respect to the 'five pillars' and with particular focus on phonics.

However, the identification of these five areas to the exclusion of other considerations is not without criticism. Turbill (2006) notes focus on reading at the expense of the relationship between reading and writing; beginning reading at the expense of literacy development throughout the school years; decoding skills at the expense of a more complex and comprehensive view of literacy; and students with decoding difficulties at the expense of students with no such problems. Allington (2005) has identified and cited evidence bases for five other key areas essential to effective reading instruction: classroom organisation that provides balance of whole class, small group and one-to-one teaching; matching pupils and texts in the context of differentiated instruction; access to interesting texts, choice and collaboration, writing and reading connections; and expert tutoring for struggling readers.

These are topics more in line with what has been researched and reported in the *AJLL* 2000–2005 archive and have their evidence base more in qualitative approaches to research. Given this different evidence base, such research provides important insights into the complexities of literacy and reading education. However, little of the archive's research has been quantified and directly linked to improved student literacy outcomes, leaving it prone to exclusion from recent literacy and reading policy initiatives.

The *Teaching Reading Report's* selection of topics and related research was more narrow than topics found in the *AJLL* archive and the NRP Report, although both the *Teaching Reading* and NRP reports focused on experimental reading research. It appears that the use of the NRP Report in the *Teaching Reading Report* was highly selective. There are a number of possible reasons why this might have been the case, including working towards a more specific agenda of policy reform; dealing with constraints of time and financial resources; and positioning for control of the pedagogic device. Positioning for control is linked with influentials who are prominent in brokering particular views and act in networks to influence policy outcomes that are tied to their respective interests (Laumann & Knoke, 1987), as was found to be the case in the U.S.A. around the No Child Left Behind literacy reforms there (Song & Miskel, 2005).

With what consequences have literacy topics been narrowed? Research studies have been overlooked that document the daily realities and complexities of teachers and students' literacy work and practices across diverse settings, and acknowledge the importance of teachers' informed professional judgments. Ignoring such research has meant that teachers' perspectives are under-represented in policy initiatives, contributing to tensions in the inter-

face of policy and practice (Broadley et al, 2000; Coburn, 2001; Hammond & Macken-Horarik, 2001; Harris, 2010; Ryan, 2005)

Classroom realities are quite extensively documented in the *AJLL* 2000–2005 archive that, combined with other research sources, can inform policy by contributing to a comprehensive range of research approaches that provide various kinds of evidence and insights into effective practices and critical issues facing literacy educators today. Policymakers need to acknowledge teachers' complex classroom realities and professional judgment with respect to the students they teach (Bailey, 2000; Pearson, 2003; Valli & Buese, 2007). Many mediating influences shape policy implementation such as student needs, parents' expectations, organisational structures and priorities, teachers' philosophies, professional associations and literacy consultants (Coburn, 2005; Harris, 2006b).

Not only do these realities appear to be overlooked in reports such as the *Teaching Reading* and NRP reports, recent policy reforms have seen the intensification and expansion of teacher roles without adequate support (Turbill, 2001; Turner & Turbill, 2007; Valli & Buese, 2007). Policymakers ignore these realities at their own peril and, more importantly, at the risk of undermining student literacy outcomes.

### Literacy definitions in the AJLL 2000–2005 archive

In the fields of literacy education research and policy, the words 'literacy' and 'reading' carry many different connotations that have significant consequences for how research and policy are construed, heeded and validated. This variety is reflected in the *AJLL* 2000–2005 archive, where we found several definitions of literacy in terms of its scope, media and modes, as overviewed in Table 2. Literacy(*ies*) have proliferated in recent years, giving rise to visual literacy, technoliteracies, critical literacy and multiliteracies (15%).

More significantly, a large percentage of the archive (74%) did *not* provide explicit definitions. While researchers might work form assumed definitions of literacy, a problem with this oversight is lack of clarity about what kind of phenomenon is under investigation. More significantly, definitions are used as a means for deciding what research is and is not admitted into reports commissioned to inform policy (Harris, 2006a). The *Teaching Reading Report* (DEST, 2005a), for example, defined literacy as 'the ability to read, write and use written language appropriately in a range of contexts, for different purposes, and to communicate with a variety of audiences' (DEST, 2005a, p. 89); and portrayed reading in terms of 'two basic processes: one is learning how to decipher print and the other is understanding what print means (Center, 2005, p. 7)' (DEST, 2005a, p. 89). The Report's Glossary contains several detailed entries on terms related to phonology and morphology of language, with much less attention, if any, given to other aspects of reading or literacy. This definition most closely aligns with the reading research of psychologists

**Table 2. Definitions of literacy in the 2000–2005 *AJLL* archive**

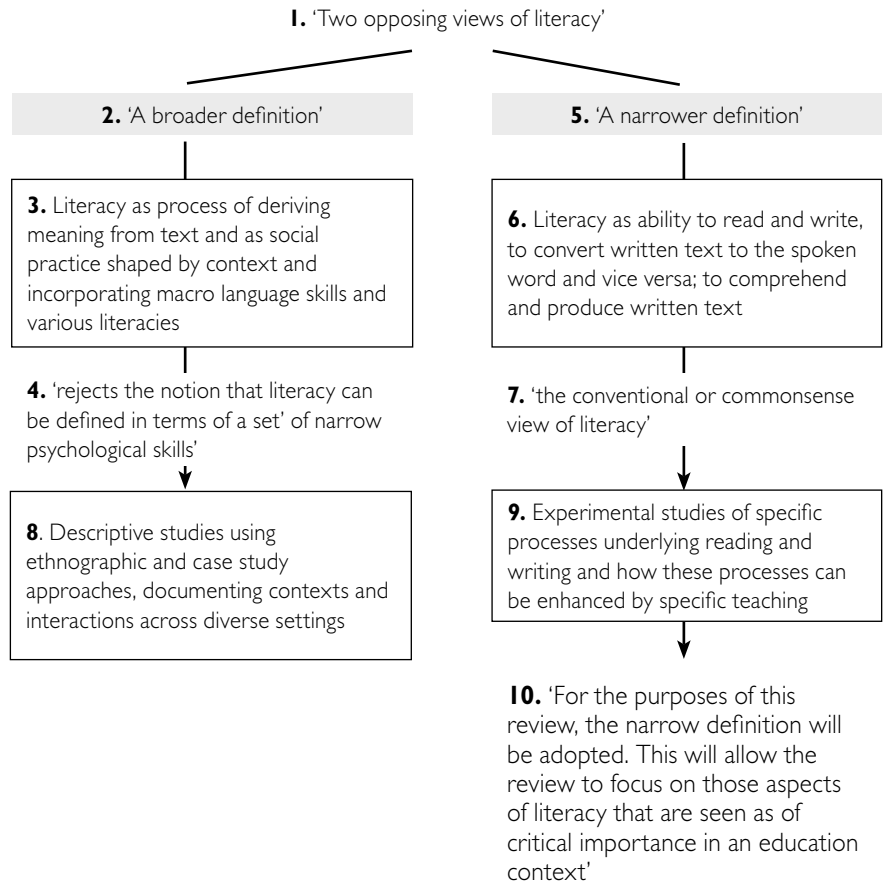| Definition | % |
|---|---|
| No explicit definition of literacy provided | 74% |
| Literacy defined in terms of multiliteracies | 7% |
| Literacy defined as socioculturally constructed practices | 6% |
| Literacy defined in terms of critical literacy | 5% |
| Literacy defined in terms of reading difficulties | 3% |
| Literacy not defined but multiple perspectives & changing nature acknowledged | 3% |
| Literacy defined in terms of tertiary literacies | 1% |
| Literacy defined in terms of literary theory | 1% |

n = 81 articles

and other aspects of literacy and related research are diminished.

However, this definition resonates with other literacy reports. Consider, for example, the ACER report, *Closing the gap between research and practice: foundations for the acquisition of literacy* (de Lemos, 2002). As noted by Harris (2006a), this paper provides a telling example of how literacy and research may be defined and categorised in ways that privilege some research while marginalising others in the pedagogic device. Figure 1 provides a schematic representation of the Introduction to the *Closing the gap* report. Its numbers indicate the sequencing of key points in this Introduction that led its author to state, 'For the purposes of this review, the narrow definition will be adopted. This will allow the review to focus on *those aspects of literacy that are seen as of critical importance in an education context*' (de Lemos, 2002, p. 3, emphasis added). In these last few words, not only is 'a broader definition of literacy' excluded (along with its many characterisations and nuances), so too are 'descriptive' research paradigms for investigating literacy.

On the surface, aligning different definitions of literacy with different ways of researching literacy education approaches may appear to have a particular *albeit* over-simplified logic. However, this kind of alignment polarises perspectives, privileges preferred standpoints, and challenges those who work in and/or consume other paradigms of research or who work across borders and blend research approaches. In short, such alignment may be construed as a grab for power in the pedagogic device – an issue we continue to explore below.

**Figure 1. An analysis of the Introduction to *Closing the gap* report (de Lemos, 2002, p. 3) (from Harris, 2006a)**

**1.** 'Two opposing views of literacy'

| **2.** 'A broader definition' | **5.** 'A narrower definition' |

**3.** Literacy as process of deriving meaning from text and as social practice shaped by context and incorporating macro language skills and various literacies

**6.** Literacy as ability to read and write, to convert written text to the spoken word and vice versa; to comprehend and produce written text

**4.** 'rejects the notion that literacy can be defined in terms of a set' of narrow psychological skills'

**7.** 'the conventional or commonsense view of literacy'

**8**. Descriptive studies using ethnographic and case study approaches, documenting contexts and interactions across diverse settings

**9.** Experimental studies of specific processes underlying reading and writing and how these processes can be enhanced by specific teaching

**10.** 'For the purposes of this review, the narrow definition will be adopted. This will allow the review to focus on those aspects of literacy that are seen as of critical importance in an education context'

### *Settings, participants and approaches involved in* AJLL 2000–2005 *archive*

In exploring methodologies used to produce knowledge in the *AJLL* 2000–2005 archive, we sought to understand how these approaches relate to the 'gold standard' approaches advocated in recent literacy policy initiatives. Of the 81 articles in the archive, 59% reported *in situ* research that used one or a combination of observations, interviews, artefact collection, document analysis and questionnaires; 11% reported remote research such as questionnaires and text analyses; while 30% were papers built around literature reviews, polemic discussion and explorations of specific instructional practices and materials.

For the 56 articles (70% of the archive) that directly involved research settings and participants, Table 3 overviews socio-economic background,

language background, locality, type of setting and participants involved in these reported studies. The type of research setting in the *AJLL* 2000–2005 studies is dominated by primary school settings (71%, including the 7% of studies that combined primary and secondary schools); and teachers and students are participants in the large majority (80%) of reported studies. While in a minority, parents of school students are represented as participants in 16% of studies altogether.

Of particular interest in this table is that just over half these research reports do not specify SES, language backgrounds or locality of their research settings. This finding is a concern given the 'all children' frame adopted by policymakers who advocate the same direct instructional approaches for all children without acknowledging diverse student needs and the benefits of differentiated instruction. Lack of specificity in these *AJLL* studies inadvertently may make the 'all children' frame easier to hold sway, instead of more specifically acknowledging and demonstrating the significance of diversity in literacy education.

Benefits brought by qualitative methodologies used in the archive include

**Table 3. Settings and participants in the *AJLL* 2000–2005 Archive**

| Socio-economic settings n = 56 articles | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Range/random 27% | Low 16% | Middle 5% | Not specified 52% |
| Participants' language backgrounds n = 56 articles | | | |
| Range/random 32% | English 7% | Chinese 2% | Not specified 59% |

| Locality n = 56 articles | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Urban 14% | Suburban 14% | Rural or Regional 9% | Remote 4% | Mixed 5% | Not specified 54% |

| Type of setting n = 56 articles | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Prior to school 7% | Primary school 64% | Secondary school 9% | |
| Prior/school & Primary 2% | Primary & Secondary 7% | University 7% | N/A 4% |

| Participants n = 56 articles | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Teachers 23% | Students 27% | Teachers & students 30% | Parents 5% |
| Parents & teachers 9% | Parents, teachers & Students 2% | General population 4% | |

documentation of the complexities of teachers' work and student learning in real-time situations in the field of practice, as we previously discussed. Vivid portrayals of diverse literate lives in classrooms and other settings offer rich descriptions of literacy materials, activities and interactions as well as participants' perspectives and experiences. These approaches align with *AJLL's* aims of providing its readers with in-depth literacy investigations in everyday settings, including classrooms, and enhancing understanding of literacy issues in relation to their wider educational and social contexts.

As such, this *AJLL* body of research helps address recent calls for literacy research and policy to take account of classroom realities by basing 'theories and empirical interventions on an adequate description of the materials and activities that are found in contemporary educational settings' (Freebody, 2007, p. 52).

However, research approaches reported in the *AJLL* 2000–2005 archive by and large do not meet the so-called 'gold standard' of 'evidence-based'/'scientific' research defined by commissioned reports and legislations such as *Teaching Reading Report*, the *NRP Report* and *No Child Left Behind* – hence their exclusion from these particular policy initiatives. In this we again see the power of definition – this time with respect to defining research in terms of rigour and what constitutes evidence. For example, the *Teaching Reading Report* advocates teaching strategies based on rigorous, evidence-based research that are shown to be effective in enhancing the literacy development of all children (DEST, 2005a, p. 38). The Report defines evidence-based research as 'the application of rigorous, objective methods to obtain valid answers to clearly specified questions' (DEST, 2005a, p. 85). This definition is elaborated on in terms of '(1) systematic, empirical methods that draw on observation and/or experiment designed to minimise threats to validity; (2) relies on sound measurement; (3) involves rigorous data analyses and statistical modelling of data that are commensurate with the stated research questions; and (4) is subject to expert scientific review.' (DEST, 2005a, p. 85).

Again, though, there is an over-simplification inherent in such definitions that may be as much about a power play as it is concern over student literacy outcomes. Many disciplines have come to inform literacy education over recent years, including but not limited to psychology, as discussed at the outset of this paper. Claiming that the only valid and admissible research approaches are those that happen to be associated with psychology is tantamount to claiming disciplinary ownership in literacy education. On what grounds such a claim can be made is highly questionable because it fails to acknowledge the many different research paradigms, each rigorous in its own right, that make up the field of knowledge production and contribute key insights into literacy education.

Returning to the *AJLL* archive, most of the archive's research studies do not make links to a priority of recent policy initiatives – that is, improved student

literacy outcomes, as previously noted. How might researchers address this important area while retaining the richness of documenting literacy in real-life contexts? Ladwig's (1996) critical realist approach to educational research suggests a constructive dialogue between different research paradigms. Such dialogue involves a broadening of the conceptualisation of research than that taken in recent policy initiatives, in which research is characterised in terms of continua of research approaches rather than as discrete and competing entities.

### Key issues emerging across the AJLL 2000–2005 archive
Many and varied topics emerge from the 81 studies reported in the archive, as we previously saw. Three broad issues were found to underpin this range of topics. We summarise these issues below and relate them to the policy initiatives and blueprints under focus in our paper.

**The changing nature of literacy.**
The proliferation of new technologies and texts has dramatically changed the way literacy occurs and the literacy environments that children encounter and need to negotiate. In this context, the very nature of literacy can be elusive and is ever-changing. Yet it is clear that a re-conceptualisation of literacy in terms of new technologies is required, as indicated across several papers in the archive. Educators across the three sites of the pedagogic device (research, policy and practice) need to keep pace with new literacies and text types and their juxtaposition with more traditional forms. Meaningful and contextualised experiences need to be provided that account for children's conventional print-based literacy as well as their multi-modal literacies, the use of local languages in indigenous communities and the reading of cultures in text.

The *Teaching Reading Report* briefly acknowledges the 'literacies of new technologies' (DEST, 2005a, p. 38); and includes 'multiliteracies' as a single entry in its glossary that recognises the 'influence of contemporary communications technologies' and identifies its 'essential skills' as 'locating, comprehending, using, creating and critiquing texts within personal, social, educational, historical, cultural and workplace contexts (Zammit & Downes, 2002, pp. 24–25)' (DEST, 2005a, p. 87). This limited coverage echoes the *NRP*. While it could be argued that the focus of these two reports was reading, to marginalise new technologies does not help educators come to grips with new pedagogies for teaching literacy in all its various and important forms in order to. adequately prepare students for their literate futures. The many articles in the *AJLL* 2002–2005 archive were clearly aiming to achieve this goal.

It is with much interest that we look to future policy developments such as Australia's pending National Curriculum – English (NCE) to address this need. In the NCE's most recent shaping paper, literacy is defined as 'reading, writing, speaking, viewing and listening effectively in a range of contexts. In

the 21st century, the definition of literacy has expanded to refer to a flexible, sustainable mastery of a set of capabilities in the use and production of traditional texts and new communications technologies using spoken language, print and multimedia. Students need to be able to adjust and modify their use of language to better meet contextual demands in varying situations' (NCE, 2009, p.6). How this definition continues to shape and be shaped in the ensuing NCE documents will be of great interest.

### Catering to children from diverse backgrounds

There is no doubt that Australia is one of the most diverse nations in the world. At the time of the 2006 ABS census that shortly followed the release of the *Teaching Reading Report*, there were more than 250 ancestries and almost 400 different languages spoken in homes across Australia. This diversity is reflected in classrooms, where issues of SES background, gender and special needs compound the range of student needs teachers can expect to encounter. Thus educators are presented with important challenges to how we think about, teach and assess literacy.

In response to this diversity, many papers in the archive explored pedagogic frameworks and strategies for teaching literacy that are based on broad inclusive views of literacy as social practices that are situated in people's daily lives and shaped by their sociocultural settings.

This sociocultural view so clearly articulated in the archive's research articles contrasts with perspectives of literacy that have tended to dominate education policy for schools over the past decade, including the *Teaching Reading Report* and the NRP (Evans, 2005; Harris, McKenzie, Chen, Kervin & Fitzsimmons, 2008). While a recurring vision throughout these documents is literacy success for 'all children' (DEST, 2005a) that sees 'no child left behind', it is undermined by the narrow visions of instruction within such documents that tend to fail to account for children's diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds and needs.

Further, the *Teaching Reading Report* advocates home-school partnerships, with the provision of

> workshops, programs and guides for parents and carers to support their children's literacy development. These should acknowledge and build on the language and literacy that children learn in their homes and communities. (DEST 2005a, p. 40)

Research in the archive suggests the need for ongoing and authentic dialogue between parents and educators in such partnerships – dialogue that is imbued with cultural and social sensitivity to the diversity that exists among children's backgrounds. However, it is not clear in the *Teaching Reading Report* what paradigm/s of instruction is/are to be adopted in this provision, and if they are meant to be the same paradigm as recommended for teachers in classrooms. If similar, there is a risk of supplanting rather than 'building

on' children's home and community experiences. If not, how school and home experiences might form a comfortable nexus that provides continuity of experience that paves the way for new learning needs careful documentation and support at this policy level.

### Teachers' professional identities and judgments

The third broad issue identifies the importance of teachers' professional identities and judgements. When specific teaching methods for 'all children' are single-mindedly advocated or prescribed, teachers' professional judgments fail to be acknowledged and upheld. Teachers' professional identity emerges, then, as a key issue, as does opportunity for teachers to have a voice in policy development, so that their complex chalk-face realities may be represented in that arena of influence.

While drawing on a comprehensive knowledge base has been found to be highly significant to effective literacy teaching (Dudley-Marling, 2005; Pearson, 2003), difficulties in transferring knowledge that is tied to specific contexts to other contexts also have been highlighted (Bernstein, 2000; Wheelahan, 2007). As Dudley-Marling (2005, p. 129) has written, 'teachers' professional discretion is a critical factor in the teaching-learning equation.'

Teachers commonly are concerned with implementing practices that they find work for *their students* (Anstey & Bull, 2003) as opposed to 'all children'. In so doing, teachers' professional judgment is critical. Amidst many and often conflicting messages from research and policy, teachers' decisions are influenced by many factors as revealed in several studies in the *AJLL* archive. These factors include: children's needs, backgrounds and interests; resources and personnel support; levels of experience; teaching beliefs, values and philosophies; organisational priorities, norms and routines; situational enablers and constraints; and localised policy directions and guidelines (Anstey & Bull, 2003; Coburn, 2001, 2004; Harris, 2006b).

However, teachers' professional judgements tend to have been dismissed and demeaned in recent current reform documents that prescribe methods and, in more extreme cases, advocate scripted curriculum such has occurred in the US. The *Teaching Reading* Report states 'that too many teachers do not have a clear understanding of why, how, what and when to use particular strategies' (DEST, 2005a, p. 14).

### *Discussion*

Findings of this study demonstrate the tenuous nature of the nexus between research as indicated in the *AJLL* archive and policy documents such as the Reading Report that this archive preceded. If there is a message for *AJLL*, it is to consider some themed issues where invited researchers and policy-makers respond to certain topics/foci so that such discussions are focused and debated with a view of enriching future policies and practice and in the

end learning outcome for all students in ways that reflect the diversity of Australia' population

Further, given literacy education policy imperatives to link research findings with improved literacy outcomes for students, it is important that education researchers also engage with constructive dialogue across the three sites of the pedagogic device – that is, across the fields of research, policy and practice. Within the research field there needs to be dialogue among different research approaches and paradigms that yield a range of research data for policy development and practice; and in so doing, redress imbalances and bridge the divide between polarised approaches and perspectives, as discussed earlier in this paper.

Encouraging collaborative links, we believe, can only help *AJLL* continue to edify its aim to 'provide a forum in which literacy professionals from all settings can exchange and discuss ideas and practices relevant to their work'. Policymakers should figure among those professionals that *AJLL* proactively encourages as its readers and contributors.

Theoretical issues also arise from this work in relation to the pedagogic device, which have been identified throughout this paper. One such issue concerns the struggle for control of the pedagogic device. As policy actors engage with this struggle to influence policy development, the potential that multiple research communities have for constructive dialogue and robust debate that can be used to inform policy and practice, is undermined; extensive literature reviews showing that no reading research has uncovered pedagogies that work for all children, are ignored (Allington & Johnston, 2002); and the rich contextualised research reported in venues such as *AJLL* goes unheeded.

While the *Teaching Reading Report* and the *National Reading Panel Report* strongly argued for and based themselves entirely on quantitative research – what the *NRP* call 'gold-standard', other disciplines also have come to inform literacy research over recent years. Part of the struggle for control of the pedagagoic device is a disciplinary one – but to allow literacy policy to be controlled by one discipline on the basis of categorical definition may be to imperil literacy education and ignore key insights provided by other disciplines and research, including those reported in the *AJLL* archive.

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# Appendix 1. The *AJLL* 2000–2005 Archive

As this is the database for this paper, we have retained the order in which these articles appeared in the *AJLL* 2000–2005 archive.

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Lewison, M., Leland, C. & Harste, J. (2000). 'Not in my classroom!' The case for using multi-view social issues in books with children. *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy, 23*(1), 8–20.

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