

Pre-service teacher knowledge of children's literature and attitudes to Reading for Pleasure: an international comparative study

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Abstract

Reading for Pleasure (RfP) acknowledges the importance of reader engagement and the role of the teacher as a reader of children's literature. The foundational work of the Teachers as Readers (TARs) programme successfully illustrated the impact of RfP activities on student learning. Previous studies of teachers' reader identities have shown a strong need for professional learning to boost teachers' confidence with children's literature. However, less emphasis has been placed on the adoption of RfP pedagogy within initial teacher education (ITE) to develop pre-service teachers' (PST) knowledge of children's literature, as well as their understanding of teachers as reading role models for future students. This paper analyses data from research into RfP undertaken in two ITE programmes for primary teachers informed by contrasting policies in Scotland and Australia. Though both countries aim to improve school student literacy success, the curriculum mandates differ, shaping the potential pathways available in ITE courses. It is within this context that we report on 3 years of data on PST reader knowledge collected from 300 students using survey tools adopted from the original TARs study. Emerging findings provide evidence that teacher educators need to act as circuit breakers to alter PST attitudes to reading.

Key words: literacy, primary education, teacher professional development, identity, reading, teacher education

This paper explores the complex and situated nature of literacy education in two ITE providers, one in Scotland and another in NSW, Australia. Shaped by different political climates, both contexts are driven to ensure graduate teachers are 'classroom ready' (Craven et al., 2014) and provide a backdrop to our ongoing study that explores how pre-service teacher (PST) learn to teach with children's literature using

authentic tasks that merge theory and practice. We position university-based education as a key factor in the preparation of teachers who are critically and theoretically informed. The paper presents an argument for examining connections between programmes of study, which deliberately expose PST to a wide range of children's literature, and their attitudes to reading for pleasure. The research affirms the value of PST undertaking evidence-based approaches to increasing their professional knowledge about children's literature.

Specifically, this paper explores the relationship between PST reader knowledge and their perceptions of themselves as reading teachers (Commeyras et al., 2003) in two comparable yet internationally distinct ITE programmes. Both programmes work in different ways to address the lack of focus [what could be called structural invisibility] on children's literature in mandated ITE requirements. Helping ITE students understand their role as teachers who value reading for pleasure matters because, as noted by the OECD, free choice reading is one of the most effective ways to leverage social change (OECD, 2021).

Background

Our shared experience as teacher educators working in two contrasting education systems who developed an awareness that PST did not have rich knowledge of children's literature led to the common research trajectory we report in this paper. Through our roles within ITE programmes on different sides of the world, we understand the importance of PST becoming reading teachers who are willing to develop their knowledge of children's literature and their students' needs and interests so they can make their teaching of reading 'authentic and relevant' (Cremin et al., 2022, p. 193).

Our theoretical approach is deliberately chosen as a counterbalance to the emphasis in current policy drivers on preparing PSTs to focus first and foremost on a constrained range of reading skills during ITE. We position our research as contributing two sides to

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The study in Scotland was covered by ethics approval: 400170169.

The studies were unfunded.

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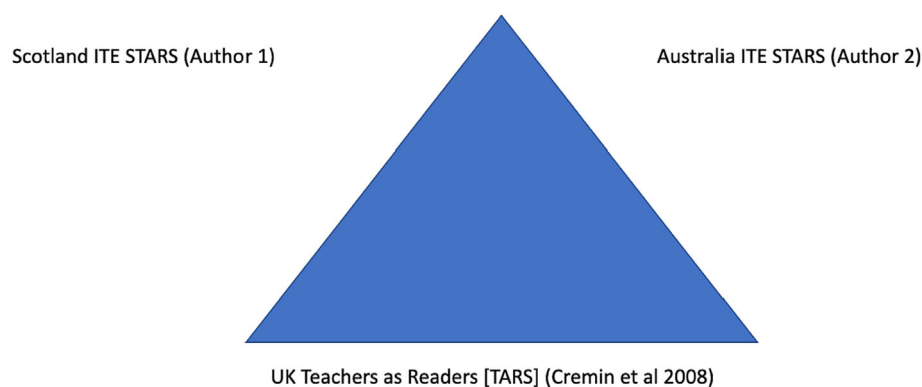


Figure 1: Our comparative components.

a data informed triangle (see Figure 1). The base of our comparison is the original Teachers as Readers (TARs) study that took place in England (Cremin et al., 2008). We chose to use this study as both a methodological model to inform our research design and a benchmark of teacher awareness of children's literature. The addition of data first collected from an ITE programme in Scotland and then from an ITE programme in NSW, Australia, allows us to discuss the results in relation to the different policy landscapes to which our two ITE systems relate, as well as against benchmarks set in the TARs study for classroom teachers.

The policy context

In any study of ITE, it is important to acknowledge the policy context in which the programmes are located. Although there is evidence of global policy borrowing (Harris et al., 2016; Sahlberg, 2011), each country sets its own national or state standards, which nuance approaches to the teaching of reading, already a complex and contested policy space. In England, where the TARs study originated, reading for pleasure is now mandated in the national curriculum (DfE, 2021, p. 4) though it was not when the TARs study took place. However, in Scotland and across the states and territories of Australia, different policies apply through different programme accreditation standards and approval systems. Before we present a review of the scholarship informing the study, we give an overview of the controls exerted on school curriculum and ITE in Scotland and in NSW, Australia.

Australia

In Australia up until 2012, states and territories were allowed to develop their own local syllabus

documentation. For example, NSW through the Board of Studies [now the NSW Education Standards Authority or NESA] developed a state-approved English syllabus through a rigorous consultative process based on concepts of literacy as social practice. In 2009, the concept of an Australian Curriculum English to be used for kindergarten to secondary (children aged 5–16) was conceptualised through a shaping paper, which introduced literature as a third compulsory strand of study alongside the study of literacy and language in primary and secondary schools. In 2014, the centralised Australian Curriculum was adopted by all states and territories though some states such as NSW still run their local syllabus in parallel with the Australian Curriculum. Thus, ITE programmes in NSW need to refer to both sets of documents when educating PST about the teaching of English.

Demonstrating the dynamic nature of curriculum development in Australia, both the Australian Curriculum and the NSW syllabus have recently been reviewed. Student teachers completing their degree in 2023 must be ready to teach the new English syllabus in 2024. Despite the emphasis on children's literature in the first version of the national curriculum, there has been a recognisable shift in the new NSW syllabus towards emphasising phonics and phonemic awareness in the teaching of early years' literacy, which relies on the use of predictable decodable texts. ITE providers have been audited for their alignment with this approach and must provide proof that the new syllabus has been embedded into current programmes. Reading is encouraged, but literacy is highlighted. For example, in the new NSW English K–10 Syllabus under the heading of monitoring reading comprehension, students are encouraged to 'Reflect on reading experiences and identify texts of personal significance and pleasure' [EN2-RECOM-01] (NESA, 2023). That is the only mention of reading in relation to pleasure in the entire syllabus. The revised 2022 Australian Curriculum has also reduced the original emphasis that

existed on reading for pleasure. In the last version, references to it existed in the primary years, but version 9.0 now has no reference at all to reading for pleasure (ACARA, 2023).

Scotland

Reading for enjoyment is implicitly foregrounded as a key theme within Scotland's national educational framework for children and young people aged from 3 to 18 years, Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) (Scottish Government, 2009). Within the CfE, literacy development is the shared responsibility of all practitioners, alongside the work undertaken within literacy and English as both a discrete primary curricular area and stand-alone secondary subject (Scottish Government, 2009). Literacy and English is sub-divided into several 'organisers'—or conceptual themes—that help to shape learners' experiences while reading, writing, listening and talking.

Under the 'Enjoyment and Choice' organiser in reading, it is stated that learners are to be able to select texts they 'enjoy and find interesting' and should be able to explain to others what sorts of texts and authors they like and why (Scottish Government, 2009, p. 7). As such outcome statements suggest, teachers play a key role as curator of learners' reading experiences by supporting children towards finding the sorts of texts and authors that resonate with their own interests and lives. This central emphasis on fostering positive attitudes towards reading can be seen in subsequent Scottish Government initiatives including the First Minister's Reading Challenge and Scotland's Reading Schools programme, both of which aim to support the development of whole school reading cultures and individual reading habits.

Yet, the CfE's deliberate 'ahistorical and atheoretical' design (Priestley and Humes, 2010, p. 358) means that resources such as children's literature are not specifically signalled within curriculum documentation, meaning teachers who are unfamiliar with children's literature will be less likely to use it as a means to develop readers and writers within their classrooms. According to Smith (2015), children's literature exists somewhere on the margins in UK educational systems.

This marginalised status is also reflected in the structures and content of some ITE contexts in Scotland (Farrar, 2021), where classes in children's literature are often offered to only a minority of students and where, more often than not, those who choose to undertake optional classes in children's literature may be those who already have an interest in the field. Indeed, the presence of long-standing tensions around

whether engaging with children's literature in the classroom actually constitutes 'work' (Hunt cited Arizpe et al., 2013, p. 242) may mean that developing student teachers' knowledge of children's literature is not prioritised, especially at a time when debates related to reading are focused elsewhere.

Many teacher educators encourage their PST to make professional judgements. So, although our ITE programmes must align with national or state-approved syllabus content, our PSTs are encouraged to interpret the syllabus/curriculum as well as understand their responsibilities as teachers who can address their students' needs. Therefore, we embed children's literature at the core of our teaching of disciplinary English in order to provide opportunities for PST to develop their knowledge of literary texts as they learn how to teach reading.

Literature review

Two major themes are explored in our brief literature review. The first addresses the impact that learning to read through children's literature may have on children's positive perceptions of reading and the linked responsibility for teachers to become familiar with texts for children and young people. The second theme addresses the potential for ITE to support PSTs to develop positive reading identities.

Impact of reading literature on children's learning and engagement with text

Research indicates that pleasurable experiences with reading can support the development of lifelong, highly literate readers (Garces-Bacsal et al., 2018). Australian findings from the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) support this assertion, whereby there is a strong correlation between reading enjoyment, confidence and attainment (Thomson et al., 2016). However, PIRLS also identified that 16% of Australian children do not like reading, with a further 41% reporting limited enjoyment (Thomson et al., 2016, p. 85). In the United Kingdom, annual survey data collected by the National Literacy Trust revealed that just under 48% of 8–18-year-olds reported engaging with reading for enjoyment, with a further 11% identified as not liking reading at all (Cole et al., 2022). While these large-scale quantitative data provide a useful measure of this 'problem', the data on *how* to raise student reading enjoyment and engagement are less prominent.

Krashen's (1994) hypothesis that learners' perceptions of activities related to language learning as

pleasurable (or not) are of significance to reading success underpins the role of 'self-selected reading' (Krashen, 2019, p. 61) or reading for pleasure (Cremin et al., 2014) in classrooms. Research has also indicated that what children and young people choose to read has an impact on reading success. Jerrim and Moss' analysis of data from the 2009 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) exercise revealed evidence of 'a sizeable "fiction effect"', a term coined to highlight the 'significantly stronger reading skills' of young people who self-reported reading this type of text frequently, in relation to their peers who did not (Jerrim and Moss, 2019, p. 181). More recently, researchers have found that children who read for pleasure at an early age tended to perform better in cognitive tests and enjoyed better mental health as teenagers (Sun et al., 2023).

Teachers' knowledge of children's literature

Despite these benefits, studies show that many teachers do not read for pleasure (Cremin et al., 2008) and are unaware of the potential of children's literature to engage readers. Commeyras et al.'s work with PSTs challenged them to engage with literature not only as a way of supporting literacy development but also as a way of shaping reading habits, which would benefit their pedagogy because of their experience as readers (Commeyras et al., 2003). Cremin et al.'s work on in-service teachers' reading practices demonstrated a similar gap, showing high percentages of teachers with limited awareness of current authors and book titles (2008). The tendency for a few popular authors to dominate book lists often used in teaching is known as 'Dahl dominance' (Cremin et al., 2014) and continues to this day (Hempel-Jorgensen et al., 2018).

Despite the International Literacy Association (2018) emphasising the responsibility of teachers to encourage reading for pleasure, prior work by Applegate and Applegate (2004) and a more recent study in Singapore confirms that PSTs do not perceive reading for pleasure to be a necessary component of their professional development (Garces-Bacsal et al., 2018). Ongoing studies have shown that the emphasis on reading for pleasure is still low for PSTs with parallel results to the TARs studies replicated in Scotland, Australia and Sweden (Skaar et al., 2018; Farrar, 2021; Simpson, 2021). Given the 'structural invisibility' of children's literature in ITE (Farrar, 2021, p. 10), it appears the tendency for teachers to perceive themselves as reading teachers (i.e. those who support the development of literacy) before they perceive of themselves as *teachers who read* will continue unless it is interrupted.

Addressing the challenge of reader identity in ITE

As teacher educators, we recognise 'teachers' beliefs about reading as well as their reading habits may have a significant effect upon the motivation and engagement levels of their students' (Applegate and Applegate, 2004, p. 555). Therefore, we see opportunities for ITE to break recursive cycles of negative perception by building PST professional capacity. There has not been a study of how PST knowledge of Reading for Pleasure Pedagogy could be enhanced (Safford, 2014). A recent paper by Simpson and Cremin (2022) proposes an approach to make teachers' engagement with children's literature more deliberate by interweaving three components into what they call the 'additive trio'. The authors suggest that development of strengths in 'knowledge of children's literature, knowledge about reading such literature and knowledge about how to teach with this literature' (Simpson and Cremin, 2022) is essential to support for good reading for pleasure practices. If adopted in ITE, these principles could help PST recognise that the value they place on children's literature will impact on their teaching practices. However, to know where our energies should be directed, we needed to collect evidence to identify what the issues are. Therefore, our research questions are:

- 1 What is the extent of student teacher's knowledge of children's literature at the outset or the end of the curricular phase of their ITE?
- 2 What are student teachers' perceptions of themselves as readers and as readers of children's literature?

Methodology

As researchers, we recognise literacy as socially situated and locally constructed (Street, 1984; Barton and Hamilton, 1998). Such a stance has implications for ITE, given it foregrounds a movement away from narrow notions of literacy learning and teaching as predominantly skills based, towards a more fluid and expansive understanding and appreciation of literacies as plural and contingent upon an individual's socially constructed literate identity (Farrar, 2021). In our previous studies, we have used dialogic methodologies allowing us to capture the voices of PST discussing their perceptions of themselves as readers (Simpson, 2021).

We recognise the need to develop our PST teacher identities as engaged, enthusiastic readers with both the will and the skill to motivate children to adopt similar reading habits. Building on the prior TARs work (Cremin et al., 2014), we adopted some of the

methodological aspects and adapted them to our ITE contexts to research PTSs' knowledge of children's literature, as well as their perceptions of themselves as readers. We also acknowledge that though RfP is now mandated in England, the pedagogic strategies were not incorporated into ITE programmes during the TARs study nor for many years afterwards.

Context of the participants

The study in Australia took place in the final year of a 4-year Bachelor of Education programme taught in an urban university in NSW. ITE students in this programme study a sequence of four units that focus on the teaching of English as a discipline subject in primary schools. The units cover the syllabus content of the local NSW state authority NESA, which aligns with the Australian Curriculum English. By the beginning of their fourth year of study, students have undertaken a total of 46 days' professional experience placements or observation lessons in schools. In some cases, Covid delayed but did not totally disrupt their classroom experience. The fourth-year unit of study was selected as a site for data collection as it is the final unit in the sequence and focuses on the use of literature as part of teaching literacy in primary schools under the discipline heading of English.

The study in Scotland was located in a 5-year undergraduate primary education degree, with data collection commencing at the start of Year 3. The start of Year 3 was significant because it marked when the PST embarked upon the curricular studies part of their degree programmes, including their first course in literacy and English as a discrete curriculum area. By the beginning of their third year, the surveyed students had undertaken short placements in schools, totalling around 25 days of observation and small group work across their first and second years.

In Scotland, data were collected between 2018 and 2020, from across two cohorts, resulting in 150 participants altogether. In Australia, data were collected between 2020 and 2022 from three cohorts of students resulting in a target set of 150 participants.

Research design/data collection

The research design echoes Cremin et al., who surveyed in-service primary teachers' knowledge of children's literature in 2008. With permission, Farrar adapted the survey tool developed by Cremin et al. and used it to explore PST reading habits, knowledge of children's literature and self-perceptions as readers

of children's literature. When Simpson began to emulate the Scottish study in NSW, the same survey was used. This consistency enabled us to undertake a unique comparative analysis of the same issue in two different policy contexts.

The survey was made up of 11 items adapted from the original TARs survey (Cremin et al., 2008). This enabled the researchers to explore PST reading habits, knowledge of children's literature and self-perceptions as readers of children's literature. Questions covered topics such as favourite books, knowledge of authors, poets and illustrators and reflection on their status of engagement with children's literature (see Appendix A). In NSW, the survey was administered online via Qualtrics so that responses could be anonymised. In Scotland, the survey was administered in person during an induction day held prior to the start of the new academic session. In line with the ethical approval granted to the study, the Scottish PSTs were assured that the study was voluntary, and non-participation would not impact on their studies.

Data analysis

The data were analysed year by year for trends question by question first by cohort, and then results were compiled and compared across the two contexts. Questions provided both quantitative and qualitative data, which could be analysed for patterns and reported in different formats. For example, the data from question 1, *What was your favourite book as a child?*, resulted in a long list of book titles. The book titles were counted to provide a list of most popular books for each country. In contrast, the data from question 5, *List 6 'good' children's book authors*, resulted in percentage scores ranking students' knowledge. The quantitative datasets were analysed and represented as graphs showing the percentage cline of knowledge within and across both cohorts. Where answers were provided in open field boxes, the qualitative data were coded according to emerging themes. For example, for question 10, *Would you describe yourself as a reader of children's literature? [provide a reason for your answer]*, resulted in themes including aesthetic appreciation, sense of enjoyment and recognition of professional need. Following Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis approach (TA), which acknowledges the inherently shaping influence of researcher subjectivity throughout the interpretation process (Braun and Clarke, 2006), the themes to emerge were then explored for similarities and differences between the two cohorts of student teachers in Scotland and Australia.

Findings

In this paper, we present findings related to PST knowledge and perceptions of their engagement with children's literature as a way of investigating their preparedness to become reading teachers. Therefore, with reference to the survey questions (see Appendix A), we report findings related to questions 5, 6, 7 and 11 as one set, which allows us to address RQ1, and then to questions 9 and 10 as a pair that allow us to address RQ2. The analysis of quantitative data collected from questions 5, 6, 7 and 11 allow us to quickly demonstrate PST knowledge about children's literature in the Australian and Scottish cohorts in comparison with the TARs data where possible. It should be noted that although the graphs do not reveal results on a year-by-year basis, the same patterns were repeated for each year the data were collected from the PST. Our presentation of quantitative data relating to RQ1 (PST knowledge of children's literature) before qualitative data pertaining to RQ2 (PST reader identity) provides a context for the more nuanced responses that emerge in relation to questions 9 and 10.

Quantitative findings

Below, we present the results for questions 5, 6, 7 and 11 as figures providing visual summaries after a short descriptive analysis of the topics. In question 5, PSTs

were asked to name six good authors for children, where 'good' indicated suitability for use in the classroom. The results in Figure 2 show that 84.5% of PST from Australia could name five or six good authors as compared to 61% of PST from Scotland could name five or six good authors. PST data echo Cremin et al.'s (2008) TARs data that showed 65% of teacher respondents could name five or six authors. Fascinatingly, the most named author by all groups was Roald Dahl.

When asked to name six good poets in question 6 of the survey, 30.1% of PST from Australia named 0 poets, and 35.6% could name six poets (see Figure 3). In Scotland, most PSTs (65%) could not name a single poet, and there were no students who could name six poets. While this is a stark difference between the two cohorts, the overall result shows that poets are less well known than children's authors. As the figure shows, PST data in Australia are similar to the 2008 TARs data where 22% of teacher respondents could name zero poets and 10% could name six poets. Once again, Roald Dahl featured as the most named poet by the PST Australian cohorts, in contrast to Michael Rosen who was the most named poet by the TARS and Dr Seuss who was the most named poet by the Scottish PST.

When asked to name six good picture book author/illustrators, the survey results showed that 15.1% of the Australian PST named zero picture book author/illustrators, while 52.7% of the cohort could name six picture book author/illustrators (see Figure 4). In

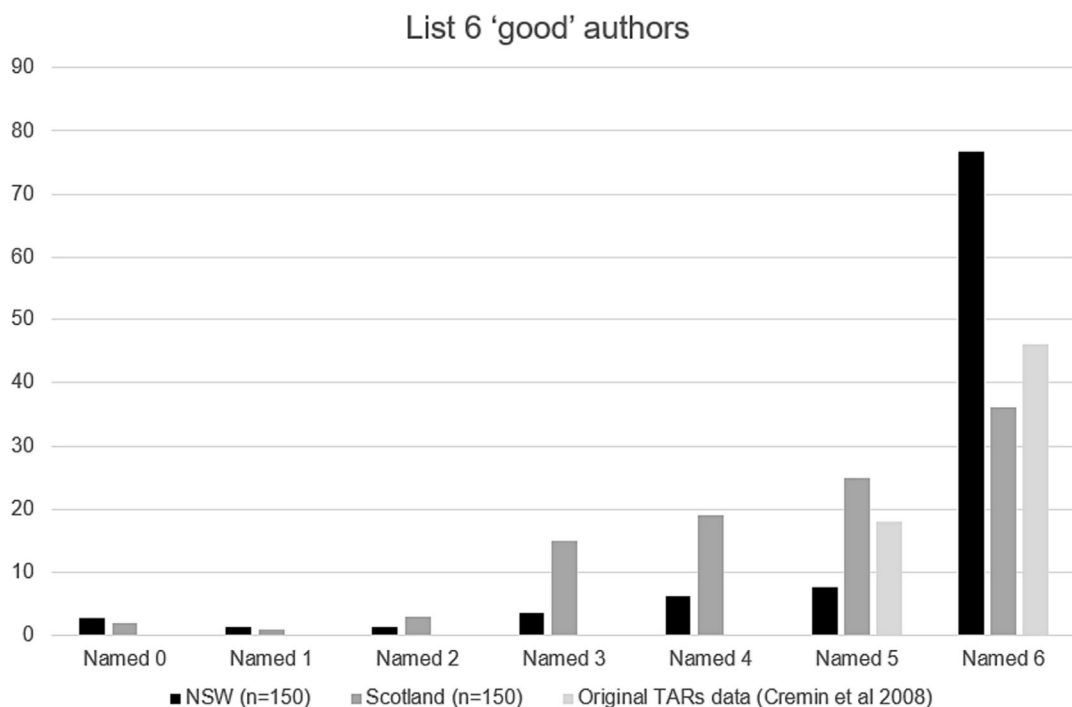


Figure 2: Combined results for Q5: List 6 'Good' authors for children.

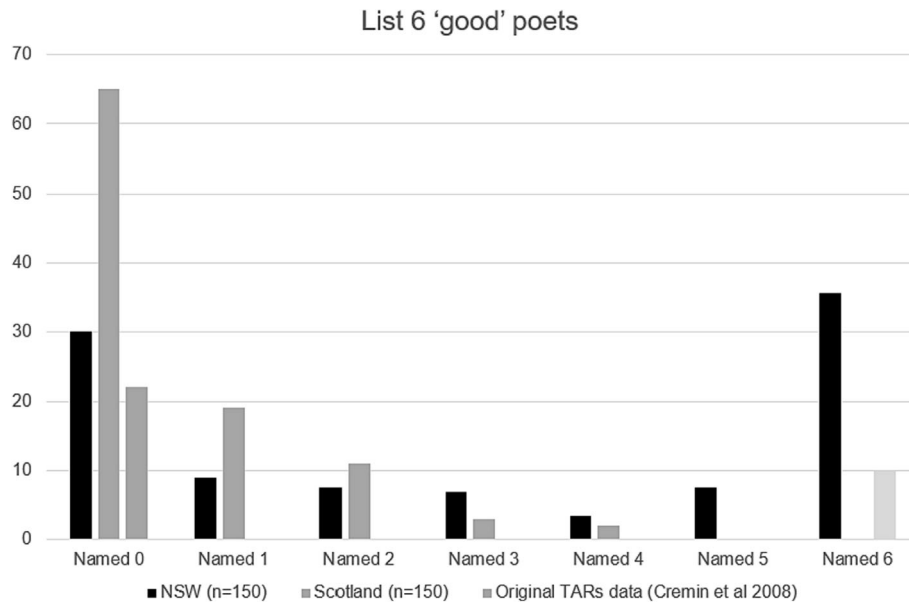


Figure 3: Combined results for Q6: List 6 'good' poets for children.

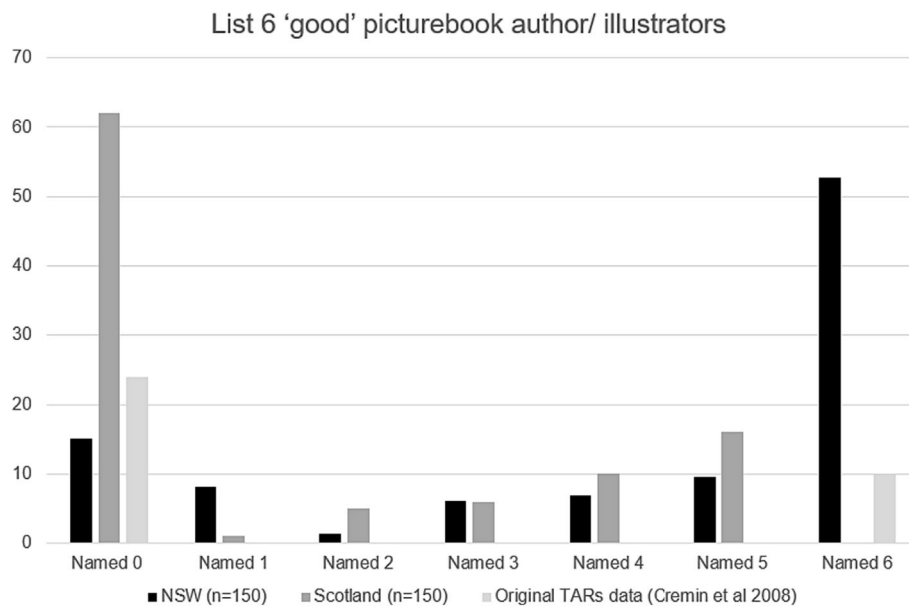


Figure 4: Combined results for Q7: List 6 'Good' picture book author/illustrators for young readers.

comparison, 62.2% of the Scottish students named zero picture book author illustrators, and 0% could name six picture book author illustrators. Again, the data show a stark difference between the two cohorts and suggest that picture book authors are better known than poets, but not as well known as children's authors. The benchmark 2008 TARs data showed that 24% of teacher respondents could not name any picture book author/illustrators and 10% could name six picture book author/illustrators. Across the datasets, Quentin Blake emerged as most commonly recognised by both TARs from the 2008 study and

the Scottish cohort, whereas in Australia, Aaron Blabey was the most recognised picture book author.

To conclude the statistical data, we present responses to Q11, which was an adaptation of the original TARS survey, that allowed us to ask the PST to evaluate their current knowledge of children's literature (see Figure 5). No comparison can be made to the TARS 2008 data as a result. Q11 asked the student teachers to choose between 'needs work', 'patchy', 'satisfactory', 'good' and 'very good' to rate their knowledge of texts for children. The responses in Figure 5 showed that 34.5% of PST from Australia

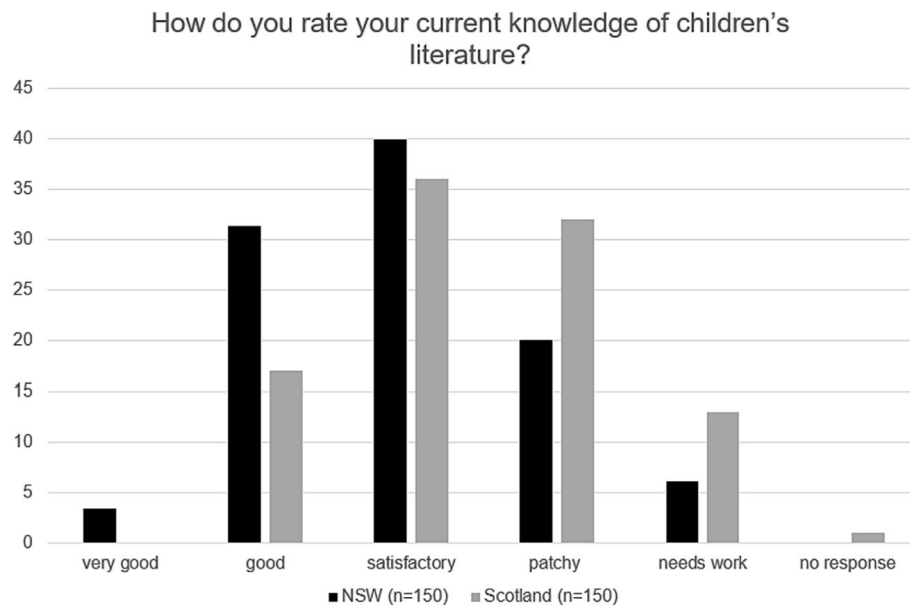


Figure 5: Combined results for Q11: How do you rate your current knowledge?

rated their current knowledge of children's literature as good or very good, while 6.2% of the cohort rated their knowledge as needing work. In comparison, 17% of Scottish students rated their current knowledge of children's literature as good or very good, while 13% rated their knowledge as needing work. The figures show roughly 50% more Australian students than Scottish students said they rated their current knowledge highly.

In summary, the quantitative data show that the Australian cohort had more knowledge of children's literature in all categories than the Scottish cohort and, it would seem, the 2008 TARs. The results also show the Australian students self-reporting stronger levels of confidence in their knowledge of children's literature than the Scottish PST. We propose possible reasons for this in the discussion section, which follows the findings from our comparison of the qualitative questions 9 and 10.

Qualitative findings

Data collected from across both cohorts in relation to survey questions 9 and 10 elicited open responses, which were coded according to emerging themes.

When asked *would you describe yourself as a reader?*, the cohorts responded slightly different ways, with a higher percentage of respondents in both contexts apparently happy to be ascribed with a reader label. In Australia, 70.3% of PST responded with a 'yes', while 29.6% answered no. In Scotland, 59% of PST perceived

Table 1: Q9 Are you a reader?

Are you a reader?	Yes	No
Australia (n = 150)	70.3%	29.6%
Scotland (n = 150)	59%	41%

themselves as readers, while 41% responded with a 'no' (see Table 1).

Respondents from both contexts offered similar reasons 'for' being a reader, including the role of reading in relaxation, as a means of escape and enjoyment. Many respondents linked high points of personal reading activity with holiday periods.

Those who chose not to describe themselves as readers did so for a range of reasons that included lack of time; lack of interest or enjoyment; dominance of other interests and technologies such as social media; impact of university work on available time; and difficulties with reading.

When asked if they identified as readers of children's literature, the cohort responses diverged. In Australia, two thirds (67%) agreed that they would describe themselves as readers of children's literature, with a third (33%) disagreeing with this statement. In Scotland, only a quarter of respondents (25%) agreed that they identified as readers of children's literature, with three quarters (75%) of the cohort declining to describe themselves in such a way (see Table 2).

Respondents were prompted to provide a reason for their answer to this question, meaning the longer responses could be coded for emerging themes, which have then been compared across the cohorts.

Table 2: Q10 Are you a reader of children's literature?

Are you a reader of children's literature?	Yes	No
Australia (n = 150)	67%	33%
Scotland (n = 150)	25%	75%

'Yes, I am a reader of children's literature because...'

Of the Australian students who were happy to describe themselves as readers of children's literature, several key reasons dominated, which can be summarised as:

- Aesthetic experience
- Future focused
- University or work need
- Lack of knowledge

For some Australian PSTs, the aesthetic experience of exploring texts for children was sufficient to gain and keep their interest: 'I love the simple beauty of children's literature and the depth they can hold. They also suit my attention span'. Others focused on aspects of their future careers and intended 'to immerse myself in the world of children's literature as much as possible'. In a similar way, those who identified as readers of children's literature did so because they perceived it as important because of their university studies and/or practicum experiences: 'It is important to build an inventory of children's literature - I read to improve my teaching practice'. Some Australian PST recognised their existing knowledge of texts for children was not sufficient and the need to develop a wider range of authors in preparation for their future classrooms: 'I feel that I have a selected list of authors that I read, and this limits the number of "good" children's books I am aware of'.

Parallels were visible between the reasons offered by the Australian PST and the smaller proportion of PST in the Scottish cohort who also identified as readers of children's literature. Themes to emerge from the Scottish data for Q10 included:

- Sense of enjoyment
- Connection to developing as a teacher
- Already read at home to family members

Like the Australian PST who appreciated the aesthetic qualities of children's literature, some PST in Scotland also foregrounded their enjoyment from engaging with such texts: 'Children's literature is creative, and I enjoy simulating my imagination'. Some student teachers in Scotland, who had not yet had any university inputs on the pedagogic possibilities of children's literature when the data were collected, made connections to their development as educators:

'I enjoy exploring how children's literature may help my future practice'. For several Scottish PSTs, reading children's literature was already part of their practice, often because of family relationships (such as parenting) and pre-existing similar responsibilities (e.g. working in a nursery): 'I read to young family members and at times, re-read old childhood favourites'.

Taking both sets together, respondents who identified as readers of children's literature tended to be those who perceived its relevance to their professional lives; those who enjoyed reading such books, and those with a pre-existing need to read such books, including to family members.

'No, I am not a reader of children's literature because...'

Students from the Australian cohort who chose to identify as non-readers of children's literature offered several reasons:

- Children's literature is linked to work purposes
- Not age appropriate
- Lack of interest
- Literature is something to own but not read

As this list suggests, some PSTs in the Australian cohort answered by drawing a distinction between their personal and professional reading for pleasure identities: 'I never really read children's literature for pleasure, only for university purposes or on practicum'. Other respondents said they preferred to read material aimed at adults rather than children: 'It's not age appropriate for me'. Some Australian PSTs said they could not identify as a reader of children's literature because reading did not feature in their lives more generally: 'I do not read enough to consider myself a reader'. Finally, some readers suggested they were happy to accumulate texts for children—possibly with future classes in mind—but without engaging with the books in detail: 'I like to collect picture books looking at the blurb to guess what the story is about, but I don't read them'. As these comments suggest, some respondents tended to think of children's literature as something separate to their own personal reading. Unlike the readers who self-identified as readers of children's literature, a picture book would not be something they chose to engage with for pleasure.

Once again, the Scottish cohort offered similar sorts of responses to their Australian counterparts when explaining why they did not consider themselves to be readers of children's literature. Overall, the main themes to emerge from the Scottish data were:

- Lack of time
- Lack of relevance
- Children's literature is for school placement
- Not age appropriate/not intellectually challenging

Many students from the Scottish cohort listed lack of time as a barrier to their engagement with texts for children. Specifically, they cited the demands of university work as a drain on available time: 'I don't have enough time now'.

Other students' responses made it clear that reading children's literature was not something that had occurred to them as a relevant use of their time, with one respondent noting: 'I don't really have a reason to read children's literature'. This suggests that PST could not yet perceive the significance of their leadership as reading role models within the classroom; it could also suggest a lack of appreciation about the wide-ranging benefit of children's literature as a powerful resource for learning. Like the Australian PST, some Scottish students seemed to separate their personal reading from the professional, with reading children's books seen as a task linked firmly to school-work: 'I only read it for professional purposes'. Another response from the Scottish context echoed the Australian cohort's concern that reading children's literature was too easy for adults, and therefore not suitable. Indeed, several Scottish student teachers voiced concerns that reading children's literature was not challenging enough: 'It is too simple to read for enjoyment'. As these themes suggest, the Scottish students did not seem familiar with children's literature as a body of work replete with pedagogic possibility. Instead, their responses seemed to indicate a lack of identification with children's literature on a largely personal, rather than professional, reason, leading to dismissals on the grounds of irrelevance or lack of intellectual challenge.

Discussion and implications about reader knowledge for our respective programmes and ITE

As noted in an earlier section, the PSTs in Scotland and Australia were at different stages of their degree programmes when data were collected, given each institution approached the organisation of literacy and children's literature provision differently.

The students in Australia were in their fourth and final year and were undertaking another unit of study that emphasised the use of children's literature within literacy teaching. In this regard, the Australian PSTs were becoming familiar with children's literature because in each of the four units of study, they had undertaken across the 4 years they were expected to read children's literature, analyse children's literature and teach with children's literature as part of their programme assessment requirements. That is, they were fully engaged with all three components of the

additive trio (Simpson and Cremin, 2022). In contrast in Scotland, the PSTs were in their third year of a 5-year primary education programme and were about to begin their first standalone course in literacy and English as a curricular area. Unlike their Australian counterparts, they had not yet had much exposure to literacy pedagogies and had not yet experienced any teaching involving children's literature. It therefore seems likely that the different experiences with and exposure to children's literature throughout their degree programmes had an impact on their responses.

We note that while there are shortfalls in knowledge for both cohorts, it is clear that the Australian PST demonstrated greater knowledge of children's literature overall. However, when comparing the largely qualitative data collected from Q 9 and 10 across cohorts, there are greater similarities than differences. That is, PST living in very different educational contexts gave very similar reasons as to why they did not feel confident about engaging with children's literature. This common perspective is a concern, as teachers' low engagement with children's literature is associated with weak professional confidence in working with literary texts in the classroom (Applegate and Applegate, 2004; Jenkinson, 2012).

We also note a concerning policy trend that over the time of the study, major curriculum changes have occurred in Australia mirroring those in other countries such as England that reduce emphasis on the use of literary texts in classrooms for reading for pleasure. At the moment, the positive results from the Australian study could be associated with the high profile of children's literature that was supported by the national curriculum when the PST commenced their degree. However, should the ITE programme be forced to reduce its emphasis on teaching with children's literature as a core pedagogic feature, we suggest that the students' knowledge would drop. Our data show that where experience of learning with children's literature is reduced or limited, then a relatively high proportion of students do not perceive that literature is relevant to their roles as future teachers.

These comparative findings provide additional information complimenting what we have said in previous solo authored papers (Farrar, 2021; Simpson, 2021) and echo Applegate and Applegate's (2004) reminder that 'teachers have a serious obligation to address the nature of their students' attitudes toward reading' (p. 561). Therefore, we argue it is imperative for ITE to seize the opportunity to act as circuit breakers by building PSTs' professional knowledge and by fostering positive reader identities at all stages of ITE through building critical awareness of children's literature so that graduate teachers can model engagement in reading for pleasure for their future students that encourage equitable literacy opportunities.

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Appendix A.

Student Teachers as Readers Questionnaire

We are very grateful for your help with this survey. Our aim is to try to find out about the reading habits and children's book knowledge of our student body in order to offer more targeted support throughout the year. The questions that follow have been adopted and adapted from the Teachers as Readers research project (Cremin et al., 2008).

- 1 What was your favourite book as a child?
- 2 What children's books have you read recently for your own pleasure?
- 3 Please indicate when this was by underlining or circling the appropriate answer:
 - within the last month
 - within the last 3 months
 - within the last 6 months
 - over 6 months ago
- 4 How do you usually get hold of books for your own reading? Please indicate all those that are appropriate:
 - local library
 - university library
 - bookshop
 - online book seller
 - from friends or family
 - other (please specify in the space below)
- 5 List 6 'good'¹ children's book authors.
- 6 List 6 good children's poets.
- 7 List 6 good children's picture book authors/illustrators.
- 8 Rank the following statements in order of importance, where 1 is the most important.

Children's literature is important because:

 - it develops reading
 - it develops writing
 - it widens knowledge
 - it engages the emotions and helps to develop empathy
 - it develops the imagination
- 9 Would you describe yourself as a reader? Please select one answer.
 - yes
 - no

Please provide a reason for your answer here:

- 10 Would you describe yourself as a reader of children's literature? Again, please select one answer.

- yes
- no

Please provide a reason for your answer here:

- 11 How do you rate your current knowledge of children's literature?

- very good
- good
- satisfactory
- patchy
- needs work

Please leave any suggestions or questions related to children's literature here and we will try to address them during the academic session.

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