Literature in the Australian English Curriculum: Victorian Primary School Teachers' Practices, Challenges and Preparedness to Teach

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Abstract: The introduction of the Literature strand within the Australian Curriculum requires all teachers to engage students in print and digital literature that embrace the cross-curriculum priorities and support students to examine, evaluate, and discuss literary texts. However, such curriculum change assumes that primary school teachers who have often not studied literature as a specific method, have the confidence and content and pedagogical knowledge to plan and implement programs. This paper investigates teachers' views of their level of confidence and preparedness to teach literature, and to explore teachers' practices, challenges and enablers in teaching literature in both print and digital environments. Results show that this group of 321 primary school teachers reported varying levels of confidence, knowledge and practices, and offers new insights into complex challenges they've experienced when interpreting and enacting the literature curriculum. Findings suggest the critical need for professional learning and discuss the implications for initial-teacher education programs.

Introduction

The current *Foundation to Year 10 Australian Curriculum: English* (ACARA, 2016), enacted across all states and territories, has been the topic of rigorous debate particularly in relation to how knowledge should be conceptualised, what content should be included, and what forms pedagogy should take (Hammond, 2012; Tambyah, 2017; Yates & Collins, 2010, p. 89). In addition, there has been divided views on what literary content and experiences should be included, and the place of multimodal texts and new media alongside more traditional print-focused paradigms (Gardiner & Cumming-Potvin, 2015; Luke, 2010).

The study of English has at its core, three inter-related strands including Language (knowing about the English language); Literature (understanding, appreciating, responding to, analysing and creating literary texts); and Literacy (expanding the repertoire of English usage) (ACARA, 2016). In previous curriculum iterations in the state of Victoria, where this study is set, Literature did not have a separate strand but was subsumed within the general English curriculum (Curriculum and Standards Framework (CSF), 1995 – 2005; Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS), 2006). Historically, the focussed study of literature was predominantly taught by specialist English teachers as a separate subject for students in the senior years of secondary schooling. In contrast, literature teaching was less visible in primary schooling and used predominantly as a valued resource central for literacy teaching (Unsworth, 2005). However, the current national curriculum seeks to explicitly encourage all teachers working at primary and secondary school year levels "not only to use texts

conventionally understood as 'literary', but also to engage students in examining, evaluating and discussing texts in increasingly sophisticated and informed 'literary' ways" (ACARA, 2016). These texts include multimodal texts and "the oral narrative traditions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, texts from Asia, texts from Australia's immigrant cultures and texts of the students' choice" (ACARA, 2016).

The inclusion of the literature strand into the Australian curriculum for all year levels provides teachers with guidance on what knowledge is relevant and highlights the need for teachers to develop substantive knowledge about literature, and ways of planning and implementing programs that ensure that learning occurs (Hammond, 2012). However, as is the case with any curriculum development and implementation, teachers require extensive professional learning to develop discipline-specific and pedagogical knowledge to build their confidence and preparedness to teach (Atweh & Singh, 2011; Barton, Garvis & Ryan, 2014; Henderson & Jarvis, 2016). Research has shown that while many teachers recognise the importance of teaching specific content areas for learning, such as literature, they often lack the confidence and understanding of how to translate this knowledge into effective pedagogical practice (Hammond, 2012; Locke, 2009; Hollindale, 1995; Jones & Chen, 2012). In the case of Victorian primary school teachers, many may not have studied literature as a specific method during their pre-service teacher training courses, and may not have the confidence or pedagogical knowledge to plan and implement programs that engage students in "literary texts of personal, cultural, social, and aesthetic value" (NCB, 2009, p. 8). The purpose of this study was to investigate teachers' level of confidence and preparedness to teach literature, and to explore primary school teachers' practices, as well as the challenges and enablers in teaching literature in both print and digital environments.

The Australian Curriculum: Literature Strand

Notwithstanding the wide-ranging contestation around the Australian Curriculum: English, (Hammond, 2012; Henderson & Jarvis, 2016; Ireland, O'Sullivan & Duchesne, 2017; Love & Humphrey, 2012), the Literature strand is an extensive resource that provides a unique lens for teachers to foster creativity, imagination and curiosity through meaningful engagement in the stories of people and civilisations, "and to enrich and develop students' cognitive and affective command and understanding of language in all its expansive dimensions, contexts and purposes" (Manuel et al., 2009, p.7). One of the central features of the Literature strand is the emphasis on texts that have the potential to enrich students' lives by learning about aesthetic, social, cultural, and intellectual aspects of human experiences. Furthermore, the strand highlights the significance of choosing texts that can support students to shape their own personal and cultural identities, and to understand how language is used and how they might use language to create their own texts. Teachers are required to support children to understand how literature reflects the context of culture, and to critically respond and examine literature according to various literary features (ACARA, 2016). Such literary features acknowledge the multilayered and entwined pleasures of engaging with literature including inter-related sensory, affective, intellectual, critical, cultural and textual dimensions, and resonate with many of the tenets described by literary theorists and researchers. For example, Nodelman and Reimer (2003) describe the "powerful pleasures" experienced when engaging in literature positing that pleasures that highlight the affective include the evocation of readers' emotions such as amusement, empathetic pain or joy; understanding the patterns of emotional connectivity made available through plot organisation such as suspense, climax and resolution; understanding one's responses to a writer's point of view or to patterns formed by the organisation of words, pictures and events;

and awareness of how such elements combine. The pleasures of critique include realising a text's attempts to manipulate and influence; deconstructing to explore elements of text that 'undermine or even deny their own apparent meaning' (Nodelman & Reimer, 2003, p. 26); and relating understandings gained from one text to another and to literature more generally. There is potential for pleasures to be experienced through: social involvement in sharing literary experiences with others and discussing responses to texts; appreciating genre and structure; and becoming aware of new and different forms of literature.

The *Australian Curriculum: English* also acknowledges a variety of forms of literature including multimodal texts in digital form, and encompasses,

> *…literary texts from across a range of historical and cultural contexts that are valued for their form and style and are recognised as having enduring or artistic value. While the nature of what constitutes literary texts is dynamic and evolving, they are seen as having personal, social, cultural and aesthetic value and potential for enriching students' scope of experience. Literature includes a broad range of forms such as novels, poetry, short stories and plays; fiction for young adults and children, multimodal texts such as film, and a variety of non-fiction. Literary texts also include excerpts from longer texts. This enables a range of literary texts to be included within any one year level for close study or comparative purposes (ACARA, 2016).*

Furthermore, it identifies the affordances of multimodal forms of children's literature made possible through the use of technology and new media. However, while the curriculum acknowledges that students not only engage in the study of print texts and recognises that digital environments make possible new forms of children's literature and offer new opportunities for responding to children's literature, the use of the term 'multimodal' is often presented as synonymous with 'digital' and 'technology'. Broader definitions should acknowledge that manipulation of digital elements by the general citizenry rather than just by technical specialists has undeniably made meaning increasingly available in multimodal forms. These forms include the integrated use of written and oral language with icons and still and moving images (examples of the visual mode of meaning); music and sound effects (from the audio mode); facial expressions and hand and arm movements (from the gestural mode); and the sensory potential evident in films with aroma capacities and games and books requiring touch interaction (examples of the tactile mode) (Kalantzis, Cope & Cloonan, 2010). Multimodal experiences in digital environments have a heightened capacity to vary the degree of control in meaning making by the reader. Such variety includes enactment by the reader/player (Beavis et al., 2014) and greater physicality through visual, audio and tactile engagement (Simpson & Walsh, 2013). Some of the affordances of these multimodal forms are strongly evident throughout the literature strand. For example, in the sub-strand 'creating literature' which specifically focuses on 'creating literary texts', Year 2 students are expected to 'create events and characters using different media that develop key events and characters from literary texts.' At Year 3 students are required to 'create imaginative texts based on characters, settings and events from students' own and other cultures using visual features, for example perspective, distance and angle.' From Years 4 to 6, students are expected to 'create literary texts that adapt or combine aspects of texts students have experienced in innovative ways.'

Teacher Knowledge and Pedagogical Practices

The *Shape of the Australian Curriculum: English* (ACB, 2009) states that the "national English curriculum will be the basis of planning, teaching and assessment of

English" (p. 4). However, while the curriculum outlines what students need to know and develop at each year level from Foundation to Year 10, it assumes that teachers have in-depth knowledge of English, and the interrelationships between each of the English curriculum strands, as well as the confidence in how to teach it. Specifically, much responsibility rests with teacher content knowledge and pedagogical innovation, as teachers expand and strengthen their knowledge and teaching of the 'literary' aspects of texts and multimodal literature, including texts in digital form, oral narrative texts of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and texts from Asia, and from Australia's immigrant cultures. Teachers also require knowledge that incorporates an understanding of diverse literary theories, genres, modes and practices including: narrative theory, reader response theory, literary genre, poetry, linguistic analysis, text construction, visual literacy, and familiarity with e-literature (Simpson, 2013). Furthermore, teachers' knowledge of literature is also challenged by the rapid developments in the field. Children's literature has been characterised by the 'avidity with which it embraces developments in technology and new media' (Reynolds 2011, p. 62), as evidenced by the burgeoning of the ebook industry, including texts with important literary aspects that take advantage of the affordances provided by the stand-alone or networked computer (i.e., sounds, gesture, with multiple pathways and   dimensions).

In general, curriculum documents incorporate the knowledge for what to teach but place less emphasis on the details for how to teach (Hammond, 2012). It is well documented in the research literature that teachers face many challenges as they attempt to interpret and translate the knowledge and skills that are specified in written curriculum documents into teaching and learning (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2012; Halse et al., 2013; Tambyah, 2017). These challenges may relate to escalated pressures around teachers' time and levels of intensity of their work but may also involve teachers trying to establish the congruence between their own beliefs, ideologies and understandings with what is written and enacted (Ireland, O'Sullivan & Duchesne, 2017).

Teaching and sharing literature with children at one level may appear to be very simple, however these practices are multi-dimensional and often complex. For primary teachers in particular, these inclusions into the curriculum and the need to incorporate language, literacy and literature as well as the cross-curriculum priorities, increases the complexity of their work as teachers of English. Subject English is framed as a site where the integration of interdisciplinary skills and content occurs and may present significant challenges for primary teachers, to interweave these multifaceted curriculum demands into a coherent program which meaningfully incorporates the study of literature. Such competing demands set the scene for the "problem of erasure" (Locke, 2009, p. 125), identified in New Zealand research into primary and secondary English/literacy teaching, in which the study and enjoyment of literature was constrained by a crowded curriculum, standardised literacy testing, restricted access to suitable literary texts and limited teacher knowledge of effective classroom practices for teaching literature (Locke, 2009). Furthermore, it is well documented in the literature that many teachers lack confidence in, and deep knowledge and pedagogical understandings of, Asia-related and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures teaching and learning (Achinstein & Athanases, 2005; Cloonan, 2015; Leeman & Ledoux, 2005). For example, in a recent Australian study by Halse et al. (2013) of 1,319 primary and secondary teachers, the majority of these teachers had little content knowledge and did not specifically plan or possess knowledge of suitable resources for Asia-related teaching, with over half of these teachers indicating that there was not enough space in the already 'crowded curriculum'.   Similar teacher concerns related to the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures in teaching and learning were identified in Nakata's study (2011), where teachers specifically asked what this inclusion looked like and how it could be embedded in their practice in a respectful way. Nakata notes

that while Australian Curriculum documents domesticate Indigenous issues in the larger framework, it is teachers who are expected to work out how these issues are to be meaningfully incorporated in the classroom. He further argues that:

> *…the big [curriculum] statements are easy…clearly, teachers and schools need access to professional development… [to understand the] complicated knowledge work for both teachers and students (Nakata, 2011, p. 8).*

Despite the prescribed content knowledge outlined in the Literature strand of the Australian curriculum, it is not evident how prepared primary school teachers are, and their level of confidence, to teach literature within print and digital environments. Furthermore, there is a paucity of research which explores teachers' pedagogical practices and the enablers and challenges they experience when teaching literature. Our study aimed to explore primary school teachers' views and practices of teaching literature in print and digital environments. Specifically, this study sought to investigate the following three research questions:

1. What are teachers' views of their own preparedness and levels of confidence to teach literature within print and digital environments?
2. What pedagogical practices do teachers implement when teaching literature within print and digital environments?
3. What are the enablers and challenges in teaching literature in digital environments?

Research Design and Methodology

Mixed methods research was used in this study combining elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches gathered from an anonymous on-line survey. Such an approach enabled us to consider multiple viewpoints and perspectives for the purposes of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie & Turner, 2007). Qualitative thematic analysis (Wilkinson, 2011) was used to analyse the data generated from the open-ended items in the survey, which involved developing initial codes, identifying themes among codes, reviewing, defining and naming the themes. The process applied Henri's (Herrington & Oliver, 1999) unit of analysis which allowed the unit of meaning, whether it be a word, sentence or phrase, to be included in the code.

Survey Design

The survey included 28 items that incorporated four main domains developed in line with the three research questions. These included: (1) demographic details of the participants; (2) teachers' views on their preparedness and levels of confidence to teach literature within print and digital environments; (3) teachers' reported practices for teaching literature in digital environments; and (4) teachers' views regarding the enablers and challenges in teaching literature in digital environments.

Survey Participants

Email invitations to participate in the anonymous online survey were sent to 1,477 government and Catholic primary school principals in metropolitan and regional or rural areas in the state of Victoria, Australia. A total of 321 primary school teachers (81% female, 19% male) currently teaching across all year levels from first year of school (Foundation) to Year 6 completed the survey. The highest percentage of teachers were aged between 50 to 59 years (40%), 22% were aged 40 to 49 years, with 18% aged between 20 to 29 years and 15%

aged 30 to 39 years. Further results showed that almost half of the participants (44%) had been teaching 20 or more years with 36% of teachers teaching 10 years or less. The majority (60%) had completed a Bachelor degree as their highest qualification and were currently teaching in urban or metropolitan areas of Victoria (65%).

Findings

The findings are presented in three main sections that align to address each of the research questions.

Teachers' Views of their own Preparedness and Levels of Confidence to Teach Literature within Print and Digital Environments

In order to investigate primary teachers' views on their own preparedness to teach literature they were invited to indicate how the teaching and learning of literature was covered in their initial teacher education (ITE) training. Results showed that 58% of teachers stated that it was covered as part of the literacy subjects, while 22% responded that the teaching and learning of literature was never mentioned. A small proportion of the teachers (12%) provided further details of their ITE training stating that the teaching and learning of literature was '*covered at warp speed*', '*was superficial at best*' and '*was not a strong focus but was mentioned at some stage*'. Four teachers gave specific responses in relation to the teaching and learning of literature within digital environments stating that they trained '*before the days of the internet*' when '*this sort of material was not around*' and '*only one computer was available*'.

Teachers were invited to indicate the types of professional learning experiences they had engaged with since their ITE training that specifically related to the teaching of literature in digital environments. Teachers were presented with five tick-the-box items and could tick all that applied. Results showed that the majority of teachers' experiences included engaging in discussions with colleagues at school (67%) or through personal reading and online research (62%). A third of teacher responses showed that they engaged in formal presentations while 16% of teachers had not engaged with any professional learning experiences.

Further exploration of teachers' views of their own levels of knowledge and confidence in teaching literature showed that over half of this group of teachers (57%) rated their knowledge of the Literature strand in the Australian curriculum as 'medium' with 22% rating themselves as having 'low', 3% having 'no knowledge' and 18% as having a 'high' level of knowledge. In addition, this group of teachers felt more confident with teaching literature related to the cross-curriculum priority of sustainability (80% either strongly agreed or agreed) compared with teaching literature related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures (45%) and Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia (44%).

Pedagogical Practices Teachers Implement when Teaching Literature within Print and Digital Environments

In order to explore teachers' pedagogical practices, teachers were invited to indicate why and how they teach literature in both print and digital environments. Specifically, teachers were invited to indicate the purposes for teaching literature from nine key statements. Participants could tick all that applied. Statements with the highest response rates

were 'to introduce students to a wide range of texts' (94%), 'to encourage students to read for enjoyment' (90%), 'to develop students' language skills' (89%), 'to widen students' knowledge' (86%), 'to develop students' imaginations and creativity' (85%), and 'as a stimulus for writing' (85%). The statements with the lowest response rates were 'to teach students about digital literacy' (68%), 'to develop broader inter-cultural understandings' (63%) and 'to develop students' capacities for empathy' (59%).

In addition, teachers were invited to complete two survey items that further explored their pedagogical practices in teaching literature. Figure 1 shows results from participant responses when asked what they use to teach literature. Teachers were asked to select from four categories for each of the 18 items listed including (1) 'I don't know about this', (2) 'I know about this but never use it', (3) 'I occasionally use it', and (4) 'I often use it'.
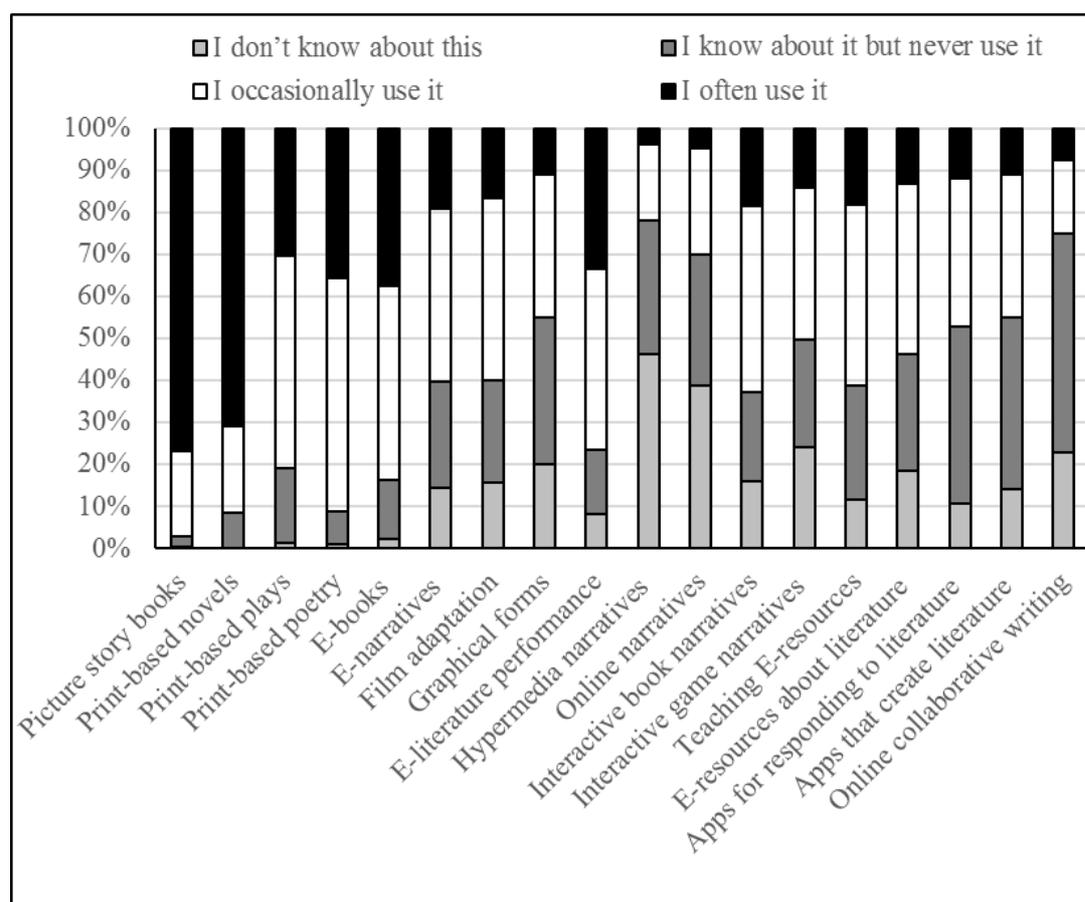

Figure 1. Resources used by teachers to teach literature

Results show that the items *most often used* by this group of teachers to teach literature were print-based picture story books (77%) and print-based novels (71%). Over one third of teachers often used e-books (38%), print-base poetry (36%) and e-literature performance, such as plays, poems, and songs performed on YouTube (33%). In contrast, a high proportion of these teachers *do not know about* or *never use* hypermedia narrative (non-linear individual pathways with links to written text and multimedia) (78%), online collaborative writing projects to which students contribute (75%) and narratives created fully online, such as *Inanimate Alice* (70%). Further results showed that while this group of teachers knew about digital tools that engage students in responding to literature (online discussions, contributing to blogs, wikis), applications that enable students to create literature (e.g., creating fan fiction; creating literature in the form of blogs, wikis etc.) and e-literature

in graphical forms (e.g., plays and poetry) were never used or only occasionally used to teach literature (77%, 75% and 69% respectively).

In order to further investigate teachers' use of digital resources and their self-reported pedagogical practices for teaching literature in digital environments teachers were invited to provide an example of a digital literature project in their classroom. Almost half (44%) of the teachers responded to this open-ended item (140 teachers). Ten of these teachers stated that they had either never undertaken any digital literature projects in their classroom or were not currently working on any literature project within digital environments. Each response from the remaining 130 teachers was initially double-coded according to two broad themes: (1) digital resources that teachers used; and (2) specific practices that teachers implemented when teaching literature. In some cases teachers responded with an example of more than one digital resource and more than one corresponding practice. Each of the themes were further analysed for emerging categories.

Results within the theme of digital resources (48% of the total responses) showed that the most prominent category was the use of digital tools such as computers and touch screens, blogging, wikis, iMovie, Stop Motion Animation and specific literacy education applications. The second most prominent category in this theme included the use of commercially available literacy programs such as "*Sunshine online*", "*Ziptales*" and "*Tumble e-books*". The remaining five categories evident in the responses included the use of websites, e-books, film, e-newspapers and e-poetry.

Figure 2 shows the main categories that emerged from the category related to the self-reported practices that teachers implemented when teaching literature. Results show that of the 213 responses related to teachers' self-reported practices, 55% were related to engaging with literature as a vehicle for supporting children's literacy learning rather than specifically teaching literature. For example, one teacher wrote that they used "*Bug Club where children read e-books and answer questions…usually literal questions.*" Another teacher commented that they use "*interactive stories during reading group sessions,*" while other teachers wrote that they use e-books to "*respond to questions using their netbooks*", "*to find and record collective nouns*", "*as a guided listening activity for literacy*" or "*to teach phonics*". Teachers also used YouTube clips as an example of e-literature with the specific purpose of "*introducing reading skills such as summarising and paraphrasing*" or "*to help explicitly teach different genres of writing*".
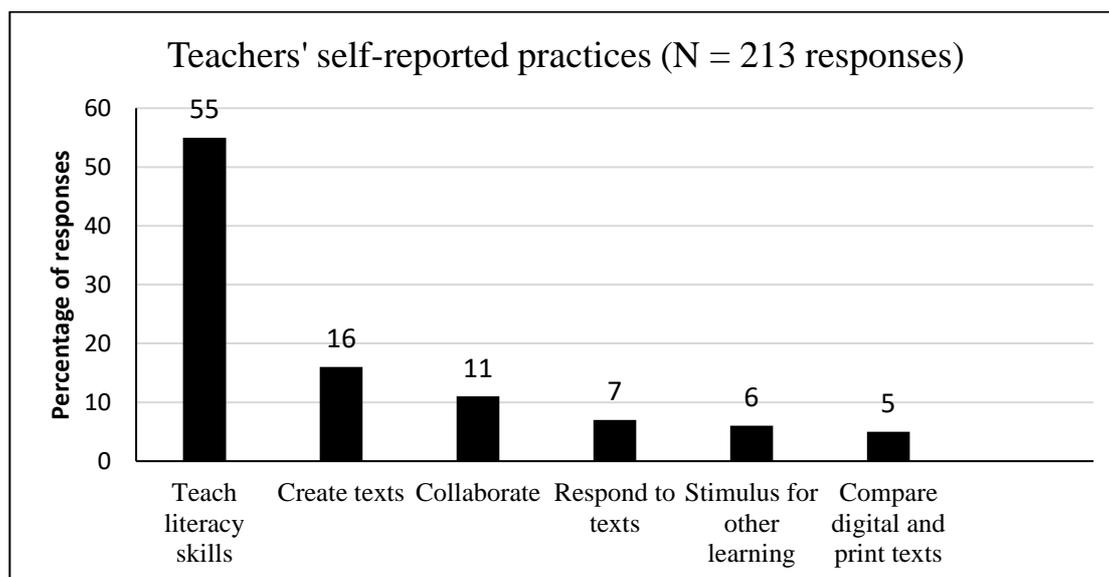

Figure 2. Teachers' self-reported practices when teaching literature.

Further categories that emerged from teacher responses included evidence of creating texts (16%). For example, some teachers used Web 2 technologies to "*produce a story or a play for an audience*", "*create a multimodal literacy text*", "*create a digital book with hyperlinks to various pages or illustrations*" and to create films "*to support student-created narratives.*" Teachers also reported that the students collaborated with others to create texts (11%). For example, some teachers used blogs and wikis to "*which children, teachers and parents can add pictures, stories and comments*", "*link with grade 5 students and schools in the USA*", and as a way for children in a school in a remote area of Australia to "c*ollaborate on a narrative about 'a day in my life.'*"

Other teacher responses showed that they fostered critical thinking and multimodal meaning making that involved a range of modes when responding to particular texts (7%). For example, a small percentage of teachers used different representations of literature in the form of film, e-books, and print to discuss the contribution of different modes of meaning making such as *"stance, body language and points of view"*. Similarly, one teacher used "*clips from "Chi", a Japanese cartoon to interpret visual literacies, to interpret characters' feelings, emotions and actions,*" while another teacher used "*Baraka as a resource alongside other literature when developing understandings of the importance of the effect of visuals in a non-narrative film.*" Further evidence of teachers supporting children to think critically about texts was apparent in the specific responses that related to the self-reported practices of providing students with opportunities to compare digital and print texts (5%). Typical responses included reference to a specific narrative text that was "*viewed as a short film and compared the narrative elements of these in comparison to hard copy books.'*

A smaller proportion of responses related to teachers' use of literature as a stimulus for other learning (6%), which included only two of the 207 responses that referred to the potential benefits of engaging in children's literature as a means of developing a deep understanding of culture and cultural exchanges. One teacher wrote that the "*students used laptops to research and develop videos about cultural diversity*" while another teacher stated that they, used film as a way of developing "*cultural and other learning that comes from watching this film*".

Enablers and Challenges in Teaching Literature in Digital Environments

Teachers were invited to list three challenges and three things that would enable their teaching of literature in digital environments. Three main themes emerged from the analysis of both of these open-ended items: (1) the strong need for professional learning; (2) greater access to digital resources and support; and (3) time. A further theme from the analysis of the challenges that teachers face when teaching literature related to the students' own knowledge and skills in using digital resources. Specifically, these teacher responses identified students' own knowledge and skills in the use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT), particularly for younger children was a challenge. Typical responses included the difficulty with '*age and ability of the children*', '*working with young students who are still developing basic literacy skills*' and '*students' ability to access e-literature independently*'.

Results presented in Figure 3 show that the highest proportion of responses related to the importance of having adequate resources and funds (55%, 57% respectively). Typical responses included the need for teachers to '*find suitable resources quickly*' and to be provided with '*a list of good websites so I don't spend hours looking for good resources*.' Teachers also typically reported that access to up-to-date hardware, reliable internet connections and technical support to troubleshoot ongoing challenges with equipment,

software and '*to support us when the server goes down*' were both seen as being an enabler and a challenge when teaching literature in digital environments.
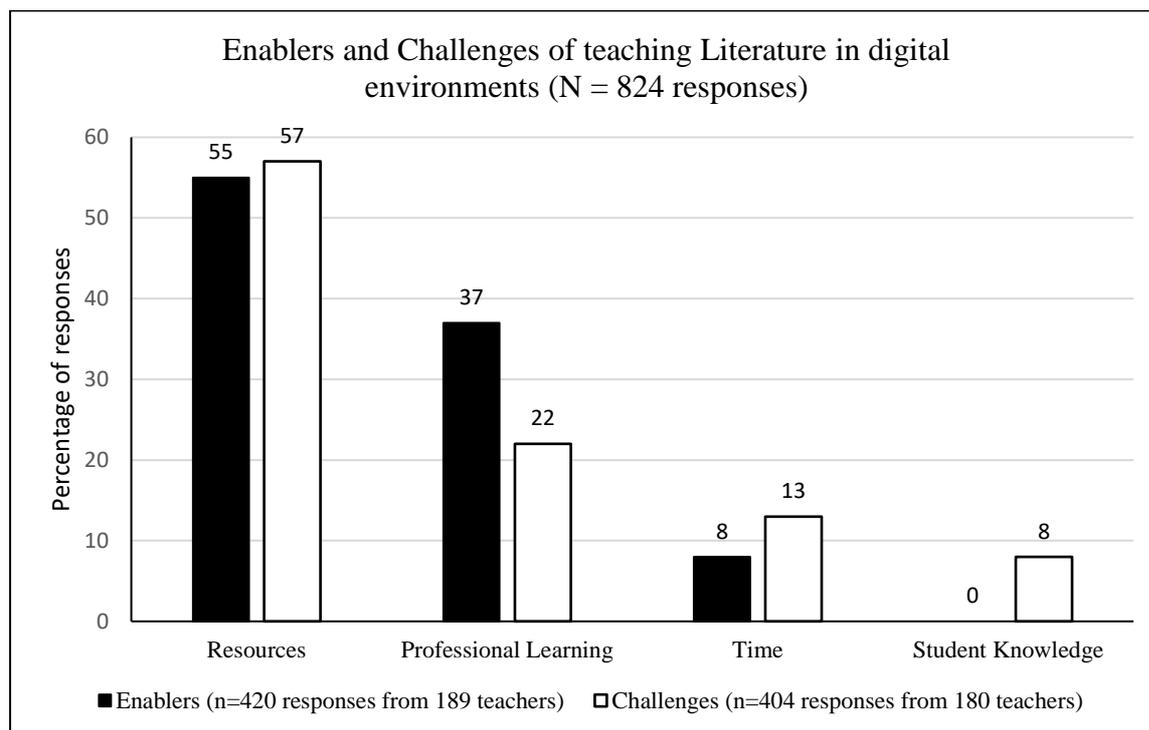

Figure 3. Enablers and challenges in teaching Literature in digital environments.

Teachers also emphasised the need for developing their understandings and practices in teaching literature at an individual level as well as reporting the need for a whole school approach. However, it was noted that more teachers viewed professional learning as an enabler rather than a challenge in teaching literature. Some teachers stated that they would benefit from '*more training with experts*', '*more time to develop my own understanding and knowledge of what's available online*', and wrote that they would welcome talking with '*like-minded teachers trialling resources and approaches in their classrooms*' and '*networking with other teachers and watching them in action*'. Some teachers also identified the need for further support in understanding and using digital technologies, voicing their concerns with '*my knowledge of digital*', and '*lack of knowledge and confidence in using digital resources*'. Other teachers also reported the challenges of changing practice with '*constantly fighting old ways of thinking with little support*' and ensuring understandings at a whole-school level where,

> *colleagues misunderstand literature [in a digital environment] as me taking the lazy way out and simply giving students something fun [and] students feeling that literature in electronic form is simply fun and don't apply themselves as much as usual.*

The time needed to undertake the necessary professional learning to upskill, particularly in the area of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and Web 2.0 tools was viewed as both an enabler but more of a challenge for this group of teachers. Furthermore, some teachers stated that they required more '*time to develop my own understanding and knowledge of what's available online*' and '*time to familiarise myself with the constant upgrading of new and exciting things.*' One teacher reflected that she needed '*time to stay on top of apps and ways to use them to enhance learning.*'

Discussion
Teachers' Views of their own Preparedness and Levels of Confidence to Teach Literature within Print and Digital Environments

Overall, this group of Victorian primary school teachers showed varying levels of knowledge and confidence in teaching literature with only a small proportion of teachers indicating that they had no knowledge of the Literature strand in the Australian curriculum. However, only 18% of these teachers rated themselves as having a high level of knowledge of the Literature strand. Furthermore, these teachers understood many of the purposes for teaching literature, including a strong emphasis on the use of literature as a vehicle for literacy learning and teaching, as well as fostering some of the pleasurable aspects of literature such as enjoyment, creativity and imagination. However, teachers placed less emphasis on the importance of engaging and studying literature to support students' knowledge and use of digital literacy, and to gain insights into history and culture and to explore the more affective dimensions of engagement with literature such as empathy. Teachers' lack of confidence in teaching literature in digital environments and incorporating the cross-curriculum priorities was further confirmed by the findings from the survey. Less than half of this group of teachers identified as being confident with teaching literature related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures (45%) and Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia (44%). Clearly, these findings suggest that while this group of teachers are highly experienced as primary classroom teachers (44% with over 20 or more years of experience) they were not confident in teaching literature and would benefit from intensive and ongoing professional learning. These findings also concur with those reported in the study by Nakata (2011), whereby teachers identified their need for professional learning experiences that addressed ways of including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures in teaching and learning practices in a respectful way.

The professional learning experiences around literature for this group of teachers should include deepening their own knowledge of content and ways to incorporate cross-curriculum priorities. It appears that this group of teachers' own preparedness to teach was somewhat limited in providing deep content and pedagogical knowledge of literature in ways that value both traditional and emergent forms. These findings have implications for initial teacher education (ITE) programs in how they position the teaching and learning of literature and how they adequately prepare the primary teachers of the future to "know the content and how to teach it" (AITSL, 2011: Standard 2). Despite the longstanding support for children's literature to be a requirement for teacher training programs and "integral to teachers' continuous professional development" (Collins & Safford, 2008, p. 419), it appears that there is still much work to be done, especially within the already crowded ITE curriculum. Furthermore, school leadership teams have a significant responsibility to provide opportunities for practising teachers to build knowledge and confidence in literature as they negotiate the implementation of the Literature strand in the Australian curriculum.

Pedagogical Practices Teachers Implement when Teaching Literature within Print and Digital Environments

Overall results show that this group of teachers predominantly use print-based literature, such as picture story-books and print-based novels, but did not appear to be exploring the potential of digital platforms, particularly Web 2 technologies, in opening up new forms and possibilities for engagement with literature. In particular, these findings suggest that while many teachers know about resources that are specifically designed to encourage students to respond to and create literature and collaborate with others, they never

or infrequently use them. Furthermore, many of these teachers appeared to be unfamiliar with the range of online literature resources available. Rather, most tended to make use of more familiar print-based forms, such as picture story-books, plays, novels and poetry. The group of teachers also appeared to heavily rely on the use of commercially available literacy programs such as "*Sunshine online*", "*Ziptales*" and "*Tumble e-books*" as a resource for supporting students' engagement with, and study of literary texts.

This limited use of technology perhaps reflects these teachers' own levels of confidence in teaching and engaging in digital environments in addition to the lack of resources in accessing and maintaining digital platforms and exposure to high quality literature. As previously highlighted, very few teachers appear to be engaging with Web 2 technologies. Findings about teachers' limited use of digital technology in this area is consistent with our previous research (Paatsch, Cloonan & Hutchison, 2015). In that study, a group of 123 pre-service teachers were invited to reflect on their observations of their supervising teachers' use of technology-based tools for literacy learning in early years primary school classrooms. They observed widespread diversity amongst teachers, with very limited use of knowledge creation technology-based tools (Web 2.0) in literacy teaching.

Further findings from the open-ended question showed that many teachers were engaging with literature for a variety of purposes that aligned with many of the elements specified in the Literature strand of the national curriculum. Specifically, these practices related to responding to, and creation of, texts and the comparison of literary texts in "written and multimodal form, including digital texts, such as narratives, poetry, prose, plays and films" (ACARA, 2016). However, similar to earlier findings from Unsworth (2005), the most prominent practice for these teachers was related to the use of literature as a valued resource for literacy teaching with less emphasis on the teaching and studying of literature itself. These findings suggest that these teachers are experienced in the teaching of literacy but perhaps given their reported levels of confidence in teaching literature, are not engaging students in literary texts to develop their understandings about the social, historical and cultural contexts of these texts. As such, it appears that these teachers are overlooking the opportunities to engage with the oral narrative texts of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and texts from Asia, and from Australia's immigrant cultures. Again, the implications of these findings suggest the urgent need for strong investment in the professional learning for these teachers to not only deepen their content knowledge but also to support them to plan for and implement effective teaching and learning around literature and the cross-curriculum priorities (AITSL, 2011; Standard 3). Furthermore, these findings also raise the importance of modelling and providing opportunities for deep learning through engagement with literature that enriches pedagogical practices for future teachers who are undertaking practicum experiences as part of their initial-teacher education qualifications. If we want the next generation of primary school teachers to develop expertise in supporting students to understand, appreciate, respond to, analyse and create literature in both print and digital environments then it is the responsibility of both university academics and practising teachers to provide content knowledge, effective literature pedagogical practices and a high quality curriculum (Barton, Garvis & Ryan, 2014; Henderson & Jarvis, 2016).

Enablers and Challenges in Teaching Literature in Digital Environments

The primary school teachers in this study acknowledged the affordances of teaching literature within digital environments. However, they also highlighted the importance of having adequate resources, specific professional learning, and time, all of which were reported as both enablers and challenges for teaching literature in digital environments.

Specifically, funds, technical support, the provision of equipment, software and hardware were important considerations. Furthermore, teachers reported the need for both individual and whole school professional learning in understanding, planning for, and implementing literature practices within digital environments. In particular, teachers reported the benefit of learning from their peers by observing effective literature teaching and learning. These findings suggest the need for teachers, school leadership teams, and education departments to provide mentoring and professional learning opportunities for not only beginning teachers but for more experienced teachers who, in the case of the experienced teachers in this study, viewed their own levels of knowledge of the literature strand and of teaching literature as 'beginning'. Planning and funding on-going, in-depth and sustained professional learning programs should not only address the development of content knowledge but should target the pedagogy to support teaching of literature that fosters students' engagement with, and study of, literary texts. As outlined in the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (AITSL, 2011), "all Australian governments, universities, school sectors and individual schools have a responsibility to work together to support high-quality teaching and school leadership, including by enhancing pre-service teacher education" (p. 1).

Conclusion

The inclusion of the Literature strand within *The Australian Curriculum: English* has provided visibility around the study of literature as a separate entity, as well as how it interacts with the other strands of Language and Literacy and the cross-curriculum priorities. Furthermore, the curriculum acknowledges the importance for all students from Foundation to Year 10 to be provided with opportunities to understand, appreciate, respond to, analyse and create literature in both print and digital forms (ACRA, 2016). However, the implementation of curriculum is complex and presents many challenges for teachers as they develop their own understandings and knowledge of the content and the ways that this knowledge is enacted (Barton, Garvis & Ryan, 2014; Hammond, 2012). These complexities are navigated by teachers within neo-liberal environments of standardization, high-stakes testing and heightened accountability. Respecting the complexity of the role of the teacher, our inquiry aimed to substantiate, acknowledge and support teacher knowledge and experience. Findings highlight the challenges teachers face in interpreting and enacting changing English curriculum guidelines and cross-curriculum priorities, in an environment where understandings of the relationships between 'multimodality', 'literature,' 'literacy' and 'English' are fluid and contested.

The overall findings from this study highlight the complexity of primary school teachers' work, in implementing and integrating the Literature strand within the English curriculum that embraces the cross-curriculum priorities and assumes content and pedagogical knowledge across digital and traditional forms of literature. The responses provided from this group of 321 primary school teachers who participated in this study highlighted the varying levels of confidence, knowledge and practices in teaching literature within print and digital environments. In addition, these teachers were predominantly using literature for the purpose of teaching literacy, rather than embracing the pleasures and possibilities of various forms of print and digital literature. Further, despite teachers' awareness of various forms of digital literature, they were not regularly using them in their pedagogical practices.

What was centrally apparent in the findings was a critical need for professional learning, to support teachers in building confidence and expertise in incorporating literature into English teaching, and in exploring the potential for innovation in responding to and

creating new textual forms. Preferred forms of professional learning identified by the teachers included the observation of digital champions; mentoring through collaborative practice-based relationships, and the curation of quality digital literary resources. More broadly, what emerges most clearly from this research is teachers' openness and preparedness to work with literature, but a critical need for more knowledge about how to do so within digital environments.

If literature is to take its place as a central element in primary English curriculum, in ways that value both traditional and emergent forms and deep knowledge and pedagogical understandings of Asia-related and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, there is an urgent need for a major cultural change. Specifically, this change requires an extensive investment from governments and curriculum authorities to enable educational leaders, initial-teacher educators, pre-service teachers and practicing teachers to mobilize the structural, material and cultural resources (Biesta & Tedder, 2007). Initial-teacher educators have the responsibility to redesign ITE courses that enable innovative ways for pre-service teachers to collaborate with practicing teachers in sharing, critiquing and developing new pedagogical practices. Encouraging teachers to research and share their own literature pedagogies requires ongoing advocacy by school leaders and a commitment to fund sustainable and reflective professional learning. Collaborative partnerships between teachers, students, schools and researchers, such as those alluded to in this study, suggest directions for future developments in this field.

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