

## Literacy in 21st century Australia : The ALEA Declaration



### UNESCO definition of literacy:

*Literacy is the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute, using printed and written (and visual) materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy involves a continuum of learning to enable an individual to achieve his or her goals, to develop his or her knowledge and potential and to participate fully in the wider society.*

Adapted from the UNESCO Education Position Paper (2004) *The plurality of literacy and the implications of its policies and programs*, p.13.

Accessed at <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0013/001362/136246e.pdf>

### Literacy is a powerful, wide-ranging life skill beyond traditional notions of talking, listening, reading and writing

In societies such as Australia, being literate means being able to use a set of capabilities to

- access, record, develop, and communicate ideas
- comprehend and build knowledge
- respond creatively to produce works of social, cultural, aesthetic, historical and economic importance
- pose, explore, and respond to local, national and global issues, problems and challenges
- understand and interact with bureaucracies, and maintain personal records and
- enjoy spending time with and sharing a wide range of entertaining texts.

As society changes and the ways in which Australians work, communicate and learn change we need to refine these capabilities.

### Learning to be literate plays a central role in determining an individual's life choices and life chances

In contemporary societies the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and participate in effective and innovative ways is a necessary condition of access to social support systems, employment, powerful forms of knowledge and to domestic, civic, and political decision-making. Therefore literacy education needs to be seen as contributing both to the quality of human experience and also to the equitable distribution of knowledge, practice, and influence across societies.

Literacies are inextricably linked with the particular cultures, histories and experiences of individuals and groups. Therefore literacy education needs to value students' worldview cultural heritage, home language/s and lived experiences.

## Meaning making is at the heart of all literate practices

Making meaning is at the heart of all literate practices, beginning at birth and continuing throughout life. A literate person must have a wide range of abilities and competencies to make meaning in the face of ever-changing social contexts. Therefore planning, teaching and assessing literacy needs to involve meaningful literacy activities, reflecting the range of contemporary demands (oral, print, digital), modes of communication (words, images, sounds, film/animation) and the ways in which accuracy, fluency, comprehension, adaptability, and critique are valued across different social settings and learning areas.

## Access by all learners to strong, effective, and lifelong literacy education is a key feature of a society committed to equity

Children have a right to a rich and creative curriculum and to quality literacy experiences. Literacy education requires ongoing authentic assessment of children's knowledge, skills and understandings using a broad range of strategies to inform systematic and careful monitoring and planning for and reporting on literacy learning. There is a need for explicit instruction in letter-sound connections.

The use of quality literature in all modes in the classroom, home and community helps develop students' understanding and use of language, reading achievement, content learning, and interpreting and construction of texts. There is a need for explicit instruction in letter sound connections (phonics) and word analysis skills: this should always occur within genuine literacy events and in contexts meaningful to the student.

Reading, viewing, comprehending, discussing and creating a wide variety of texts has positive and significant effects on students' reading, numeracy and other cognitive skills as well as helping them represent themselves and their understandings. However, no one method of reading/writing instruction will ever meet the needs of all children at all times. Therefore educators need to be discerning practitioners as they draw on research that is contemporary, valid and rigorously conducted to inform their practice. Furthermore, they need to become leaders in ongoing innovation and review to guide ongoing literacy pedagogy.

## Educators lead literacy but do not have sole responsibility in literacy education

Parents and caregivers play a critical role in fostering children's engagement in and enjoyment of a wide range of experiences that enhance literacy development. They need to understand that children benefit from rich oral language experiences and opportunities to interact with high quality literature representing diverse cultures, experiences and perspectives.

Educators across all of the school years, and all of the curriculum domains share the responsibility for developing students' capabilities in literacy. Therefore literacy educators must understand that being literate is at the heart of learning in each content area and students need to learn strategies in order to interpret, understand, (read view), and compose (write) in written and digital forms using language and reasoning pertinent to each content area.

The society as a whole provides each generation's background of common experience in all aspects of literacy, and the content and standard of these experiences shape students' understandings and expectations. Community emphasis on high standards for environmental texts is influential in developing students' appreciation of the importance of literacy standards.

In assuming the lead responsibility for literacy education, educators and their professional associations have a significant role to play in advocating for a rich and coherent understanding of literacy among educators, children and their families, the media, and the community at large.



Australian Literacy Educators' Association

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