

**Linking assessment and pedagogy:
Pre-primary teachers' literacy practices in
Catholic schools, Western Australia**

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**This thesis is presented for the degree of Doctor of Education
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I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

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Abstract

International interest in the body of research concerning teachers' practices in literacy education, specifically during early childhood, has grown consistently. In Australia, a number of recent initiatives and increased funding have brought substantial changes to early childhood literacy education affirming and paralleling the increased focus internationally. In this climate of change in early childhood literacy education, the goal of this study was to document the pedagogical and assessment practices currently being utilised in Pre-primary Western Australian classrooms to examine how teachers link these aspects of their teaching in planning and monitoring their literacy programs. A mixed-method research approach was applied using both qualitative and quantitative data gathering and analyses to portray and interpret the day-to-day pedagogical and assessment practices in literacy of a select group of Western Australia early childhood teachers. Data were gathered using three methods: survey questionnaires, interviews and classroom observations. Participants included Pre-primary teachers from the Catholic sector in Western Australia. All teachers were invited to participate in a survey and a smaller number of participants were involved in being interviewed and observed.

Using the three dimensions of conceptual focus, namely, pedagogy, assessment and monitoring and planning. Both quantitative and qualitative analyses identified a number of consistent terms used within each dimension when examining the practice of effective teachers of literacy. In this way, key findings in literacy teaching and assessment were extracted to uncover and elevate consistencies in effective teacher practices. Briefly, effective early years' teachers of literacy implement a variety of

pedagogical and assessment methods; are intentional and explicit in what they do; systematically spend regular, consistent and significant time on both instruction and assessment; apply an iterative approach in their practice; share responsibility; interconnect the dimensions of pedagogy and assessment and provide a safe and nurturing environment for their learners. Effective teachers of literacy implement these characteristic practices in their day-to-day literacy programs. In summary, this study demonstrates that early childhood teachers in Western Australian Catholic sector are actively applying a range of instructional and assessment practices in their own contexts and are open to increased awareness and professional learning in the areas of literacy pedagogy and assessment. Two implications for practice arise from the current study. The first is a strong need for development of a set of guidelines articulating how to facilitate effective early childhood literacy pedagogy, assessment and monitoring, and planning. The second implication for practice involves the dissemination of this information, implementation of its suggested practices and the provision of ongoing support to teachers through professional learning frameworks.

Greater support for early years' teachers through the development of a set of guidelines around effective literacy practice within a supportive professional learning framework are two avenues likely to enhance the pedagogical and assessment practices in early years' literacy. A grounded understanding of intentional pedagogy, intentional monitoring and assessment and intentional planning is necessary for early years' teachers regardless of teaching experience. To achieve this across schools and systems, professional development within these key dimensions of literacy needs to be forthcoming. The continued development of early childhood literacy education in Western Australian schools could be bolstered by attending to findings and recommendations of this research.

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