

Language, Learning & Literacy (L3) Review

Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation



Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation

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Executive summary

Language, Learning & Literacy (L3) is a pedagogical approach to teaching reading and writing (not a collection of curriculum resources or a programmed scope and sequence). L3 includes two core components. **Language, Learning & Literacy Kindergarten (L3K)** was developed first as a Tier 2 intervention for Kindergarten. The aim of L3K was set out as:

“to increase opportunities for students in low socioeconomic communities to achieve learning outcomes in Kindergarten commensurate with their peers in other communities”; and

“reduce the number of students requiring access to Reading Recovery targeted Year 1 early literacy intervention.”

(NSW DEC 2011a, p. 5)

As a Tier 2 intervention, L3K was designed to provide personalised instruction for individuals and small groups of students within a whole class setting. **Language, Learning & Literacy Stage One (L3S1)** was developed later not as a tiered intervention, but as a professional learning program for stage one teachers. The aim of L3S1 was set out as:

“to develop deep understandings of how to plan and implement a systematic literacy program that meets the literacy learning needs of all students”; and

“maintain[ing] and grow[ing] the gains of students who have received explicit, systematic, balanced and integrated literacy teaching in the L3K initiative.”

(NSW DoE 2017a, pp. 3-4)

The overall goal of both L3K and L3S1 was to increase the number of students who reach expected literacy outcomes by Year 3 (NSW DoE 2017a). L3K has been available to any NSW public school since 2010 and L3S1 since 2012.

Research aim and methods

The aim of this review was to examine the design, content and implementation of L3. In order to achieve this aim, we used three methods:

- Document review of existing literature, program materials and evidence underpinning L3.
- Quantitative analysis of relevant questions from the K-2 Literacy and Numeracy 2019 Principal Survey (for details, refer to [Appendix 1](#)).
- Qualitative analysis of interviews and group discussions with L3 teachers, L3 trainers and lead trainers, instructional leaders, principals and school executive, departmental stakeholders and other relevant groups (for details, refer to [Appendix 2](#)).

Summary of findings

In this report we address seven research questions. Below is a summary of the findings for each question.

What was the original research base for L3?

L3K originated from the research base of the New Zealand 'Picking up the Pace' program. L3K professional learning focused on an iterative inquiry cycle and ongoing review of data within an instructional leadership model. L3K literacy instruction was based on the works of Marie Clay (1991, 1998) and the three cueing system, and emphasised the use of whole texts, analytic and constructivist approaches.

Landmark reports in the early 2000s emphasised the importance of code-based approaches to reading instruction through explicit and systematic pedagogies in the earliest stages of reading instruction, and L3K did not draw on these approaches. More specifically, L3K did not draw on the 'Simple View of Reading' (Gough and Tunmer 1986, advocated by Rose 2006) or 'The Reading Rope' (Scarborough 2001), and did not include a scope and sequence to systematically structure the introduction of alphabetic code-breaking skills (advocated by Rowe 2005). Children with reading difficulties and children from disadvantaged backgrounds most particularly benefit from code-based approaches to reading instruction as an early intervention (Louden et al 2005; Rowe 2005; Snow, Burns & Griffin 1998).

In summary, while L3K drew on **some** research, it did not draw on **the full range** of available research into early literacy teaching. L3K therefore did not draw on a systematic understanding of the existing research, and those parts which it under-emphasised are of particularly benefit to children with reading difficulties and children from disadvantaged backgrounds. We note also that L3S1 was developed later and drew largely on the same research base as L3K.

How was L3 originally designed and implemented?

Both L3K and L3S1 were piloted in a small number of schools prior to implementation. While schools originally had to apply to participate in L3K and meet particular criteria based on socioeconomic status and NAPLAN results, these requirements were removed in 2010. This meant that L3K shifted away from being a closely monitored and targeted intervention to being perceived as a general literacy program suitable for all schools. This shift from a targeted intervention to a general pedagogy was exacerbated by the fact that the department did not offer any other comparable literacy programs for schools to choose as an alternative to L3. As the use of L3 expanded to reach an increasingly large and diverse range of schools, there was reduction in departmental oversight and implementation monitoring.

The design and implementation of L3 became intertwined with two related departmental initiatives. First, L3 was featured as one component of the Best Start Initiative, which aimed to ensure that all students were on track in their literacy and numeracy learning by Year 3. The inclusion of L3 within Best Start meant that L3 was seen as widely applicable to any school, rather than a targeted intervention for use with particular groups of students at selected schools. Second, the vast majority of the 572 Early Action for Success (EaFS) schools have implemented L3. EaFS involves a set of specific actions for targeted government primary schools whose results fall in the lowest quartile of NAPLAN performance. L3 has been implemented differently in EaFS and non-EaFS schools. Overall, EaFS schools have better access to L3 training and support than non-EaFS schools. EaFS schools also have access to Instructional Leaders who can facilitate ongoing implementation of L3.

Under Local Schools, Local Decisions, principals in non-EAfS schools have had to collaborate within local networks to identify and share L3 trainers, and have had to independently fund participation in L3 training (which is considered to be expensive). Both of these factors have been barriers to participating in L3 for non-EAfS schools. The department has limited oversight over both access to and the quality of L3 training in non-EAfS schools.

To what extent does L3 reflect current departmental policies and publications?

L3 only partially reflects fundamental elements set out in four documents: the department's Literacy K-12 Policy, the Quality Assurance Professional Learning aims, and the CESE publications 'How schools can improve literacy and numeracy performance' (2017a) and 'Effective reading instruction in the early years of school' (2017b). In particular, by taking an analytic approach, the L3 instructional model provides only limited 'systematic' teaching and a form of 'explicit' teaching that is not consistent with best practice, as set out originally by Mesmer and Griffiths (2005) and more recently by CESE (2017b). Furthermore, L3 does not adequately reflect the phonemic awareness or phonics components in CESE's effective reading literature review, highlighting the philosophical and empirical gap between a synthetic approach and an analytic approach. Finally, L3 is not aligned with two areas of the department's Quality Assurance professional learning aims – L3 is not consistent across the state, in either quality or availability, and L3 does not embed robust support for facilitators to ensure quality and expertise in delivery.

How is L3 currently designed and implemented?

Three in every five schools reported using L3 in 2019. L3 is primarily perceived as a general literacy pedagogy, rather than a tiered intervention (for which L3K was originally designed). L3 has become a pedagogical identity for some teachers, and is often discussed with a personal and passionate intensity. Implementation of L3 varies considerably between schools. 84% of L3 schools reported using additional programs alongside L3 (the most common of which were MiniLit, Jolly Phonics, Daily Five, Reading Recovery and Sound Waves). Two-thirds of schools reported modifying L3.

Implementation of L3 is currently presenting some challenges for classroom management. During fieldwork, there were two conflicting messages about classroom management during guided reading time. Some schools reported that, once they set the expectations and 'trained' their students, their students worked independently. Others reported that, regardless of the different strategies adopted, their students did not work well independently and struggled with limited supervision for a significant period of time.

Running records were the most commonly reported tool used to assess the impact of L3's implementation. Schools agreed that reading level data are important and useful. Some teachers reported concerns about the accuracy of reading level data and a sense of pressure to 'push' students through the reading levels. A limited range of other assessments were also described.

Why did NSW government primary schools choose to use L3?

The demand for teacher professional learning in literacy appears to have driven the use of L3. Schools chose L3 in order to improve teachers' pedagogical understanding and skills; to enhance programming consistency through a shared understanding and meta-language; and to develop stronger ways of tracking

student progress. In addition, many were impressed with the training model, in particular the in-school coaching. There was a perception that L3 was rigorous and endorsed by the department, especially as the department did not offer any other comparable literacy programs for schools to choose as an alternative to L3. The interviews also revealed that some principals felt that they had no choice but to adopt L3, particularly those in EAFS schools.

What aspects of L3 are working well?

Teachers reported that an important strength of L3 is the significant change in their knowledge, practice and confidence. L3 fills current gaps in pre-service and in-service training in the fundamentals of teaching reading and writing K-2. Teachers report feeling more confident as a result of participating in L3 training. L3 supports differentiation and helps teachers to target their teaching to meet individual student needs. L3 promotes the use of quality texts and provides specific procedures for how to have conversations with students about texts. Teachers report that L3 provides a structure for setting up a classroom and students benefit from the consistency.

Teachers also note that the L3 assessment expectations create good routines and help teachers identify student needs through greater reflection. Reading levels are useful for a simple 'at a glance' monitoring system. The five-weekly goal setting and use of data to inform teaching practice supports teachers to be reflective practitioners. The L3 training model also helped to create a culture of collaboration and networking, both within and between schools. L3 teachers reported that their students' progress was seen as a whole-school, collective responsibility, so that individual teachers are not judged if a student had not improved.

What aspects of L3 could be improved?

According to participants, L3 pedagogical strategies can be challenging to implement, depending on the specific needs of a class. Teachers report that key groups of students needed more support than can be offered within L3. Teachers found some of the L3 strategies difficult to implement and that using L3 resources efficiently requires an onerous amount of preparation time. Managing students so they were engaged and learning can be demanding while balanced programming and thorough preparation were sometimes compromised by lack of time. Training was considered to be costly to some schools, while others found trainers' expectations of children's work were unrealistic. The lack of realism in the examples and expectations in training made translation into the classroom disheartening. There is currently limited departmental oversight of L3, resulting in fidelity continuing to reduce over time.

Recommendations

During fieldwork for this review, it became evident that there is some anxiety in schools about the future of L3 and the department's intention to continue to support it. Any changes made will therefore require clear messaging and careful implementation. Schools are seeking holistic solutions to the challenges they face with early literacy teaching. With this in mind, we present the following five recommendations for consideration.

Consider key elements of the L3 PL model for future training

There was strong agreement amongst schools that several elements of the L3 professional learning model are valuable and worth considering for any future training. These were:

- a unified, holistic approach to literacy teaching
- ongoing learning over a substantial period of time
- classroom observations and coaching/mentoring sessions; and
- networking and sharing across schools, especially for small and rural/remote schools.

However, schools also emphasised that the impact of their L3 training was highly dependent upon the quality of the trainer and the relationships they built within their schools. Any future training would benefit from closer monitoring of the quality of the trainers, including standardised training materials that are readily accessible and updated regularly, as well as the provision of ongoing professional learning and support for trainers. Teachers also wanted training examples (such as the L3 videos) to more realistically demonstrate what is achievable in a typical classroom.

Clarify how best to program and implement the K-6 English syllabus

In terms of programming, schools particularly want support to find the balance between scope and sequence or 'big picture' programming and differentiated or emergent programming. In terms of implementation, schools spoke about the need to manage their three key resources – time, physical space and concrete materials. Schools want support to find an appropriate balance between implementing modelled, guided and independent activities across a typical English session.

This also relates to a broader concern about the distinction between planning for 'literacy' (which, by definition, sits across all key learning areas) and planning for 'English' as a discrete subject with its own syllabus outcomes and course content. Linking programming more explicitly to the English syllabus may help to clarify this concern, as well as to ensure that all outcomes and course content are addressed.

In instances where new programs are implemented from the start of Term 1, the department could further assist teachers in planning and to gain confidence by offering the first few training sessions in Term 4 of the previous year prior to starting.

Clarify how best to differentiate phonics instruction in different contexts

Schools were strong in their agreement on the importance of oral language, phonemic awareness and phonics for early literacy instruction, but there was confusion about exactly how these skills should be taught, and what role analytic instruction (as in L3) and synthetic instruction should play. The department should consider providing schools with a recommended standard approach to phonics

instruction to be provided to all students, as well as options for how schools might approach supplementary differentiated phonics instruction (Duke & Mesmer 2018; Ramirez Stukeley et al. 2019). Any future program should be designed so that phonemic awareness, phonics, handwriting, grammar, writing and spelling are taught explicitly, using a systematic approach that includes programmed content and an intentional scope and sequence (Mesmer & Griffiths 2005).

Clarify the purpose of different assessment tools and how to use the data they generate

Use of data in L3 is widely considered to be a strength of the program. However, as we looked more closely at the use of data in L3, we identified several issues. First, there is a strong emphasis on reading level data in L3. It would be valuable to provide a set of common guidelines on how best to collect and record this data. Whilst tracking reading levels over time gives a broad picture of progress, it does not necessarily provide teachers with detailed information to identify student needs to inform further teaching points. L3K uses two additional assessment tools, but L3SI does not. It would therefore be valuable to identify what other assessment tools teachers could use to complement reading levels data.

Second, greater use of diagnostic assessments would enable teachers to more closely identify areas of student need. It would also be valuable to provide more explicit guidance on how teachers can actually use the data once it is generated through assessment. Where possible, any assessments should be clearly linked to existing systems (particularly BSKA and PLAN2), as well as to the Literacy Learning Progression.

More broadly, it is also worth considering what oversight the department should have with student data. It would be valuable for the department to collect data on the programs, tools and interventions each school is using and with which specific students. This would enable better tracking of students through different schools, identify what particular programs and interventions students have or have not participated in, and indicate which programs are worth evaluating more closely.

Develop a logic model and an evaluation plan for a comprehensive outcome evaluation of future programs

Any refreshing of L3 or other new literacy professional learning should be evidence-informed and maintain a cohesive focus on improving student outcomes. A program logic methodology should be applied to ensure that there is a clear definition of success; that there is coherence across activities; that there are adequate and robust measures available; and that there is strong, central coordination, enabling continual monitoring and adjustment.

We therefore suggest that future programs be developed alongside a detailed logic model and an evaluation plan to enable a comprehensive outcome evaluation. Future implementation plans would also benefit from the inclusion of specific mechanisms to maintain implementation fidelity (O'Donnell 2008). Implementation fidelity includes identification of 'core' components of a program that cannot be changed and 'additional' components that can be adapted to meet individual contextual needs. A focus on fidelity would support more comprehensive future evaluations.

Limitations and why a review rather than an evaluation

CESE identified several limitations that meant it was not possible to undertake a **retrospective outcome evaluation**. First, we were unable to conclusively identify which schools and students participated in L3 and in which years they participated. This meant that a 'control group' could not be identified for comparison. Second, reading level data collected during L3 training are not centrally stored by the department. When collected at school, these data are not always reported at the individual student level, but rather are aggregated at a group or class level, making individual student comparisons impossible. Finally, schools participating in L3 should be using L3 in a systematic manner as intended for reliable results, and our review identified that there is considerable variation between schools in how they implement L3 (refer to chapter 4). It is therefore difficult to credibly attribute any outcome changes directly to L3. A rigorous **prospective outcome evaluation** would need new data requiring several years to collect.

Given these limitations, CESE determined that a **qualitative review** was the best alternative to an outcome evaluation for L3. This decision is in line with current government guidelines. The NSW DoE Evaluation Framework notes that program reviews "may be useful when there is insufficient information to conduct an evaluation" (p. 7). The NSW Government Program Evaluation Guidelines state that program reviews are "typically quicker, more operational assessments of 'how we are going', often to inform continuous improvement". We also note that this review is limited to document analysis, survey and interview data, drawing from the perspectives of schools and stakeholders, and does not include classroom observations. Nonetheless, this is a robust review that will provide important insights to inform future work as the current NSW Literacy and Numeracy Strategy ends in 2020.

Introduction

Language, Learning & Literacy (L3) is a pedagogical approach to teaching reading and writing (not a collection of curriculum resources or a programmed scope and sequence). L3 includes two core components. **Language, Learning & Literacy Kindergarten (L3K)** was developed first as a Tier 2 intervention¹ for Kindergarten. The aim of L3K was set out as:

“to increase opportunities for students in low socioeconomic communities to achieve learning outcomes in Kindergarten commensurate with their peers in other communities”; and

“reduce the number of students requiring access to Reading Recovery targeted Year 1 early literacy intervention.”

(NSW DEC 2011a, p. 5)

As a Tier 2 intervention², L3K was designed to provide personalised instruction for individuals and small groups of students within a whole class setting.

Language, Learning & Literacy Stage One (L3S1) was developed later not as a tiered intervention, but as a professional learning program for stage one teachers. The aim of L3S1 was set out as:

“to develop deep understandings of how to plan and implement a systematic literacy program that meets the literacy learning needs of all students”; and

“maintain[ing] and grow[ing] the gains of students who have received explicit, systematic, balanced and integrated literacy teaching in the L3K initiative.”

(NSW DoE 2017a, pp. 3-4)

The overall goal of both L3K and L3S1 was to increase the number of students who reach expected literacy outcomes by Year 3 (NSW DoE 2017a). L3K has been available to any NSW public school since 2010 and L3S1 since 2012. Wherever possible in this review we have explored the distinction between L3K and L3S1. A more detailed description of how L3 works is provided in Box 1.

Research aim and methods

The aim of this review was to examine the design, content and implementation of L3. In order to achieve this aim, we used three methods:

- Document review of existing literature, program materials and evidence underpinning L3.
- Quantitative analysis of relevant questions from the K-2 Literacy and Numeracy³ 2019 Principal Survey (for details, refer to [Appendix 1](#)).

1 For an explanation of tiered interventions, refer to: http://www.earlyactionforsuccess.com.au/pdf/Information_for_Principals_Nov2014.pdf.

2 For comparison, Tier 1 interventions are designed for use with a whole class. Tier 3 interventions provide more intensive support for individual students and may involve withdrawal from the classroom for one-on-one instruction.

3 Refer to: <https://education.nsw.gov.au/literacy-and-numeracy-strategy/primary-school-initiatives/k-2-action-plan>.

- Qualitative analysis of interviews and group discussions with L3 teachers, L3 trainers and lead trainers, instructional leaders, principals and school executive, departmental stakeholders and other relevant groups (for details, refer to [Appendix 2](#)).

Research questions

In this review, we address seven research questions:

1. What was the original research base for L3?
2. How was L3 originally designed and implemented?
3. To what extent does L3 align with current departmental policies and publications?
4. How is L3 currently designed and implemented?
5. Why did NSW government primary schools choose to use L3?
6. What aspects of L3 are perceived to be working well?
7. What aspects of L3 could be improved?

Limitations and why a review rather than an evaluation

CESE identified several limitations that meant it was not possible to undertake a **retrospective outcome evaluation**. First, we were unable to conclusively identify which schools and students participated in L3 and in which years they participated. This meant that a 'control group' could not be identified for comparison. Second, reading level data collected during L3 training are not centrally stored by the department. When collected at school, these data are not always reported at the individual student level, but rather are aggregated at a group or class level, making individual student comparisons impossible. Finally, schools participating in L3 should be using L3 in a systematic manner as intended for reliable results, and our review identified that there is considerable variation between schools in how they implement L3 (refer to chapter 4). It is therefore difficult to credibly attribute any outcome changes directly to L3. A rigorous **prospective outcome evaluation** would need new data requiring several years to collect.

Given these limitations, CESE determined that a **qualitative review** was the best alternative to an outcome evaluation for L3. This decision is in line with current government guidelines. The NSW DoE Evaluation Framework⁴ notes that program reviews "may be useful when there is insufficient information to conduct an evaluation" (p. 7). The NSW Government Program Evaluation Guidelines⁵ state that program reviews are "typically quicker, more operational assessments of 'how we are going', often to inform continuous improvement". We also note that this review is limited to document analysis, survey and interview data, drawing from the perspectives of schools and stakeholders, and does not include classroom observations. Nonetheless, this is a robust review that will provide important insights to inform future work as the current NSW Literacy and Numeracy Strategy ends in 2020.

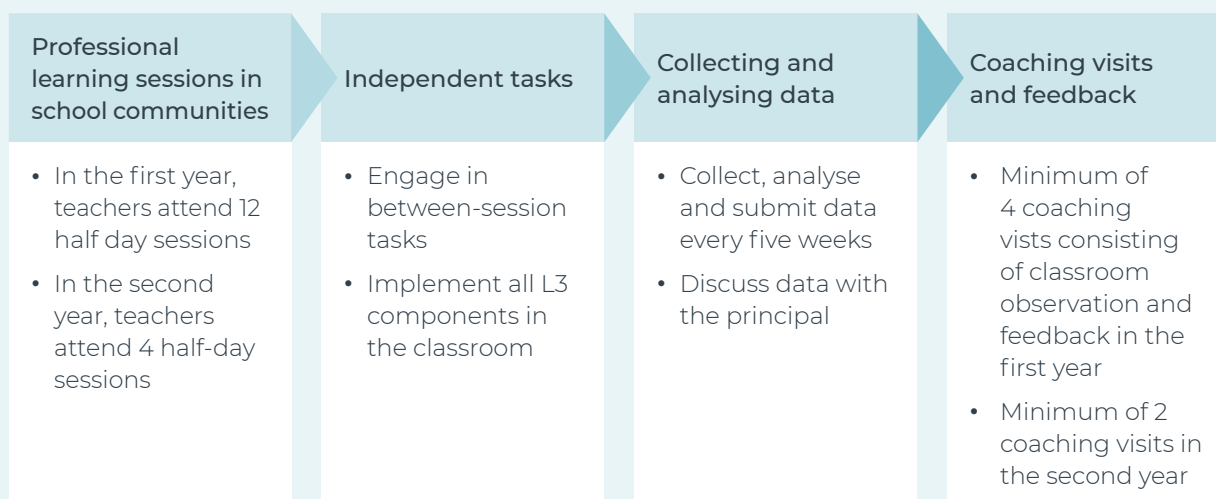
4 Refer to: <https://policies.education.nsw.gov.au/policy-library/associated-documents/evaluationframework.pdf>.

5 Refer to: <https://www.dpc.nsw.gov.au/tools-and-resources/evaluation-toolkit/evaluation-in-the-nsw-government/>.

Box 1:**How does L3 work?**

L3 Kindergarten is an early literacy intervention which aims to reduce the gap between children who are 'at risk' literacy learners and those who are achieving expected outcomes.

L3 Stage One is a professional learning initiative aimed at maintaining and growing the gains of students who have received explicit, systematic, balanced and integrated literacy teaching in L3K.

**L3 pedagogical approaches**

- Learning how to listen to stories and think about texts, including rich talk and vocabulary related to quality texts
- Modelled, guided and independent reading tasks
- Guided, interactive and independent writing tasks
- 'Word work' and analysis, including explicit instruction in high frequency words, phonemic awareness, letter-sound relationships, spelling patterns and conventions
- 'Strategic activities' for reading and writing to identify problems and actions to solve them
- Phrasing and intonation for fluent reading
- Using reading vocabularies and discussing language
- Comprehension drives the reading and writing process and is used as an overarching source of information
- Students draw on and expand their oral language as they engage with predictable text that is selected to match student oral language ability

For principals

Principals commit to supporting their L3 Kindergarten and Stage One teams by:

- facilitating teacher release from class to undertake PL sessions
- monitoring teachers' completion of independent tasks
- reviewing student data and progress at a school and stage level on a regular basis
- supporting in-class visits and follow-up discussions through the release of staff
- supplying the resources required to implement the program
- negotiating with local school communities to nominate a suitable trainer to work in their network or schools.

For teachers

Professional learning for either L3K or L3S1 is undertaken in school teams. The professional learning extends over a two-year period and consists of four types of delivery: PL sessions, independent tasks, data collection and in-school coaching.

For students

- In addition to daily whole class literacy work, L3 provides targeted instruction and support for both reading and writing in small groups. Students then rotate to independent individual or group tasks.
- 'Short and sharp' explicit experiences in phonics and phonemic awareness.
- Lessons are planned using the English K-6 Syllabus, including regular and systematic collection of data.
- Classrooms are resourced with quality texts.

Chapter 1: What was the original research base for L3?

This chapter is divided into two sections. We first report research that **was included** as the basis for L3K, before presenting research that was **not included** in the development of L3K. We focus on research up to 2010 as this was when L3K was first available to all schools (without requiring specific application). The research base for L3 focused on both successful teacher professional learning models and effective literacy pedagogy. We note that this chapter focuses only on L3K, as L3S1 was developed as a later extension and reflected the same foundations. We have not included more current literature used to develop refurbishments or extensions in later years as this is addressed in chapter 3.

What research was originally included as the basis for L3K?

L3K originated from the research base of the New Zealand ‘Picking up the Pace’ program

L3K drew on the research underpinning the New Zealand ‘Picking up the Pace’ program, such as the work of Goodman (1967) and Clay (1991, 1998). ‘Picking up the Pace’ delivered concentrated professional development in literacy instruction to early childhood and primary teachers in ‘low decile’ schools with high proportions of Maori and Pasifika children⁶. The program was developed through a pilot study and was evaluated by the New Zealand Ministry of Education. The evaluators tracked the progress of three different groups of children at six-monthly intervals and compared their progress with a baseline group who were not involved in the program. This process was repeated with three different groups of students and at three different points in time. Findings from the evaluation showed that “the intervention accelerated the progress of children over the first six months of school. Significant gains across a broad range of literacy measures occurred compared with baseline groups and the non-intervention group” (Phillips, McNaughton & MacDonald 2002, p. 13). Research from ‘Picking up the Pace’ concluded that children who enter school with limited literacy backgrounds are best served by quickly and efficiently addressing initial disparities in language, reading and writing (Phillips, McNaughton & MacDonald 2004) – hence the initial focus on Kindergarten for L3. (See also related articles from Timperley & Phillips 2003; Timperley, Phillips, & Wiseman 2003; Timperley 2004).

6 For more information, refer to: <https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/pasifika/4971>.

L3K professional learning focused on an iterative inquiry cycle and ongoing review of data within an instructional leadership model

The design of L3K's professional learning model also derived from 'Picking up the Pace' and other current research in effective professional learning models. The L3K model required teachers to participate both individually and collectively in an iterative inquiry cycle, where they monitor the impact of their actions and adjust their practice accordingly over a sustained period of time. This approach was adopted in recognition of the fact that common models of professional learning, focusing on one-off activities and/or use of external experts presenting prescribed practices, have limited impact on student outcomes (Timperley et al. 2007).

L3K professional learning focused on the importance of ongoing collection and review of student assessment data, and a belief that teachers need to focus on student outcomes in order to identify their own learning needs. L3K schools originally operated within networked 'learning communities' with other L3K schools, guided by an instructional literacy leader using coaching techniques (Earl & Katz 2007). L3K employed 'instructional leadership' (Elmore 2004) and 'learning-centred leadership' techniques (Timperley 2006), both of which have been shown to improve learning and teaching outcomes (Robinson & Timperley 2007; Robinson, Lloyd & Rowe 2008). These approaches were used to deliver the L3K pedagogical approach.

L3K literacy instruction was based on the work of Marie Clay and the three cueing system, and emphasised the use of whole texts, analytic and constructivist approaches

L3K pedagogy drew on the works of Clay, who reflected the work of Goodman (1967). Goodman rejected the idea that reading is a precise process involving exact or detailed perception of letters or words. Goodman asserted that:

“Efficient reading does not result from precise perception and identification of all elements, but from skill in selecting the fewest, most productive cues necessary to produce guesses which are right the first time.”

(Goodman 1967, p. 127)

Goodman argued that readers make predictions about the words on the page using a combination of three cues – semantic, syntactic and graphic. This became the foundation of Clay's three cueing or MSV approach – Meaning, Sentence structure and Visual information (i.e. letters in words). Of these three cues, Clay (1991) wrote that meaning was “the most important source of information” ahead of sentence structure or visual information (1991, p. 292). Clay (1993) also stated that children should be discouraged from relying too heavily on visual or word-level cues and may need to be redirected to focus more on either meaning or sentence structure cues (p. 42).

L3K, substantially based on the work of Clay, adopted an analytic and highly contextualised approach to learning to read. In L3K, learning to read is driven by the use of whole texts. Like Clay's Reading Recovery, L3K was built on the belief that children need some direct teaching of letters and sounds, however children should be more greatly encouraged to use cues from the whole text – picture cues, sentence-context cues, preceding passage context, prior knowledge activated by the text – to generate predictions about what unknown words might be. Letter-sound cues are used sparingly and mainly to confirm language predictions (Clay 1991; 1998).

L3K also reflected Clay's Literacy Processing Theory, which takes a constructivist approach to reading. Clay explains her theory as:

“A complex model of interacting competencies in reading and writing the reader can potentially draw from all his or her current understanding, and all his or her language competencies, and visual information, and phonological information and knowledge of printing conventions ... as opportunities to read and write accumulate over time the learner becomes able to quickly and momentarily construct a somewhat complex operating system which might solve the problem.”

(2001, p. 224)

This constructivist approach influences the lack of systematic teaching of reading in L3K. Learning to read is driven by a quality text that will provide opportunities for children to be exposed to language conventions and identify cues in deciphering words:

“The texts for reading are not controlled or contrived; they are selected to give the young reader access to all levels of the language hierarchy as working systems for perceiving, integrating, evaluating information sources—strengthened only as a result of reading continuous, meaningful texts.”

(Doyle 2013, p. 652)

Furthermore, a constructivist approach requires children to be inherently active, self-regulating learners who construct knowledge for themselves. Whilst this method may suit some children well, not all children will thrive. There is a large body of research (further discussed in the next section) that shows how this constructivist approach is particularly challenging for children with reading difficulties and/or from disadvantaged backgrounds (Rowe 2005, p. 28).

What additional research was not included in the development of L3K?

Landmark reports in the early 2000s emphasised the importance of a code-based approach through explicit and systematic pedagogies in the earliest stages of reading instruction, and L3K did not draw on these approaches

At the start of the twenty-first century, research emerged that questioned the dominant approaches of the previous decades. Findings from various reviews, inquiries and reports revealed that, for many children, constructivist and analytic methods using whole texts to teach reading and writing were not working. In particular, we note here the work of the US Report of the National Reading Panel: Teaching Children to Read (NICHD 2000), the Australian National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy (Rowe 2005), and the UK's Independent Review of the Teaching of Early Reading (Rose 2006). Teaching children to read, according to these authoritative papers, required a different understanding of the cognitive processes children use to read. The scientific research of the time revealed that the complexity of the English alphabetic system and, in particular that the

relationship between letters and sounds could not be constructed or 'worked out' by students. Rather, letter-sound correspondences needed explicit teaching.

In the 2000s, effective reading research called for a change to pedagogy that would recognise the complexity of letter-sound correspondences by systematically teaching the smallest units of words (i.e. teaching according to a pre-determined range of content arranged incrementally and taught using an intentional sequence). To do this, teachers needed to begin with sounds (phonemes) and letters (graphemes) when teaching children to read and synthetically build blends and words. Researchers were now recommending that children be taught to listen, speak, read and write the individual building blocks of words so that they could learn to build more complex words and decode unfamiliar words when they arose. Use of the cueing system was considered to be of low priority as a means for learning to read.

Reading theories such as the 'Simple View of Reading' and 'The Reading Rope' were recommended as foundations for literacy programs

Recommendations from the Rose review included the adoption of the 'Simple View of Reading' (Gough & Tunmer 1986) as a basis for reading pedagogy. The 'Simple View of Reading' aimed to draw attention to two fundamental elements of reading – decoding and comprehension – by recognising the implications of the development of both when learning to read. The process of decoding is explained as using phonics rules to recognise single words not in context, while comprehension here refers to linguistic comprehension (not reading comprehension), and is described as the process used to determine sentence meaning through word information. The 'Simple View of Reading' emphasised the necessity of both decoding and comprehension and asserted that teachers need to understand:

- the cognitive processes involved in the development of both
- that different strategies are required to teach students mastery of each component
- that progress and performance in each will not always be equal
- that assessment of each is possible and will guide planning for future directions.

The Rose review recommended that the 'Simple View of Reading' conceptual framework should replace the Searchlights program, a literacy program which shared similar research foundations to L3K (including the three cueing system) and had been prevalent in the UK.

Similar to the UK, the US responded to their national report on reading (Report of the National Reading Panel: Teaching Children to Read (NICHHD 2000)) by drawing attention to programs reflective of the recent research. 'The Reading Rope' – a framework representing the development of reading (Scarborough 2001) – became a highly recommended approach. 'The Reading Rope' reflects a similar view to the 'Simple View of Reading' in that Scarborough claims reading consists of two components:

- a. **word recognition** comprised of three elements – phonological awareness, decoding and sight recognition; and
- b. **language comprehension** comprised of five elements – background knowledge, vocabulary, language structures, verbal reasoning and literacy knowledge.

Scarborough described each element of the two components as strands needing development through instruction and practice so as to weave with other strands

of the same component. Furthermore, to become a skilled reader, the two components must be woven together through increasingly automatic word recognition and cumulating strategic language comprehension⁷. Both the 'Simple View of Reading' and 'The Reading Rope' frameworks became the basis for reading programs in the UK and US during the 2000s.

L3K adopted only some parts of the National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy (Rowe 2005) and did not adopt all recommendations.

In Australia, the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training (Rowe 2005) undertook its own inquiry into literacy. The report made 20 recommendations, two of which are pertinent here:

“Recommendation 1: The Committee recommends that teachers be equipped with teaching strategies based on findings from rigorous, evidence-based research that are shown to be effective in enhancing the literacy development of all children

Recommendation 2: The Committee recommends that teachers provide systematic, direct and explicit phonics instruction so that children master the essential alphabetic code-breaking skills required for foundational reading proficiency. Equally, that teachers provide an integrated approach to reading that supports the development of oral language, vocabulary, grammar, reading fluency, comprehension and the literacies of new technologies”

(Rowe 2005, p. 14)

L3K adopted part of both recommendations. Regarding the first, L3K training sessions offered teachers the opportunity to learn literacy teaching strategies shown to be effective in a number of studies. However, more recent effective reading research was not included or considered as important. Regarding the second recommendation, L3K did not reflect the explicit and systematic approach to teaching phonemic awareness and phonics as recommended. L3K did, however, ensure an integrated approach to reading, as described in the second half of this recommendation. The L3K program integrated the use of oral language, with modelled, guided and independent reading and writing practice to assist in the development of fluency, comprehension and grammar.

In Australia, the findings of Rowe failed to enact the type of decisive change of practice as was demonstrated when the UK education system endorsed programs reflective of the 'Simple View of Reading'. In particular, the decoding aspect of the 'Simple View of Reading' promoted careful sequencing of letters, sounds and blends to facilitate word recognition in the absence of whole texts. This is different to the L3K method, where sequencing is more restricted because the text itself drives what is to be learned. That is not to say that in L3K there is **no** consideration of sequential building of letter-sound correspondences, segmentation, and blending in the texts selected, however overall, the method is more flexible and less systematic. The comprehension aspect of the 'Simple View of Reading' focuses on using word information only, unlike L3K and Searchlights, which draws on other 'cues' such as sentence structure and pictures.

⁷ For more information on the Reading Rope, refer to: <https://dyslexiaida.org/scarboroughs-reading-rope-a-groundbreaking-infographic/>.

Children with reading difficulties and children from disadvantaged backgrounds most particularly benefit from code-based approaches to early reading instruction as an early intervention

There is a strong body of evidence to show that whole language and constructivist approaches are particularly challenging for children with reading difficulties (Coltheart 2005a, b; de Lemnos 2002; Loudon et al 2005; Snow, Burns & Griffin 1998). Indeed, Pressley (2006) argued that not teaching children to focus primarily on letter-sound relationships in the early stages of learning to read was “equivalent of teaching them the way weak readers read!” (p. 164).

Rowe (2005) further argued that these approaches may in fact **intensify** problems for children from disadvantaged backgrounds:

“For children from disadvantaged backgrounds, who often do not have rich phonological knowledge and phonemic awareness upon which to base new learning, being taught under constructivist modes has the effect of compounding their disadvantage once they begin school. This is particularly the case for children from non-English speaking backgrounds.”

(p. 28)

Finally, in the National Research Council review into preventing reading difficulties, Snow, Burns & Griffin (1998) concluded that most reading problems can be prevented by providing effective instruction and intervention in preschool and the early primary years. Code-based approaches can be said to ‘even the playing field’ for all children and reduce the likelihood of children missing any of the fundamental parts of learning to read and write. We can therefore conclude that code-based approaches give **all** children the strongest chance of long term reading success. **All three of the landmark reports discussed here emphasised the importance of teacher professional development in literacy instruction as crucial to children’s literacy success.**

In summary, L3K drew on some research, however it did not draw on the full range of available research into early literacy teaching

In this chapter, we have demonstrated that L3K drew on the original research from ‘Picking up the Pace’ and the work of Clay. The program took whole text, analytic and constructivist approaches to teaching reading that emphasised the use of semantic and sentence level information over visual (letter-sound) information. L3K did not include some aspects of early literacy research emerging at the time. In particular, L3K did not draw on the ‘Simple View of Reading’ (Gough and Tunmer 1986, advocated by Rose 2006) or the Reading Rope (Scarborough 2001), and did not include a scope and sequence to systematically structure the introduction of alphabetic code-breaking skills (as advocated by Rowe 2005).

Chapter 2:

How was L3 originally designed and implemented?

In this chapter, we describe other major Department of Education initiatives that intertwined with L3 and present an historical timeline of L3's implementation. Our aim in this chapter is to provide key contextual information about the history of L3.

Initial implementation for L3K was closely monitored, however this diminished over time

L3K was first trialled in a small number of schools in 2006-07. Schools were then required to apply to the department to participate in L3K from 2008. Schools had to meet particular criteria based on socioeconomic status and NAPLAN results in order to be accepted.

L3K was featured as one component of the Best Start Initiative

In 2008, the department commenced the Best Start Initiative for all K-2 students. The centrepiece of the initiative was the Best Start Kindergarten Assessment (BSKA)⁸. This assessment helped teachers to identify each student's literacy and numeracy knowledge and skills on entry to school. It is within this context that:

“L3[K] is one component of the Best Start Initiative that aims to ensure all students are on track in their literacy and numeracy learning by Year 3.”

(NSW DEC 2010, p. 1)

The Best Start Initiative provided schools with increased support for the quality teaching of literacy and numeracy. Both Best Start and L3K were closely linked to the NSW Literacy Continuum K-10⁹, which mapped the development of critical literacy skills and understandings by describing key markers of expected student achievement¹⁰.

As the Best Start initiative expanded, schools no longer had to apply to the department to participate in L3. Since 2010, L3K has been available to all schools (without requiring specific application).

8 Refer to: <https://education.nsw.gov.au/literacy-and-numeracy-strategy/primary-school-initiatives/best-start-kindergarten>.

9 Refer to: <http://www.literacy-continuum.det.nsw.edu.au/m>.

10 Since 2018, this has been superseded by the National Literacy Learning Progression. Refer to: <https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/literacy-and-numeracy/teaching-and-learning-resources/learning-progressions>.

L3K was refurbished and expanded over time

In 2011, the L3K program materials were refurbished to include references to the departmental publication 'An introduction to quality literacy teaching' (NSW DET 2009). This document emphasised the 'four cornerstones of literacy' (explicit, systematic, balanced, integrated) and was aligned with the NSW Literacy Continuum. At the same time, L3S1 was developed as an expansion of L3K to support stage one teachers to build on the foundations set in L3K. L3S1 has been available to any school since 2012.

The majority of Early Action for Success schools implement L3

Since 2012, the K-2 Action Plan has focused on schools from all sectors with K-2 students most at risk of falling behind¹¹. Through the Action Plan, schools receive support through instructional leadership, tiered interventions (including L3K) and teacher professional development (including L3S1). Phase 1 (2012-2016) included \$261 million for 448 schools and Phase 2 (2017-2020) included a further \$340 million for 668 schools. An external evaluation of Phase 1 was inconclusive¹², and an external evaluation of Phase 2 is currently underway¹³.

Early Action for Success (EAfS) is the department's implementation of the K-2 Action Plan¹⁴. EAfS targets government primary schools whose results fall in the lowest quartile of NAPLAN performance in literacy and numeracy. EAfS schools are provided with instructional leaders who provide ongoing access to departmental programs and interventions. The vast majority of EAfS schools implement L3 (this is further discussed in chapter 5). Yet despite the widespread use of L3 in EAfS schools, the Action Plan Phase 1 Evaluation found no significant change over time in Year 3 NAPLAN results. Furthermore, there appeared to be no closing of the gap between EAfS and non-EAfS schools.

L3 was implemented differently in EAfS and non-EAfS schools, resulting in uneven access to training and support

Since 2012, L3 has been implemented in EAfS schools through the EAfS Literacy and Numeracy Trainers. Overall, EAfS schools have received greater support than non-EAfS schools to both access L3 training and to facilitate ongoing L3 implementation.

Under Local Schools, Local Decisions, principals in non-EAfS schools are required to collaborate in local networks to identify and share L3 trainers. Since 2016, several 'Principal Implementation Groups' have worked informally to independently coordinate L3 training in non-EAfS schools. Local Schools, Local Decisions has made it challenging for many non-EAfS schools to: (1) access an L3 trainer; and (2) finance participation in L3 training. It has also meant that the department has limited oversight over both access to and the quality of L3 training in non-EAfS schools.

11 Refer to: <https://education.nsw.gov.au/literacy-and-numeracy-strategy/primary-school-initiatives/k-2-action-plan>.

12 Refer to: <https://www.cese.nsw.gov.au/publications-filter/report-of-the-evaluation-of-the-nsw-literacy-and-numeracy-action-plan-2012-2016>.

13 For details of this evaluation, refer to: <https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/literacy-and-numeracy/early-action-for-success>.

14 Refer to: <https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/literacy-and-numeracy/early-action-for-success>.

Table 1 provides a summary of the history of L3 implementation in NSW government schools, from initial trials to the present. In sum, over the past decade the use of L3 has expanded to reach an increasingly large and diverse range of schools. As the use of L3 scaled up, there has been a reduction in departmental oversight and implementation monitoring.

Table 1**History of L3 implementation**

Year	Item
2006	L3K trial in Hunter/Central Coast and South Western Sydney regions (Dr Gwenneth Phillips, University of Auckland)
2007	L3K trial expanded to 30 schools in the Hunter/Central, South Western Sydney and Illawarra/South East regions
2008	Best Start initiative commenced (same regions as above). Best Start Literacy and Numeracy Leaders also provided L3 training to approved schools.
2009	Best Start Kindergarten Assessment (BSKA) commenced state wide
2010	L3K available to all schools
2011	L3S1 trial ('Growing the Gains')
2012	L3S1 available to all schools; K-2 Action Plan Phase 1 (2012-2016) Literacy and Numeracy Trainers and Instructional Leaders also provide L3 training in most EAfS schools.
2013	Erebus evaluation of L3K
2014	Functional realignment and consultancy positions returned to schools. Under Local Schools, Local Decisions, principals collaborate locally to identify and share L3 trainers.
2016	Principal Implementation Groups begin to independently coordinate L3 training in non-EAfS schools (ongoing to date)
2017	K-2 Action Plan Phase 2 (2017-2020) Literacy and Numeracy Trainers and Instructional Leaders continue to provide L3 training in most EAfS schools
2018	L3 no longer financially supported by DoE School Services
2019	No new L3 Trainers and no professional learning or support for continuing L3 trainers

Chapter 3:

To what extent does L3 reflect current departmental policies and publications?

The NSW DoE Literacy K-12 policy¹⁵ states that literacy teaching in NSW schools “will incorporate explicit and systematic instruction”

In order to address this research question, we must first define what is meant by ‘explicit’ and ‘systematic’ as the key distinguishing terms used to differentiate literacy approaches. Complications arise in the debate when usage of these terms vary and where literacy programs claim to be explicit or systematic yet mean something different in practice to identical claims in other programs.

Over the last two decades there has been rigorous debate about what constitutes effective literacy instruction. Much of the debate has focused on what students should be taught **first** in order to lay a firm foundation for reading and writing. The debate is particularly concerned with two components of reading: phonemic awareness and phonics, and the application of approaches to teaching reading which are considered to be both ‘explicit’ and ‘systematic’.

In this review, we use the definitions for ‘systematic’ and ‘explicit’ specifically as they refer to phonemic awareness and phonics provided by Mesmer and Griffiths (2005), who drew on an historical review of word usage in reading literature to establish clarity around these terms. We note that ‘sequential’, the third word frequently used in reference to phonics, is encompassed within ‘systematic’.

The terms ‘explicit’ and ‘systematic’ as applied to phonics instruction have been in use since the 1990s. Mesmer and Griffiths (2005) explained that [emphasis added]:

- **Systematic** “contains two important connotations: scope and sequence” (p. 369). **Scope is the phonics content and range; and sequence, a specific order of letter-sound correspondences.** Systematic can only be identified across a period of time, typically through program documentation using terms such as less systematic or more systematic.
- **Explicit** is used to describe a **teaching strategy** where “the teacher tells the children directly what she or he is trying to teach. For example, a teacher might say, “These two letters, ch, make the sound /ch/.” In contrast, a less explicit approach might sound like this, ‘Look at these words, church, chew, chick, chunk. What sounds do you hear at the beginning of these words? What letters do you see at the beginning of these words?’ The learner must identify the two letters at the beginning of each word, analyse the sound at the beginning of the word, and then make the connection between the letters and the sound. The teacher

¹⁵ Refer to: <https://education.nsw.gov.au/policy-library/policies/literacy-k-12-policy>.

does not make the connection for the learner directly” (p. 370). Because ‘explicit’ is a teaching strategy, it can be observed in a single lesson and would be most likely identified through observation of teaching practice. A teaching strategy could be described as being less explicit or more explicit.

Mesmer and Griffiths concluded that three features characterise explicit, systematic phonics:

- a curriculum with a specified, sequential set of phonics elements;
- instruction that is direct, precise, and unambiguous; and
- practice using phonics to read words (p. 369).

A more recent extensive review of the science of learning to read, (Castles, Rastle and Nation 2018), supports the use of the explicit and systematic approach. This review explains how the representation of phonemes (distinct units of sound) using graphemes (symbols used to represent each sound) in alphabetic writing systems “does not typically come naturally to children” and “is something most children must be taught explicitly” (p. 11). This echoes the previous findings of National Reading Panel Report (2000) and the Rose Review (2006).

Castles, Rastle and Nation (2018) firmly conclude that “phonics programs are systematic when they teach grapheme-phoneme correspondences in an ordered manner” (p. 12). Their definition of systematic concurs with that of Mesmer and Griffiths. Although Castles, Rastle and Nation do not provide a clear definition of ‘explicit’, this is inferred when they described teaching children “in such a way that they learned the links between letters and sounds explicitly” (p. 6). Castles, Rastle and Nation argue, therefore, that the central importance of explicit and systematic phonics instruction is unarguable:

“The most appropriate way to learn this mapping [of spoken and written language] is governed not by pedagogical philosophy but by the nature of the writing system the child needs to learn ... If a child learns to decode that symbol-to-sound relationship, then that child will have the ability to translate printed words into spoken language, thereby accessing information about meaning.”

(p. 9)

The value of explicit teaching is further supported in CESE’s publication on cognitive load theory (2017c). Learners do best, CESE states, when they are provided with explicit instructional guidance in which teachers clearly show students what to do and how to do it. Archer and Hughes (2011) in their work on explicit instruction similarly advise that “break[ing] down complex skills and strategies into smaller instructional units ... addresses concerns about cognitive overloading, processing demands and the capacity of students’ working memory” (p. 2). ‘Load reduction instruction’ (Martin 2016), is also consistent with the views of Archer and Hughes and CESE as it emphasises that explicit instruction should be sequenced before using more discovery-based approaches. We therefore conclude that there is strong support for explicit and systematic instruction when teaching phonemic awareness and phonics.

L3 program materials only partially reflect fundamental elements of key departmental documents

In this section we now examine the extent to which L3 program documents reflect current departmental policies and publications and the current directions of the Learning and Teaching Directorate. In order to achieve this aim, we analysed the following L3 documents:

1. **The Language, Learning and Literacy Kindergarten folder (2011)** provides an overview of L3K in addition to all instructions and procedures divided into four sections: reading to students, writing texts, guided reading and monitoring student progress. The opening words in the materials make it very clear that the L3K is intended only for schools with students unprepared for engagement in literacy learning. It is in this folder that the specific procedures for 'Reading To', guided writing, and guided reading are explained.
2. **The 'Language, Learning and Literacy Guidelines' (March, 2017)** explain the purpose of L3, its background, and the research upon which it is built. An overview briefly describes the aims of L3K and L3S1 and lists eight features of the program (listed later in this chapter). The guidelines also describe the roles and responsibilities of principals, L3 teachers, L3 trainers, L3 lead trainers and P-2 advisors, and includes the selection criteria for both trainer roles. The guidelines document concludes with the professional learning requirements for trainers and teachers in both face-to-face and online delivery modes. **L3S1 training documentation** consists of a general training overview to explain the structure for each session, followed by a dot point plan for each of the 12 sessions. Each session plan is divided into three sections: 'reflections', 'new learning' and 'between session' tasks. The training documentation also includes an outline of L3S1 content covering four main areas: reading and writing; classroom organisation; planning, programming and assessment; and reflections.
3. **L3K training materials** contains four modules for training L3 trainers, unlike the teacher materials which are less detailed and rarely provide any extra information. Both sets of modules begin with an overview of the program, including an explanation of how the L3 program links to essential readings:
 - a. Literacy documents listed in Table 1 from 2017¹⁶
 - b. the 'NSW Syllabus for the Australian Curriculum: English K-6'
 - c. 'What works best: Evidence-based practices to help improve NSW student performance' (2015a).

The key departmental policies and publications used for comparison in this chapter are listed and described in Table 2. We note that the L3 program materials were refurbished in 2017, and many of the training materials now make direct references to the documents listed in Table 2.

¹⁶ The links to the NSW Syllabus for the Australian Curriculum: English K-6 and Effective reading instruction in the early years of school (2017) are denoted throughout the modules by means of symbols

Table 2**Departmental policies and publications relevant to L3**

Title	Document type and focus	Purpose of the document
Literacy K-12 policy (2017) ¹⁷	Policy Literacy focus	Describes the objectives for ability, skills and competence of students, incorporating specific teaching practices and programs; and requirements for evaluation of effectiveness and reporting
How schools can improve literacy and numeracy performance and why it (still) matters ¹⁸ (2017a)	Research report Literacy and numeracy focus	A CESE report summarising evidence-based practices to improve student literacy and numeracy outcomes at school
Effective reading instruction in the early years of school ¹⁹ (2017b)	Literature review Literacy focus	A CESE literature review presenting findings from current literature on evidence-based reading instruction strategies
The quality assurance rubric for professional learning ²⁰ (2019)	Process Professional learning focus	Facilitates measurement of professional learning course design, delivery, and mechanisms for evaluation against six general aims and 12 core criteria

By taking an analytic approach, the L3 instructional model provides only limited 'systematic' teaching and a form of 'explicit' teaching that is not consistent with Mesmer and Griffiths (2005) or CESE (2017b) definitions

The Literacy K-12 policy consists of objectives for literacy teaching, assessing and reporting²¹. The objectives relevant to this analysis are the teaching objectives 1.2.1 – 1.2.7 and the assessing and reporting objectives 1.3.1 – 1.3.2. We made a series of judgements about the extent to which the L3 program, on the basis of the available L3 documentation, reflects these objectives using Mesmer and Griffiths' definitions of explicit and systematic, and definitions of balanced and integrated derived from the DET publication 'An introduction to quality literacy teaching' (2009). Table 3 lists the objectives and identifies for each the extent of support found within L3.

¹⁷ Refer to: <https://education.nsw.gov.au/policy-library/policies/literacy-k-12-policy>.

¹⁸ Refer to: https://www.cese.nsw.gov.au/images/stories/PDF/Literacy_and_Numeracy_Paper_FA_AA.pdf.

¹⁹ Refer to: https://www.cese.nsw.gov.au/images/stories/PDF/Effective_Reading_Instruction_AA.pdf.

²⁰ Refer to: <https://schoolsequella.det.nsw.edu.au/file/2c881b10-8989-45eb-87d8-da2b34847950/1/Quality-assurance-rubric.pdf>.

²¹ Refer to: <https://education.nsw.gov.au/policy-library/policies/literacy-k-12-policy>.

Table 3**Literacy K-12 policy objectives aligned against L3**

Objectives	Support	Does not support
Literacy teaching		
1.2.1 Literacy teaching in NSW schools will incorporate explicit and systematic instruction in the skills, knowledge and understandings required for students to be literate. Literacy will be taught in a balanced and integrated way.	L3 partially uses systematic instruction with regard to the scope and range	L3 does not use systematic instruction with regard to a specific order of letter-sound correspondences
	L3 offers a highly integrated approach to literacy teaching and through reading and writing is balanced with regard to “code-breaking, meaning-making, text-using, and text analysing” ²²	L3 appears to advocate less explicit teaching strategies and uses an analytic phonics approach
1.2.2 In the early years, literacy teaching will include the explicit teaching of: phonemic awareness; phonics; vocabulary knowledge; comprehension; concepts about print; grammar, punctuation; spelling and handwriting.	L3 partially uses systematic instruction with regard to the scope and range of most of the aspects listed in the objective	L3 does not use systematic instruction with regard to a specific order of letter-sound correspondences
	All components are included in L3 documentation	In L3 “word work”, the students decipher difficult words through explicit teaching of taking words apart The focus on handwriting does not appear to be strong and the analytic phonics approach limits the acquisition of spelling skills
1.2.3 Literacy teaching will draw on the strengths of a comprehensive range of evidence and research-based approaches to meet the learning needs of all students.	L3 draws on the strengths of research-based approaches	The range of evidence for L3 is not comprehensive. There is a substantial body of research that counters the analytic phonics approach
	The L3 program aims to reduce the risk of students failing to meet literacy standards	The L3 program does not specifically address the needs of students achieving above expected standards
1.2.4 Teachers will ensure students are equipped with a range of literacy practices and skills that support them in code-breaking and in understanding, using, analysing and evaluating texts for a variety of purposes and audiences.	In L3 students are equipped with some literacy practices and skills for understanding, using, analysing and evaluating texts for a variety of purposes and audiences	Students are not equipped with a range of literacy practices and skills that support them in code-breaking. Only one approach is adopted (i.e. the approach described in Chapter 1)

22 NSW Department of Education and Training (2009), *An introduction to quality literacy teaching*.

Objectives	Support	Does not support
1.2.5 Teachers K-12 will develop and continually refine a broad and responsive set of effective literacy teaching practices to meet the diverse learning needs of students.	The L3 coaching model over a two-year period provides an extended period of development and refinement	The lack of refresher courses and access to updated resources limits the extent to which teachers can develop and continually refine
1.2.6 Teachers K-12, across all key learning areas, are responsible for the teaching and learning of literacy skills, knowledge and understandings.	L3SI training focuses on the developing literacy skills, knowledge and understanding across all KLAS	L3K training does not appear to focus on the developing literacy skills, knowledge and understanding across all KLAS
1.2.7 Teachers K-12 will allocate sufficient time to explicitly plan, program and teach literacy to ensure students' achievement of syllabus standards.	L3 encourages the allocation of sufficient time to explicitly plan, program and teach literacy ensuring students' achievement of syllabus standards through its strategies, especially coaching and feedback	
Literacy assessing and reporting		
1.3.1 Teachers K-12 will use school-based and state-wide literacy assessment information to inform teaching and to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of teaching programs.	L3 uses literacy assessment information drawn from running records and reading levels (school-based) to inform teaching and regularly evaluate (every five weeks) the effectiveness of teaching programs	L3 does not use state-wide literacy assessment information to inform teaching and to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of teaching programs
1.3.2 Schools will report formally and informally to parents, caregivers and school communities on student literacy achievement using state-wide and school based assessment information.	There is no clear indication of how the results from regular assessment in L3 are reported to parents however, it is likely this is so. L3 trainers and principals review assessments and progress	The current use of the continuum rather than the Literacy progressions limits the extent to which the teachers can use state-wide assessment information to report

L3 program materials partially reflect evidence-based practices identified by CESE, however these links could be strengthened

The CESE report (2017a) 'How schools can improve literacy and numeracy performance', identified four evidence-based practices that improve literacy and numeracy. The report noted that "effective teachers of literacy have a strong literacy knowledge base that they make explicit to their students, in addition to creating and making use of a rich literacy environment" (p. 3). The four practices recommended for effective literacy and numeracy development are listed in Table 4. The degree to which the L3 program reflects these practices is also provided using a three-level rating system: negligible support; partial support; and full support.

The L3 program demonstrates each of the evidence-based practices identified in the report to some extent. With regard to the first practice: "intervene early and maintain the focus", L3 fully supports both sub-practices. While the second and fourth practices: "knowing what students can do and target teaching accordingly" and "focus on teacher professional learning that improves the teaching of literacy and numeracy" both partially support. Finally, L3 demonstrates only minor support for the practice of "have[ing] clear and transparent learning goals" in two sub-practices (both concerned with explicit teaching) which is mediated by stronger attention in setting clear goals at a school and class level.

Table 4**L3 support for CESE-identified evidence-based practices**

Evidence-based practices	The L3 program	Support
Intervene early and maintain the focus		
a) Quality matters early “This is particularly important for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, as early intervention can contain the effects of disadvantage and reduce performance gaps” (p. 4)	L3K is a tier 2 intervention that aims to reduce the numbers of students from low socio-economic communities not reaching expected literacy outcomes by the end of the first year of school. The aim of the L3S1 intervention is to build on progress made in Kindergarten.	Full
b) A sustained focus is important “The first three years of school are a peak window within which children develop the literacy and numeracy skills that they will carry into upper primary and secondary school” (p. 4)	L3, inclusive of L3K and L3S1, aims to address the needs of students to the end of Stage 1 demonstrating a commitment to a sustained focus.	Full
Know what students can do and target teaching accordingly		
a) Targeted teaching can reduce achievement gaps “Targeted teaching refers to methods teachers use to lift the performance of students who are many years behind and also to challenge students who are already well ahead of year level expectations” (p. 5).	The aim of L3K and L3S1 is to greatly reduce the number of students falling behind in literacy and by targeting teaching to meet their needs. The program does not appear to specifically address the needs of students achieving above expected standards.	Partial
b) Formative assessment helps target teaching “Key elements of formative assessment include: • identification of goals, outcomes and criteria for achievement • communication between teachers and students about a student's current knowledge and future directions • active involvement of students in their own learning • teachers responding to feedback by modifying teaching strategies” (p. 5).	• L3 uses formative assessment through running records, reading levels, writing samples, hearing and recording sounds in words assessment and writing vocabulary assessments. • Documents show linkage to syllabus outcomes but criteria for achievement is less obvious. • The extent of explicit teacher-student communication regarding current knowledge and future directions is unclear. • Students are actively involved in the engine room and in independent work. • Formative assessments contribute to the identification of student achievement, teacher planning including modification of strategies.	Partial

Evidence-based practices	The L3 program	Support
Have clear and transparent learning goals		
a) Set clear learning goals “Research shows that having clear and transparent learning goals at both the school and classroom level leads to improvements in learning achievement. At the school level, a whole school approach can be important to promoting clear and transparent learning goals” (p. 6).	Schools are encouraged to include L3 implementation and professional learning as part of the school plan, linked to goals for improvement in student literacy outcomes. At a classroom level, teachers aim to implement practices that support each child's achievement of their personal best. Data collection on a 5-weekly basis enables teachers to track students and plan learning.	Full
b) Learning continua or progressions support explicit teaching “Learning progressions or continua support explicit teaching by enabling teachers to accurately determine students' current learning achievement” (p. 6).	In L3K literacy achievement is measured using the NSW Literacy Continuum at the end of Kindergarten. The 2017 L3 materials do not include NESA's Literacy Learning Progressions. To support explicit teaching the continuum should be used to set expectations and assess student work. In L3 this is unlikely when used only at the conclusion of a year's worth of learning.	Negligible
c) Explicit teaching improves student learning “Explicit teaching practices involve teachers clearly showing students what to do and how to do it, rather than having students discover or construct this information for themselves. Explicit teaching can also be referred to as direct or explicit instruction” (p. 7).	The L3 program aims to “deliver systematic, explicit, balanced and integrated literacy teaching”. However, using the definition of explicit from Mesmer and Griffiths, L3 appears to advocate less explicit teaching strategies through an analytic phonics approach. In L3 students are encouraged discover and construct information for themselves with teacher guidance. The instructions provided in “word work” note that the words, letters and sounds chosen do not follow a pre-determined sequence.	Negligible
Focus on teacher professional learning that improves the teaching of literacy and numeracy		
a) Quality professional learning improves teacher quality The most effective professional learning programs “deepen[ing] pedagogical content and assessment knowledge, ground[ing] learning in practice (i.e. taking into account the local classroom context), and engage[ing] existing theories of practice (i.e. existing practices within the school)” (p. 8).	The L3 professional learning model: 12 half-day sessions spaced across per year, readings and homework between sessions, and at least four classroom observations and feedback; reflects a well-supported approach. The sessions and readings, according to L3K and L3S1 training materials, focus on pedagogical content and assessment knowledge, and L3 trainer school visits ground what has been learned. The extent to which the professional learning engages with existing practices in the school is unclear.	Partial

Evidence-based practices	The L3 program	Support
b) Experts in the classroom provide instructional leadership to the whole school “The importance of a whole-school approach to teacher professional learning” where “school leaders promote and participate in teacher professional development” profoundly impacts on student outcomes. “Other crucial elements of effective professional learning are teaching experts working in classrooms with teachers, and teachers learning from each other by sharing experiences and expertise” (p. 8)	L3 requires school principals to review student data and progress at both a school and stage level, and contribute to developing a network of schools to coordinate logistical support for L3 professional learning. These requirements would very likely encourage principals to promote the professional learning but does not encourage their own participation. Nonetheless, the L3 practice of training all teachers in a stage and then sharing expertise and knowledge across the K-2 teaching community is a salient feature. L3 does not actively aim to provide this literacy practice expertise to Years 3-6.	Partial
c) Teaching writing has far-reaching benefits “The approach to the teaching of writing should be school-wide, with each discipline teaching and assessing the requirements of writing that are specific to that discipline, as a means of writing to learn” (p. 8).	A focus on writing is included in the L3 program however, the extent to which the teaching strategies extend to all KLAs is not mentioned. The program is also not aimed to improve writing across the whole school.	Negligible
d) Effective teachers use of data “Research shows that effective teachers use data and other evidence to constantly assess how well students are progressing in response to their lessons (Timperley & Parr 2009) ... A professional development program for teachers that focused on the interpretation and use of assessment information resulted in student achievement gains accelerating at twice the expected rate” (p. 8).	The L3 program has a strong focus on the collection and use of data to inform planning and teaching. Teachers are taught how to conduct running records and interpret results for planning instructional level reading.	Full

Overall, L3 reflects some of the recommendations in CESE's Effective reading literature review, with the exception of both phonemic awareness and phonics

The literature review 'Effective reading instruction in the early years of school' (CESE, 2017b) analyses major reviews and scholarly papers focused on the effective teaching of reading and identifies five key components: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. The review explains the importance of these elements and describes the strategies needed to teach them well. The paper asserts that the five components should be taught explicitly, systematically and sequentially and that "students' reading abilities should be monitored and assessed regularly" (p. 5).

Reviewing the L3 guidelines (March, 2017), L3S1 training documentation for L3 teachers, and L3K training documents for L3 trainers and teachers, it is clear that the L3 program addresses all five components named in the review. The guidelines state that:

“both initiatives provide teachers with the knowledge and skills to:

- develop **learning plans based on ongoing data collection**
- deliver **systematic, explicit, balanced and integrated literacy teaching**
- collect and **analyse data regularly to monitor progress and to inform future teaching and learning**
- deliver **quality literacy instruction** through targeted learning experiences that reflect individual learning needs
- engage in ongoing professional learning within a community of schools
- develop a strong theory of early literacy acquisition
- enhance **daily literacy practices for all students**
- focus on the development of **comprehension skills** using quality literature.”

(p. 4) [emphasis added]

At a glance, L3 reflects many aspects of the effective reading review's recommendations with two main exceptions – phonemic awareness and phonics. While CESE advocates a synthetic method to phonics instruction, L3 supports an analytic approach. There are some other examples in the training materials where reflection of the literature review is either absent or contrary to L3 strategies. The instructions in the Kindergarten folder capture the difference in meaning to the word 'explicit':

“When introducing a new or novel book the teacher should resist dealing with everything or making the most of every opportunity the text offers to teach. Keep the introduction elegant. The teacher should be clear about why the text was selected. Decide how to introduce it to these particular students. Decide on an emphasis. Keep it brief.”

(p. 83)

Here, teachers are urged to be explicit in their lesson intentions yet the actual strategies require students to adopt a detective role where clues are highlighted but the students must put them together themselves.

In the section that follows, we use the CESE recommendations for effective reading instruction to guide the analysis of the L3 training materials. For each component, we first describe the review's suggested approaches, before explaining the ways in which the materials support or do not support.

Phonemic awareness

The review

The review asserts that “several tasks are commonly used to improve or assess the subskills of phonemic awareness” (p. 6) and they include (but are not limited to): phoneme blending, phoneme segmentation, and phoneme manipulation. It stipulates that instruction of these subskills should begin with simple phoneme blends and/or simple words before proceeding to more complex words.

L3 training materials

Analysis of L3K trainer modules and session notes reveals that with regard to phonemic awareness the review's recommended approach is promoted through specific attention to each of the three subskills and through alignment to the syllabus and NESA documents. However, a systematic approach to phonemic awareness is not obvious. In the L3 method, phonological work derives from the lesson's chosen text using an analytic approach and while consideration of mastering simple sounds before moving to those more complex is evident, it cannot be described as systematic.

Phonics

The review

The phonics section of the CESE review refers repeatedly to the words defined earlier: explicit and systematic. ‘Explicit’ is defined in the review with some similarity to Mesmer and Griffiths: “explicit teaching practices involve teachers clearly showing students what to do and how to do it, rather than having students discover or construct information for themselves” (p. 5). However, unlike Mesmer and Griffiths, who distinguish between systematic and explicit, the review includes systematic as an essential component of ‘explicit’ teaching practices and does not define it as a separate method. Nonetheless the review clearly draws a distinction between two types of ‘explicit phonics’ methods: synthetic and analytic. Synthetic phonics is defined as “explicit and carefully sequenced” involving “teaching students to pronounce the sounds (phonemes) associated with letters in isolation” (p. 7). It is clearly asserted that synthetic phonics is the most effective method of phonics instruction.

L3 training materials

Reviewing L3 materials reveals that an explicit approach to phonics instruction is recommended, but the extent to which the instruction is systematic (carefully scoped and sequenced) is not evident. The L3 approach is not synthetic. Suggested teaching strategies typically begin with the reading of a quality text (graded appropriately) and through word work the individual sounds, letters and eventually words are identified and practised. This is contrary to the synthetic method.

Fluency

The review

With regard to fluency, the review on effective reading practices names three dimensions of fluency: accuracy, automaticity, and prosody before exploring three commonly used teaching approaches: modelled oral reading, repeated reading, and independent silent reading. The review notes that research concerning the first two methods is unambiguously supported, while research regarding independent silent reading as a tool for promoting fluency is less well-regarded. Assessment of accuracy and automaticity is recommended through the use of a student's reading rate and words correct per minute. Prosody can be assessed by hearing children read grade level texts and assessing use of expression, inflection, volume and pace.

L3 training materials

Both teacher and trainer materials for L3K and L3S1 clearly show the importance and use of modelled oral reading, the reading of familiar or repeated texts, and independent reading. There is emphasis in the materials on prosody, but not direct reference to automaticity and accuracy. It is reasonable to assume that as Running Records are used as the main assessment tool in L3 both a focus on accuracy and automaticity would be highly likely. Training materials explain that in guided reading students never read alone, but rather in concert with the other two group members. One aim of this approach is to ensure continuity of reading and 'a sense of one performance'. This approach aids prosody and through self-monitoring and self-correction students develop accuracy and ultimately automaticity.

Vocabulary

The review

The CESE review defines vocabulary as words known and used for communication. These known words are used in speaking, listening, reading and writing (oral and written) activities and should be taught indirectly and directly. When considering vocabulary instruction the review notes there are methodological limitations to the evidence. Nonetheless, some recommended strategies are provided:

1. **Complex, unknown words should be taught directly.** It is somewhat unclear what is meant by the word 'directly' in this context, but if we assume it is the opposite of indirectly – learning about words and their meanings through exposure to oral and written communications – then it is reasonable to assume that, according to the review, direct teaching of vocabulary is overt talk with students about the meanings of specific words.
2. **Regular and repeated exposure to new vocabulary is important.** The review cites research claiming a strong positive association between repeated reading of stories and vocabulary improvement. It is recommended that "teachers encourage students to engage with the text by explaining new words and asking them questions about the book or what is going to happen next" (p. 10). This helps the students use context to figure out word meanings.
3. **Use morphology in the early stages of literacy learning.** Using morphology, breaking down words into meaningful parts (for example, help-ful or help-less or un-help-ful) in instruction assists students "to use word parts (for example, suffixes, prefixes and base words) [and] to figure out the meanings of words in text" (p. 10).

L3 training materials

Module materials in L3K appear to use both direct and indirect teaching of vocabulary through exposure to text. A word is identified, its meaning discussed and is then added to the word wall to enhance regular and repeated exposure to it. Directions in the training materials refer to “expanding student vocabularies through explicit instruction” and “explicit vocabulary instruction for subject-specific language, using and adding to writing vocabularies and word walls”.

Across the documentation available there is no mention of morphemes or morphology suggesting that L3 does not use morphology to improve students’ vocabulary and therefore, does not reflect part of the third recommendation of the CESE review.

Comprehension

The review

The research presented in the CESE review reflects a degree of uncertainty regarding the most appropriate age to commence comprehension instruction and the extent of such instruction. The findings of the National Reading Panel report (NICHD 2000) states that a multiple-strategy method is most effective, is cited along with seven effective strategies:

1. Comprehension monitoring – students self-monitor what they do and do not understand
2. Cooperative or reciprocal learning – students learn reading strategies and teach each other
3. Use of graphic and semantic organisers – for example, story maps, visual constructions of key ideas
4. Question answering – teachers pose questions about the text
5. Question generation – students question themselves about the text
6. Story structure – students are taught to use the structure of the story to recall and understand content
7. Summarisation – students identify important points, condense them and put them in their own words.

In the final paragraph, more recent research is cited where it states that comprehension instruction should be explicit and include “integrated modelling, feedback and opportunities for practice (Solis et al. 2012). Teachers should clearly explain to their students why and when they should use a comprehension strategy”. The review concludes comprehension assessment is important for monitoring student progress and informing future planning.

L3 training materials

L3 training materials do not demonstrate an explicit approach to comprehension, and direct teaching strategies appear to be largely absent. Nonetheless, the Kindergarten folder indicates that specific comprehension procedures are to be used in guided reading. As with other literacy aspects, the text drives the lesson procedures which show use of strategies such as question answering, self-monitoring and story structure evident usually through modelled, guided and independent activities. The cueing system ‘meaning’ plays an important part here. What is not evident is the Simple View of Reading approach to linguistic comprehension where a reader determines sentence meaning through word information.

The difference between the Effective Reading review recommendations and the L3K training materials and folder is most noticeable in the L3's more analytic approach to mastering early literacy skills. In L3, children are provided with carefully graded texts that provide them with opportunities to develop the five components driven by quality texts, but this method is not as explicit or systematic as the CESE review recommends.

L3 is not aligned with two of the department's Quality Assurance professional learning aims

As part of the 2017 Educational Services Review, the department has committed to the use of a new Quality Assurance (QA) framework for key professional learning. This framework is designed to assure school leaders of a consistently high quality of service across the state. A key part of the QA process includes reviewing the evidence base for any professional learning. A QA Professional Learning Rubric²³ consisting of 12 criteria was developed to ensure that quality professional learning will meet six general aims²⁴ (refer to Table 5 for the list of aims).

L3 is one of a small number of programs that has an exemption from the QA process because it would not pass QA. It is therefore not appropriate to review the L3 professional learning against the rubric. Instead, the following section broadly compares the L3 professional learning program (as described in Box 1) against the six general aims using the same ratings as we used with the CESE (2017a) report in Table 3.

Table 5

Reflection of the QA professional learning aims in the L3 model

Aims of QA professional learning	The L3 model	Support
a) be consistent across the state, in both quality and availability	While L3 appears to be somewhat consistent with regard to the L3K training module material, the L3S1 materials and online materials appear to be less detailed. Lack of transparency regarding the L3 manuals makes consistency difficult to judge	Negligible
b) incorporate evidence-based practice	The L3 training incorporates evidence-based practice in its design and advocated approaches. L3 draws on one body of evidence-based practices, but does not recognise all available evidence	Partial
c) embed adult learning principles such as "learning by doing"	The L3 training with the two separate components gives numerous opportunities for teachers to learn by doing whether that be teaching, assessing, modelling, analysing, or receiving feedback	Full

²³ Refer to: <https://schoolsequella.det.nsw.edu.au/file/2c881b10-8989-45eb-87d8-da2b34847950/1/Quality-assurance-rubric.pdf>.

²⁴ Refer to: <https://education.nsw.gov.au/inside-the-department/educational-services/quality-assurance-for-professional-learning/quality-professional-learning>.

Aims of QA professional learning	The L3 model	Support
d) provide authentic and relevant learning journeys that build knowledge and skills and which can be applied in real-world contexts	Between sessions and in the classroom visits there is ample opportunity for teachers to build knowledge and skills in real contexts using examples from their own classes over a two year period	Full
e) encourage collaboration and sharing of expertise through professional learning networks and communities of practice	The commitment expected from schools to “ensure that all grade teachers responsible for classes participate in the appropriate professional learning as L3 is a whole-stage initiative” (p. 5) ²⁵ enables many planned opportunities for collaboration and sharing of expertise. Furthermore, recent expectations that principals would work with local schools to contribute financially to paying for a L3 trainer and lead trainer provides other opportunities to develop a community of practice with staff from other schools	Full
f) embed robust support for facilitators to ensure quality and expertise in delivery be aligned to the department's strategic priorities	The support for trainers and lead trainers no longer exists	Negligible

Summary

Overall, all four policies and publications reviewed in this chapter are **partially** reflected in the L3 program materials. The support for key components of each document varies from full to negligible, resulting in an overall assessment of partial support. We note that reflection of the phonemic awareness and phonics components in CESE's (2017b) 'Effective reading instruction in the early years of school' review is largely absent, highlighting the philosophical and empirical gap between a synthetic approach and an analytic approach to phonics instruction. Furthermore, the in L3 instructional model, 'systematic' teaching is present but in a limited capacity, and 'explicit' teaching exists but not in the way that is advocated by Mesmer and Griffiths (2005) or by CESE: “teachers clearly showing students what to do and how to do it, rather than having students discover or construct information for themselves” (CESE 2017b, p. 5).

We also note that L3 currently does not support two aims of QA professional learning as L3 is not consistent across the state, in either quality or availability, and L3 does not embed robust support for facilitators to ensure quality and expertise in delivery.

While the three L3 documents analysed in this chapter provide some key information about L3, the lack of detail in L3S1 training documents leads to an incomplete understanding of the L3 program. It is also unclear whether or not any other training documents exist. These points somewhat limit the extent to which dependable conclusions can be drawn from the current analysis.

We also note that, in this review, the absence of teacher observation in delivering L3 limits the extent to which we can draw conclusions regarding the 'explicitness' of any teaching. The data collected through field interviews (chapters 4-7) will shed light on this aspect of L3 instruction.

²⁵ Language, Learning and Literacy Guidelines (March, 2017).

Box 2:**What is the current academic debate surrounding L3?**

In 2013 Erebus International evaluated L3K to determine the extent to which L3 teachers had improved techniques for planning and delivering literacy instruction to small groups and classes²⁶. Their report asserted that L3K students had exceeded expectations. Against an end-of-year reading benchmark set at reading Levels 6 – 8, 71% of students exceeded the benchmark (reading at Level 9+), 16% met the benchmark and 13% were below (p. 5). Against an end-of-year writing benchmark set at 6 – 23 words, 78% exceeded the benchmark, 17% met the benchmark, and just 4% fell below (p. 6).

The evaluation also noted that the professional learning model of ongoing training coupled with in-class support enabled teachers to develop a stronger, shared understanding of early literacy acquisition and that consistent use of data caters for individual student needs and informs teaching practice. The report concluded that “setting and revisiting students’ literacy learning goals on a regular basis resulted in significant shifts in literacy learning, including a real reduction in the number of students requiring (and severity of need for) more intensive and resource-demanding intervention programs” (p. 7).

It should be noted that the evaluation methods lacked a control group comprised of students not participating in the program, and therefore the relative achievement of L3K students could not be measured.

In their critique of L3, Neilson and Howell note that “while phonemic awareness teaching moments certainly do happen, there is no planned sequence to the introduction of letter-sound correspondences, and no opportunity for children to practice to mastery the skills of letter-sound identification, phoneme segmentation and blending” (Neilson & Howell, 2015, p. 9). They also question the validity of the benchmarks used to measure progress (refer to the Erebus evaluation).

In 2018, Buckingham publicly called for a “rigorous evaluation of the effectiveness of the L3 program compared to a matched control group of schools using standardised, quantitative reading measures administered according to appropriate protocols to ensure data integrity” (p. 2). Drawing on the Rose review (2006), Buckingham raised concerns about the “incidental or embedded teaching of phonics (which) involves pointing out letter sounds in the process of reading words or texts ... Incidental phonics teaching does not involve any direct teaching of letter-sound correspondences and is opportunistic rather than systematic or sequential — so there is no guarantee that children will learn all of the alphabetic code” (p. 7). Buckingham concludes that a systematic, synthetic phonics approach is the most effective instructional method for teaching early readers, an approach not adopted in L3.

Most recently, a report released in the NSW Parliament (Legislative Council Portfolio Committee No. 3 – Education 2020) also noted concerns with L3. This included the fact that L3 uses pedagogical principles similar to Reading Recovery (see also CESE 2015b) and that L3 “only teaches phonics incidentally” (p. 78).

26 Refer to: <https://www.cese.nsw.gov.au/evaluation-repository-search/language-learning-and-literacy-in-the-early-years>.

Chapter 4:

How is L3 currently designed and implemented?

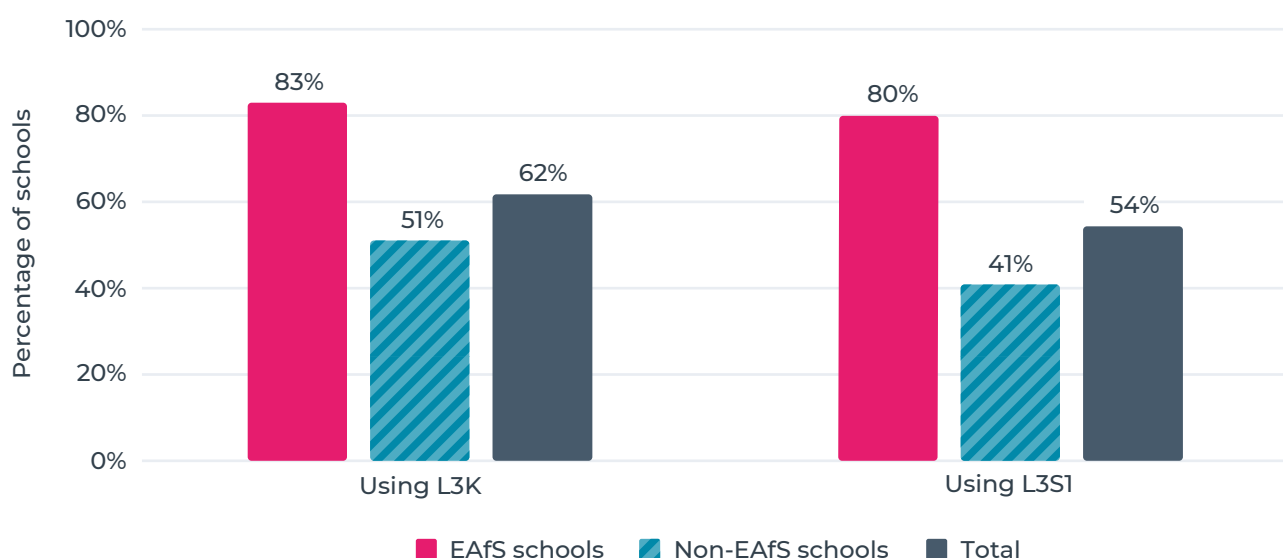
We now turn to address the four research questions that draw on qualitative data collected during fieldwork in semester 2, 2019 (refer to [Appendix 2](#) for details of the fieldwork sample). This chapter also includes analysis of survey data collected as part of the K-2 Literacy and Numeracy 2019 Principal Survey (refer to [Appendix 1](#) for details of the survey sample).

Three in every five schools reported using L3 in 2019

In the K-2 Literacy and Numeracy 2019 Principal Survey, principals were asked ‘what tools does your school use as targeted approaches or interventions in K-2 literacy?’²⁷ Overall, 58% of schools reported using L3 in 2019, and this is shown in figure 1. Slightly more schools reported using L3K (62%) than L3S1 (54%). As expected, EAfS schools were considerably more likely than non-EAfS schools to report using both L3K and L3S1.

Figure 1

Percentage of schools using L3 in 2019 (n=731)



²⁷ The survey included the following options: Daily Five, Getting Reading Right, InitiaLit, Jolly Phonics, L3K, L3S1, MiniLit, Reading Recovery, Sound Waves, Spelling Mastery, and other (up to three choices).

L3 is primarily perceived as a general quality literacy pedagogy, rather than a tiered intervention

While L3K was originally designed as an intervention, there was a widespread view that L3 was now very much seen as a general quality literacy pedagogy that could be widely applicable in any setting. For example:

“Even though L3 is this program, it is just quality teaching and it’s what we should be doing anyway, L3 trained or not L3 trained.”

(Teacher, school using L3)

“L3 is a pedagogy and it is a philosophy ... It’s the way I think about teaching in general.”

(Principal, school using L3)

“There’s nothing magic about L3, it’s just a systematic approach to teaching kids to read and write.”

(L3 trainer)

L3 has become a pedagogical identity for some teachers

Many of L3 teachers interviewed were very passionate and personal in their views. People spoke about being an “L3 teacher” or working in an “L3 school” as a strong part of their teaching identity. Some comments also reflected a sense of divide from those who were not part of L3.

“I have a very strong opinion that if you don’t believe in L3 ... You’re either in the L3 camp, or you’re not.”

(Principal, school using L3)

This divisiveness is also intensified by the fact that there is limited public access to materials about L3 for those who are not currently participating in L3 training. For example, several principals described their experience of starting in a new school that was already using L3 and finding it extremely difficult to find any information about L3 to help them determine whether or not they would continue with the program. The fact that information about L3 was only available to those currently participating in the training exacerbated the sense of exclusiveness.

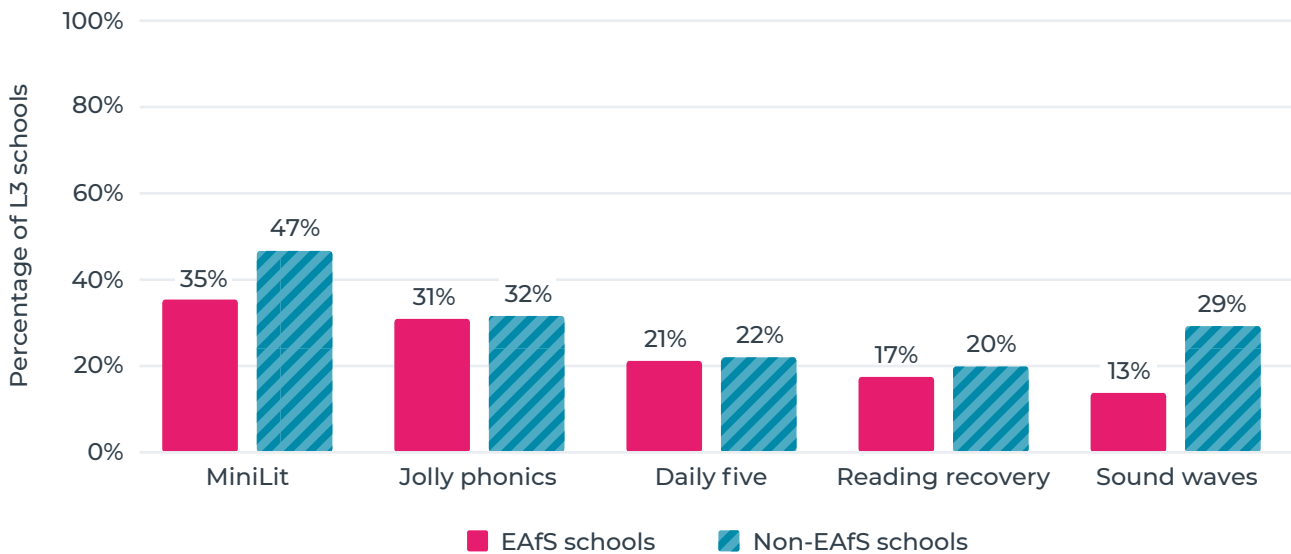
Implementation of L3 varies considerably between schools

Whilst the L3K program folder notes that “L3 does not require additional programs” (NSW DEC 2011a), both our survey and fieldwork data found that this was not typically the case in practice.

84% of L3 schools reported using additional programs alongside L3

Figure 2 shows that in 2019, MiniLit and Jolly Phonics were the most commonly reported programs used alongside L3, followed by Daily Five, Reading Recovery and Sound Waves²⁸. This pattern was mostly consistent across EAfS and non-EAfS schools.

²⁸ Note: The figure includes only programs that at least 10% of schools reported using.

Figure 2**Five most common additional programs L3 schools reported using (n=487)**

We have also considered these interventions according to their tier. Tier 3 interventions were least commonly used. Non-EAfS schools were slightly more likely to add both Tier 1 and Tier 2 interventions to supplement L3.

Almost all schools interviewed reported using additional literacy programs²⁹ to supplement L3, including both school-designed and commercial programs. As one L3 teacher noted “L3 says it is the whole package, and it’s not.” Some schools also report trying to align L3 to other whole school scope and sequence documents (for example, spelling, grammar, writing and handwriting). For example:

“I found that the phonics side of it was not great with L3. I just found that without a scope and sequence, without cross checking what I taught, there were gaps ... I know that it needs to be taught at a point of need, and I can do that in the engine room, but I wanted to make sure that I had something that was covering everybody.”

(Teacher, school using L3)

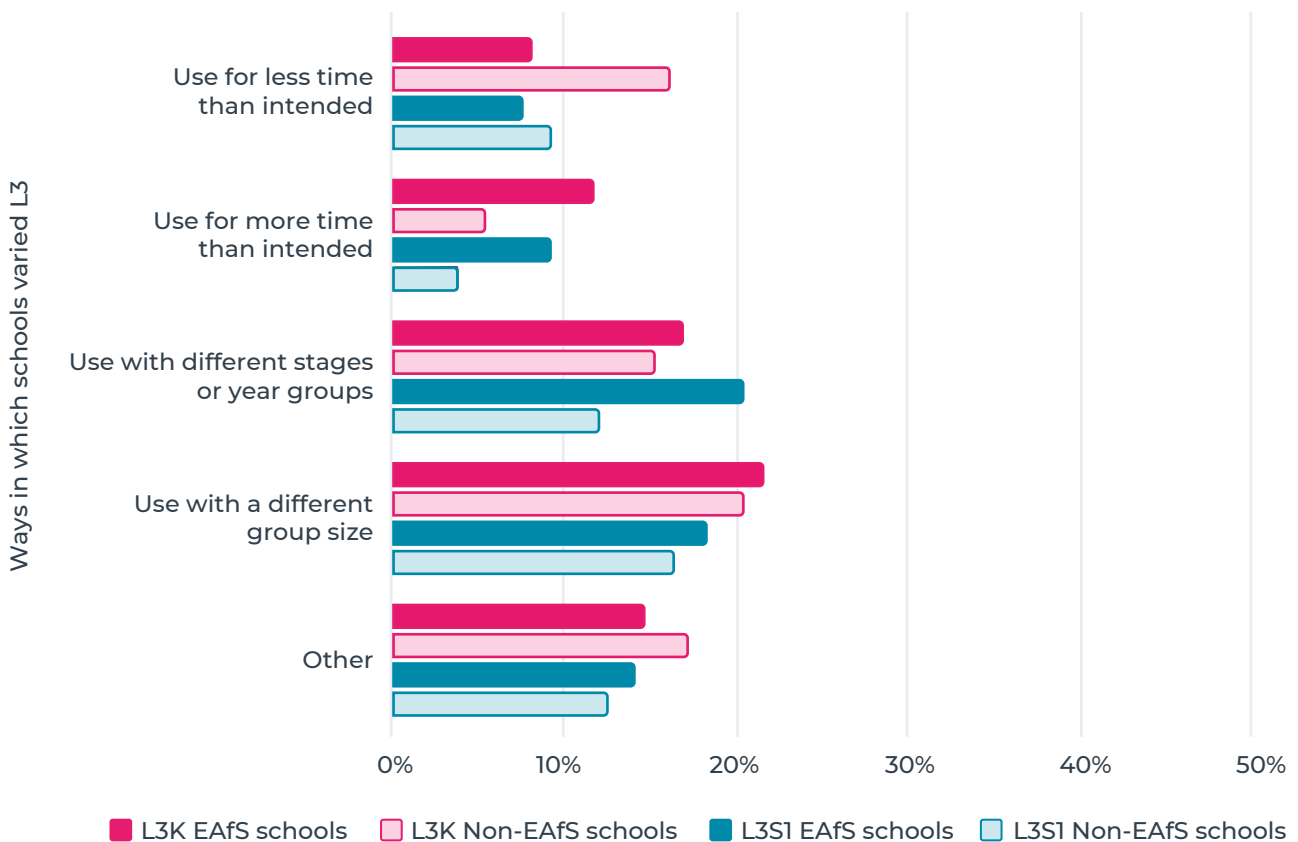
²⁹ Examples cited during fieldwork were: Accelerated Literacy, Ants in the Apple, Big Write, Daily Five, Get Reading Right, Jolly Phonics, Letter Land, MiniLit, MultiLit, Read Write Inc., Sentence a day, Seven Steps to Writing Success, SPELD, Spelling Mastery and Step by Step Writing Rescue.

Two-thirds of schools reported modifying L3

Principals were also asked to identify how, if at all, they modified L3³⁰. Our survey data revealed that 66% of schools reported modifying L3 and only 34% of schools reported not modifying L3. Figure 3 shows the different ways in which schools reported modifying L3: using it for more of less time than intended, using it with different stages or years groups or using it with different group sizes. These reported modifications illustrate the impact upon program fidelity, which would significantly compromise any outcome evaluation.

Figure 3

Percentage of L3 schools who reported modifying L3 in different ways (n=448)³¹



Around half of the schools interviewed reported not implementing the number of reading and/or writing sessions specified in the L3 guidelines. Teachers reported that L3 is very time consuming and delivery is particularly difficult in schools with busy timetables and competing priorities. Some schools reported only using the reading or writing components of L3, for example “I just follow my own writing program, I don’t really use the L3 writing program at all.”

Teachers undertaking variations to the original program processes is important when you consider that L3 teacher instruction provides very specific guidelines. An example of the type of teaching strategies expected to be used in L3 can be found in Box 3, where an L3 Guided Reading session is described.

³⁰ Note: Principals could choose up to three options.

³¹ Note: We have not included a small number of responses for “not sure” (n=39).

Box 3:**How is guided reading taught in L3?****Early stage one** (adapted from NSWDEC 2011a)

Guided reading is conducted with groups of three students at the same reading level at least three times each week. The three students and teacher sit at a table (sometime known as the “jellybean table”) in a dedicated space within the classroom (sometimes known as “the engine room”).

Text selection is a critical element of successful guided reading lessons. The text should always be within the capability of the students and should be read as independently as possible to sound like ‘good’ reading. Students engage with their teacher and each other in an active process of constructing meaning as they read continuous text.

Each guided reading lesson consists of **six elements**:

1. **Familiar reading.** Students read one or two familiar books. The books are read easily and accurately by the students and sound phrased and fluent. As students demonstrate increasing control of text reading, familiar reading can stop.
2. **Orientation to the new text.** (1 or 2 minutes)
3. **Reading the new text.** Read the text and time the reading. If the reading takes significantly longer than expected, the text is perhaps too hard or the teacher is allowing students to read in a slow, word by word way. Students do not read only part of the text or read one by one. Teachers do not read with the students or read the text to the students before they read it.

Students read the text together in a soft voice. Using a soft voice helps them feel they are reading the text by themselves and have a sense that they are reading their own story. As students read the text they are alert and conscious of their peer’s reading. Individual students gently dip in and out, slightly behind, slightly ahead, mostly in unison. Their eyes quickly shift from their text to their peer’s text, then back to their own text as they check and process. Students are able to experience what readers need to do with the text through the process of collaboration. They search, select, reject, self-monitor and self-correct within the safe parameters of the collective reading.

4. **Teaching during the reading.** As students read the text the teacher prompts or comments on aspects of the reading. Mostly the prompting will occur without stopping the reading of the text. The prompting will call for a specific action or will reinforce a desirable response, such as detecting an error as it happens. Occasionally the teacher will supply an unknown word without interrupting the flow of the reading.
5. **Teaching after the reading.** The teacher selects the most useful and generative place to provide explicit instruction following the reading. Often the teaching will confirm desirable aspects of processing or reading behaviour that occurred during the reading. The explicit instruction may also focus on clarifying a confusion or uncertainty, showing a solution to a problem or reinforcing independent detection of an error even if the student is unable to solve the problem at the time.

6. **Word Work** features the use of magnetic letters, a small white board and the guided reading text. The words, letters and sounds chosen for explicit instruction in Word Work are drawn from the language of the text. There is not a predetermined sequence to follow. The text itself creates the gradient of complexity and determines the content for instruction. The language of the text used for guided reading guides the decisions of what to teach.

In Word Work, students are learning how to look at print at the word level. Word Work is designed to help them understand how to look at printed letters, words and continuous text. Word Work encourages students to think flexibly about letters and letter groups within words in order to foster fast and accurate visual analysis of new words when reading. Word Work involves explicit instruction which demonstrates how to take words apart in order to solve a difficulty or check for accuracy as they read. As students become knowledgeable and experienced at managing words, letters and sounds they become expert at processing visual information quickly and efficiently on text.

Word Work helps students appreciate that how they look at an unknown word and where they look within an unknown word has a critical bearing on the success of their attempts. They learn that some visual information within words is redundant or that grouping particular letters together is more likely to provide a sound that is consistent.

The teacher also provides a variety of other activities for the **other students not participating in guided reading** to complete. Students may 'free roam' or have more structured rotations. Activities are typically completed independently, but may involve support from classroom volunteers (for example, parents) or Students Learning Support Officers.

Stage one (adapted from NSW DET 2017b)

Stage one students continue to receive guided reading sessions using levelled texts. Key tenets are:

- Fluid and flexible grouping of students
- Use of 'reciprocal reading' (predicting, questioning, summarising, clarifying)
- Each guided reading session has three components: before reading, during reading, after reading (word work)
- Prompt for strategic activity during reading
- Focus on comprehension and fluency
- Emphasis on critically concerning students. Reflect particularly on students who are 'off the boil'? (I.e. not progressing as expected).

There were two conflicting messages about classroom management during guided reading time

Some schools reported that, once they set the expectations and ‘trained’ their students, students worked well independently

Some teachers were confident that their students were working well independently whilst they were focused.

“They’re pretty good, but you’ve got to train them. So it’s all about consistency at the start of the year.”

(Teacher, school using L3)

“I think it comes down to your routine, your classroom expectations from very early on. It doesn’t happen instantly. It’s something that needs to be developed and you gradually increase the expectations.”

(Teacher, school using L3)

Others reported that their students did not work well independently and struggle with limited supervision for a significant period of time

Other teachers were frustrated that they could not give their students in the engine room the attention they wanted to because, despite working hard to ‘train’ their students as described above, they still had some students who required more supervision and guidance.

“I found in the engine room I’d be frustrated. Even though you teach the routines, you teach the expectations, you’d have all the things set out – yet there were still kids that I just felt weren’t using that time wisely.”

(Teacher, school using L3)

“Some of that (concern) was around really poor student behaviour and I think some of the aspects of L3 weren’t conducive to good behaviour of the kids in our school because they needed more structure.”

(Principal, school formerly using L3)

Strategies to manage independent time include additional classrooms supporters (for example, Student Learning Support Officers, parent volunteers), structured rotations, buddy systems and accountability or task completion boards. It is worth noting that some teachers provide only literacy activities, while others include a range of KLAs and cross-curricular links wherever possible. EAfS schools talk about the core six learning centres (reading, writing, word studies, mathematics, investigations/science and response to text). Finally, some schools also reported using L3 strategies in Years 3-6, especially where an L3-trained teacher had moved onto a different grade. For example:

“Some of the pedagogy and some of the strategies around L3 are being implemented into our 3-6 classes. So even though they’re not L3 trained, they see how it works in K-2. They are using small groups, flexible grouping, the data driven practices and they’re starting to implement that in 3-6 classrooms because they see how effective it is down in K-2.”

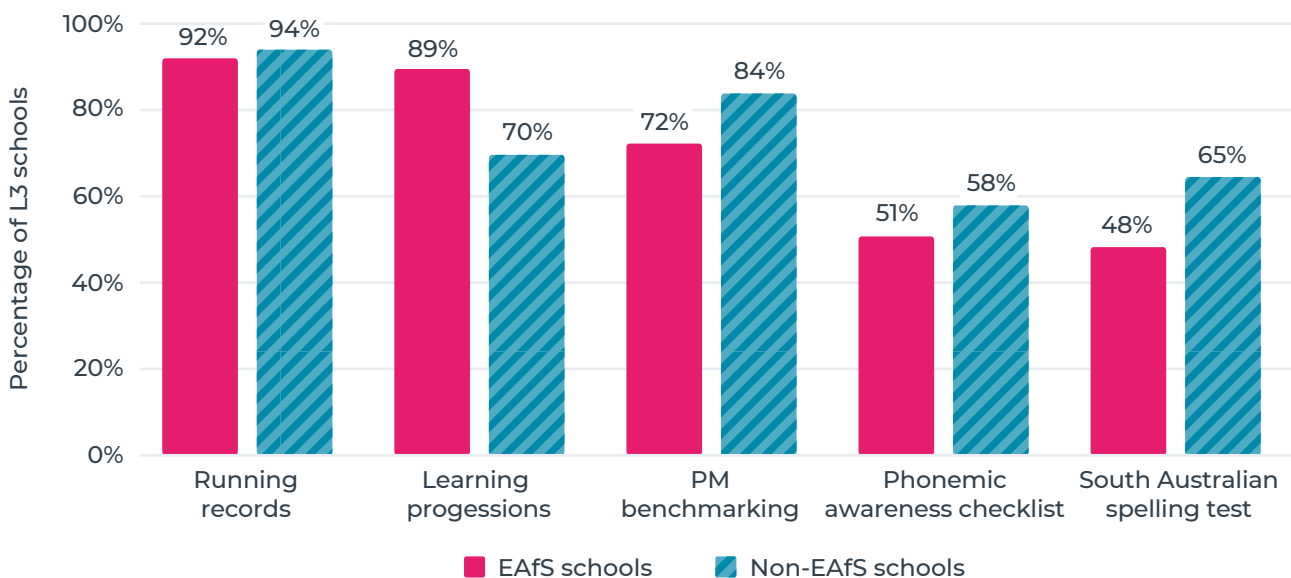
(Instructional leader, school using L3)

Running records were the most commonly reported tool used to assess the impact of L3

Principals were asked ‘what tools are used to assess literacy K-2 at your school?’³² Overall, running records³³ were the most commonly reported tool used, and this is presented in figure 4. Some schools also reported using the Literacy Learning Progressions. We note that, schools report using the Literacy Learning Progressions as assessment tools, even though they are not designed to be used as such.

Figure 4

Five most common assessment tools that L3 schools reported using (n=487)



³² The survey included the following options: Best Start, Developmental Reading Assessment, DIBELS, ESL scales, National Literacy Learning Progressions, PAT Punctuation and Grammar, PAT Comprehension, PAT Spelling, PAT Vocabulary, Phonemic Awareness Checklist, Phonics Screening Check, PM Benchmarking, Reading Eggs, Running Records, South Australian Spelling Test, TORCH, Wadding Tests and other (up to three choices).

³³ Note: It is unclear what distinction schools make between ‘running records’ and ‘PM Benchmarking’.

Schools agreed that reading level data are important and useful

There was strong agreement that close monitoring of reading level data is a valuable part of L3.

“I think the running records are very important in terms of really gauging what the children can do at either point of difficulty, or if they can monitor, and what strategies they have. So those running records are really important.”

(Teacher, school using L3)

Interestingly, both EAfS and non-EAfS schools reported that an Instructional Leader or Assistant Principal continued to track reading level data across a stage, even once L3 training was finished.

Some teachers reported concerns about the accuracy of reading level data

Schools reported different ways of collecting reading level data, usually either through formal running records or informal observations in the engine room. This disparity in approaches led to some concerns about the accuracy of the data collected. For example:

“The monitoring graphs that we have, which track the kids’ reading levels is quite important. However, looking back on those and being here when it was collected, I know that initial data...those kids are reading at is inaccurate. So, unless it was myself or a teacher that I felt knew what they were talking about, collecting that class data and submitting it is irrelevant. Because even though they might say a child’s on level 15, when you go in there and read with that child, the child may only be a level 10 or 11. So the data’s not quite right.”

(Instructional leader, school using L3)

Other difficulties mentioned by school staff focused on the time it takes to conduct running records with each student in the class and the variable judgement between teachers regarding the appropriate reading levels for students.

“The only kind of real data that we’re using to collect, is also a subjective teacher judgment piece of data around reading levels, then I think we’ve got a limited data source on which to be making those judgments as well.”

(DoE stakeholder)

There was also a disagreement on whether to use a familiar text (as per the L3 guidelines) or to use an unfamiliar text to determine a child’s reading level:

“We all have a benchmark kit now to share between the stage and we have set rules where it’s got to be an unfamiliar text.”

(Executive member, school using L3)

Some teachers reported pressure to 'push' students through the reading levels

Given the emphasis on reading level data, it is also interesting to note that some teachers described a sense of pressure and discomfort about the rate at which their students were expected to progress. For example:

“I do find at times this urgency of pushing them on ... We've got to push them through. We've got to get them to this level by the end of the year.”

(Learning and support teacher, school using L3)

“[In training], you bought the data, and if they didn't improve you had to say why they didn't improve ... Then you had to match up your reading and writing. So it was a lot of stress on the kids to – if they were reading at a level 11 but their writing wasn't reflecting it, you had to really try and keep bumping that up while you were moving up your reading levels.”

(Teacher, school using L3)

A limited range of other assessments were also described

L3K teachers reported using the other two assessments in the L3K folder – 'hearing and recording sounds in word' and 'vocabulary'. Both L3K and L3S1 teachers reported collecting student writing samples and working in stage teams to establish consistent teacher judgement to assess student writing. Schools also reported a wide range of school-based interventions for students who were not progressing under L3. Some used modified Reading Recovery strategies in a withdrawal support model, whilst others described how they identified students for 'learning sprints' or additional support from an interventionist. For example:

“The learning sprints model, looking at your data, focus on those small amount of kids, we've seen good growth with our kids across there.”

(Principal, school using L3)

Chapter 5:

Why did NSW government primary schools chose to use L3?

Overall, demand for teacher professional learning in literacy appears to have driven the use of L3. In our analysis of the interview data, we identified that schools chose L3 in order to:

- improve teachers' pedagogical understanding and skills
- enhance programming consistency through shared understanding and meta-language; and
- develop stronger ways of tracking of student progress.

In addition, many were impressed with the training model, in particular the in-school coaching, which was perceived to be rigorous, based on research, and endorsed by the department. The interviews also revealed that some principals felt they had no choice but to adopt L3.

Common responses about a school's initial decision to adopt L3 showed that principals were strongly influenced by what they had heard or experienced. For example:

“I think the general feedback from other schools, there were a lot of public schools starting to implement it and we were just hearing great feedback from those schools.”

(Executive staff, school using L3)

“It's good to have more training, so the teachers were always after extending their skills. There was a lot of talk about L3, so it was a great program to start.”

(Executive staff, school using L3)

Principals believed that L3 would provide teachers with improved pedagogical understanding and skills

Principals held the view that L3 would give their teachers (especially early career or those moving to a new stage) the opportunity to improve their understanding and skills in the pedagogy of reading and writing. This included an emphasis on translating the syllabus into practice.

“The syllabus tells us what we need to achieve, but it doesn't tell us how to get there.”

(Principal, school using L3)

“It [L3] is actually upskilling our staff to have a bag of options that differentiates the delivery of the syllabus for our kids.”

(DoE stakeholder)

“I’ve got three or four early career teachers between kindergarten and year one at the moment, who are all getting [with L3] the nuts and bolts ... around how to teach children to read and write.”

(DoE stakeholder)

Principals believed that L3 would enhance programming through shared meta-language and understanding

Principals considered that L3 would give staff the opportunity to develop a shared meta-language and understanding about literacy teaching. They hoped that there would be opportunities for collaboration and dialogue when programming and designing learning experiences.

“Prior to L3, everyone was doing their own little thing and had their own idea of what literacy looked like ... So I wanted a consistent pedagogical approach in every classroom.”

(Principal, school using L3)

“The principal at the time wanted to get a program to get more consistency K-2 ... teachers were still teaching on their islands, and it was a way of bringing it together, having consistent language, getting new teachers to give them some TPL so they had confidence in teaching literacy. So I think it was just to bring everybody on the same page.”

(Executive staff, school using L3)

Regular assessment and using data to track student progress was an attractive feature of L3

Principals wanted their teachers to engage with data, and L3 made data collection and analysis part of regular practice.

“It [L3] is a program I’ve always believed in, because you are assessing your kids. You’re using your data. So what do I need to teach them next? Using the syllabus ... and you can catch those kids who aren’t progressing.”

(Principal, school using L3)

“That’s one really good element of L3, because you are assessing the children every five weeks. So we have all that data. The actual excel sheet is amazing because it graphs them ... it’s very visual and easy to look at ... it shows us the growth, and it shows us which children are at risk.”

(Teacher, school using L3)

The coaching model and perception of rigour were also attractive features of L3

The L3 professional learning was well-known for its quality trainers, research base, the endorsement of the department and the in-school coaching model. The reputation of L3 in this respect, was an important factor in deciding to adopt the program.

“It [L3] was department endorsed, and the fact that there was a body of research behind it saying that this is a good thing to try to have a go at, that we should get on board, a lot of our schools are doing it. So, the department was endorsing it and saying that it’s a good thing to do. You’d be crazy not to.”

(Teacher, school using L3)

“The principals that I work with really opt in to L3 because it’s research-based practice ... They really respect the trainers as instructional leaders who have the ability to deliver in sessions and to be able to come in and help in the classroom in terms of modelling best practice, but also watching and coaching.”

(DoE stakeholder)

Some principals felt that participation in L3 was not optional

Some principals in EAfS schools felt they did not have a choice; it was expected that they would participate.

“There’s a lot of pressure on the EAfS schools to do L3, a huge amount and we felt that at the start as well.”

(Principal, school formerly using L3)

“If you’re an EAfS school, you should be participating in L3.”

(Principal, school using L3)

“We had no choice to do it [L3].... [She] sort of said, you will be doing L3, your results in literacy are that poor.”

(Executive staff, school using L3 EAfS)

Others felt that they had no choice because there was no other comparable program like the L3 available.

“That was one of the questions we asked when we did planning – if we don’t do L3, what else is there?”

(DoE stakeholder)

“Just because I am not an EAfS school, does not mean I should be excluded from having that opportunity.”

(Principal, school using L3)

Box 4:**Why did schools stop using L3?****Unproductive use of student time**

Principals raised concerns about the quality of work produced by students who were not in the engine room with the teacher:

“When L3 was introduced, the teacher would sit on a chair with the three students in front of her, have 10 minutes of intense teaching, and that was the engine room. And the rest of the kids would be sitting around doing some busy work. And she’d bring in groups of three at a time and do it. And I was thinking to myself, “That’s 9:00 to 11:00, two hours of children in groups of three getting some intense work of 10 minutes, of really explicit teaching.” That worried me a bit, and I wasn’t really happy about that ... If you’re looking at Kindergarten, Year 1, Year 2 in areas where kids need more explicit instruction and structure, it defied all of those laws of what I believe good teaching should be.”

(Principal, school formerly using L3)

“I think some of the aspects of L3 weren’t conducive to good behaviour of the kids in our school because they needed more structure. Letting five year olds, for example, choose their own path to learning and their own activities wasn’t working well ... You’re not getting the results. Your kids are disengaged. You’re frustrated. You’re not getting the quality time in that engine room.”

(Principal, school formerly using L3)

Excessive demand on teacher attention and time

The principals found that their teachers were distracted by the behaviour of students not in the engine room and were exhausted.

“The teacher in the engine room wasn’t giving those kids quality time because there was constant monitoring of the behaviours ... so we needed to either change what was happening and adapt it or we needed to look at other methods ... there was a lot of time wasting going on and a lot of kids off task.”

(Principal, school formerly using L3)

“And the teachers were like, “Yeah, I’m exhausted.” Because, they do the same lesson six, seven times in the two hours ... The teachers were really exhausted, and they could see that it wasn’t working for the students, and they could see that it’s really pretty much 10 minutes of teaching, and not really much happening there. So yes, it wasn’t that difficult for me to get rid of it.”

(Principal, school formerly using L3)

Chapter 6:

What aspects of L3 are perceived to be working well?

Changes to teacher practice underpinned by stronger knowledge of literacy acquisition, and a collaborative approach to reviewing data and forward planning are perceived strengths of the L3 valued by teachers and school leaders.

Teachers report that an important strength of L3 was the significant change in their knowledge, practice and confidence

It is widely acknowledged (refer to Chapter 1) that much teacher professional learning, particularly of short duration, has only a limited impact on actually changing teaching practices. One interesting strength of L3 is that teachers report they substantially changed their practices in response to the training:

“L3 really changed how I teach and my understanding of how kids learn ... It made me a much better teacher.”

(Teacher, school using L3)

In EAfS schools, an instructional leader supports implementation between L3 training sessions. As one L3 Trainer put it, “the instructional leader is the eyes and ears and muscle on the ground.” This supports continuation of L3 training and reinforces the impact that L3 training has on classroom practices.

L3 filled knowledge gaps in pre-service and in-service training in the fundamentals of teaching reading and writing

One of the most frequently reported perceived strengths of L3 was that teachers felt their pre-service education did not adequately prepare them to teach reading and writing, and that L3 played an important role in overcoming this.

“At uni, they don't teach you how to teach children how to read and write.”

(L3 trainer)

“I think having the early career teachers having quality TPL [through L3], they feel really confident with running a literacy session. Because you often find that that's sort of an area that people don't feel as confident in when they come straight from uni to teaching.”

(Executive staff, school using L3)

Teachers report feeling more confident as a result of participating in L3

As a result of participating in L3 training, teachers reported feeling more confident.

“Having the L3 training boosted my confidence to teach guided reading ... I found it beneficial, and it has definitely improved my practice as a teacher.”

(Teacher, school using L3)

Teachers who had a good relationship with their trainer really valued the coaching and mentoring model. They appreciated the opportunity to receive feedback on their practice in a safe, low-risk context (i.e. not part of performance management³⁴). This in turn appeared to improve confidence.

L3 supported differentiation and helped teachers target individual student needs

L3 provided a structure for fluid and flexible grouping of students. As students are placed into small groups, teachers can be more targeted and specific in their teaching. Teachers reported that they liked setting individual reading and writing goals for their students and making these goals clearly known to the students.

“I think the students like the small group, being able to have that individualised attention ... the small group works well, so you can get that intensive language in.”

(DoE stakeholder)

“The beauty of L3 is it's really dependent on kids' needs. It's not a one size fits all at all, and that's the thing that I love most about L3. Back in the day, when I planned for guided reading, I would do my guided reading for the term ... But it was not responsive to need at all, and it was just kids just going through the motion. So I think that's the number one thing that I like is that you can target those really specific needs.”

(Instructional leader, school using L3)

“I like that it's targeted and specific. The whole idea that you need to take groups at their point of need as opposed to teaching whole class all the time. It's quite important in terms of moving children along and trying to accelerate them through their learning.”

(School executive, school using L3)

34 For information on the teacher performance and development, refer to: <https://my.education.nsw.gov.au/human-resources/performance/school-teachers/performance-development>.

L3 provided a consistent structure

L3 promoted a consistent structure, such as analytic questioning and setting up the classroom, which provides a consistent approach for students.

L3 promoted the use of quality texts and provided specific procedures for having conversations with students about texts

Teachers report valuing the L3 procedures to support how they talk about quality literature with their students and gradually increase their students' capability to have deeper conversations about texts.

“It [L3] promotes the use of quality texts in the classroom...And discussing the language in it and the quality features within that text, rather than just reading it for enjoyment, you know, there's more talk about it.”

(Principal, school using L3)

L3 classroom settings provided consistency for students

“It's consistency for the child everyday – like that read, they know that they're going to have a read every second day, or every day. They know what the expectation is going to be.”

(Teacher, school using L3)

“I find that you've always got those kids that can't, who are not independent workers, and may never be. So it's really good in the sense that it's the same every day. They know they're doing writing, they know they're doing reading, and then they know they're doing ABC. So it's really good for that structure.”

(Teacher, school using L3)

L3 assessment expectations created good routines and helped teachers identify student needs through reflection

Teachers remarked on the benefit of developing regular assessment routines and found that data collection supported where additional interventions were needed.

“I think keeping teachers accountable to their data, and also just monitoring and tracking the children as they progress ... I think it's just a good way to monitor them in-between those years, to see if they need any additional interventions or if they need any extra support. Yes, and to see if those supports are actually working well.”

(Teacher, school using L3)

Reading levels can be used for a simple ‘at a glance’ monitoring system

The regular assessment opportunities enabled teachers to use the results to track students, identify those not progressing, and help prevent students from ‘falling through the gaps’.

“The other thing that’s been really good is collecting data. And I never felt like it was just for the sake of collecting data. It’s exciting to see kids grow so much and have such success in that. But I’ve said it’s good to look back and go, “All right, I’ve got a child who’s been on the same level for five weeks. What strategy am I using or what’s not working?””

(Instructional leader, school using L3)

“Especially because it [L3] allows you not to lose kids in the gaps, because you’re constantly evaluating okay, why aren’t you moving – like that constant evaluation practice, “okay, do I need to change something? Is there something more going on?” You’re less likely to leave kids behind, whereas when daily teaching gets really busy, often people don’t have the time to sit there.”

(Assistant principal, school using L3)

“You’re assessing your kids. You’re using your data. So what do I need to teach them next? ... You can catch those kids who aren’t progressing as they probably should. And it’s not a one model fits all. You’re not teaching everyone the same thing.”

(Principal, school using L3)

The five-weekly goal setting and use of data to inform teaching practice supported teachers to be reflective practitioners

“One of the big impacts is it’s enabling them to be reflective practitioners. So one of the big things with L3 is, you implement something, you reflect on that, you use that to inform your planning and programming.”

(Instructional leader, school using L3)

The L3 training model helped to create a culture of collaboration and networking within and between schools

Teachers reported valuing the active participation in L3 training giving them an opportunity to collaborate with others, something that is often not achievable in the busyness of school life. The collaboration also helped to reduce the workload as resources could be made and shared with colleagues. Furthermore, teachers reported valuing the chance to network with teachers in other schools and the opportunity to see a range of different classrooms. This was particularly important for teachers in small and rural/remote schools.

“We’ve got five heads to work together, and a lot of these small schools don’t. They really enjoy being able to share resources.”

(L3 trainer)

“We actually meet people who are in exactly the same boat as we are, and it’s just fantastic for that collaboration, knowing that you are not alone in this.”

(Instructional leader, school using L3)

“I quite like going to the training sessions, and hearing what other people are doing within their classrooms.”

(Teacher, school using L3)

Student progress is a whole-school, collective responsibility. Individual teachers are not judged if a student has not improved.

“[We have] collective responsibility. Everyone’s responsible for everyone’s kids. And just because your kids for some reason haven’t grown, it’s not a reflection on you necessarily ... let’s have a look at what we’re doing, because what we’re doing is not working.”

(Principal, school using L3)

“They [the teachers] are a lot more collaborative when reporting on kids and having a lot of regular conversations, and just treating every kid as their own ... they’re working really well together and they’ve got good communication.”

(Executive staff, school using L3)

The effect of L3 training and implementation on school culture is a benefit that should not be under-valued. The consistency and focus on collaborative review and planning have shown to be widely influential on teachers and their practice.

Chapter 7:

What aspects of L3 could be improved?

When asked about aspects of L3 that teachers, principals and L3 stakeholders found challenging, the issue of time and fitting in everything was the most consistent message. The expectations regarding the L3 classroom strategies created tensions for some teachers as they applied these in their own classroom contexts.

“For kindergarten, to get three reads and three writes in a week is damn impossible in this day and age, it is impossible.”

(Teacher, school using L3)

In short, teachers discovered that the L3 approach wasn't always realistic, and if not modified or adapted, would lead to groups of students or to curriculum areas being 'short-changed' or somewhat neglected. Furthermore, the training was expensive, particularly for non-EAfS schools, and required substantial logistical planning.

Some schools reported that they currently have a mix of trained and untrained teachers using L3 in their classrooms (although this is contrary to the L3 guidelines), and this creates challenges for consistency and fidelity. For example:

“For the last four years, I have been trying to run little hub groups where we go through the L3 folder and then do in-class observations on how it runs and things like that. But it's not great. You have to be trained in it.”

(Executive staff, school using L3)

This also reflect the fact that EAfS and non-EAfS schools access L3 training in different ways (as outlined in chapter 2). These challenges have resulted in a program that is widely implemented in a variety of ways to accommodate the contextual needs of students.

L3 pedagogical strategies could be challenging to implement, depending on the needs of a class

Modifying or adapting the L3 program for those in need of extra support, managing the needs of each student when an engine room group was defined by a single reading level and a maximum of three students, and implementing some of the more complicated L3 strategies were some of the difficulties mentioned by teachers.

Key groups of students need extra support

Teachers noted that students with special needs such as those with low cognitive functioning, poor fine motor skills or conversely, those with established literacy skills, required extra or different support, making it difficult to use the L3 program as intended.

“We’ve got a lot of children with speech difficulties, and therefore they can’t make the sounds, they can’t necessarily hear the sound. If they can’t identify the sound as well, it just becomes really tricky to meet their needs. And I think L3 doesn’t really focus on that high level of need.”

(Executive staff, school using L3)

“I dislike how there’s not enough opportunities in the program for students who come into Stage 1 with no English background. It doesn’t give us enough freedom to work with those students one-on-one, and nor does it give us enough instruction to be working with those students one-on-one. L3 is not designed for EAL/D students in Kindergarten.”

(Teacher, school using L3)

Managing a wide range of reading levels in groups of three is unrealistic

In addition to groups needing extra support in some classes, the wide range of reading abilities with less than three students clustered on the same level caused issues of time.

“So I’ve got one level two ... my next level is a four, and then my next level is a five, and then I’ve got six and sevens, and then tens, and then I’ve only got one on a 15. So I have to read with him individually, I have to read my level two individually, even though L3 says never read to kids individually, but you have to because it’s what they need at that point in time.”

(Executive staff, school using L3)

Some of the L3 strategies are difficult to implement

A few teachers noted difficulties they experienced with word work and the word wall explaining that the teaching process was complicated and required practice and familiarity to be efficient.

“With the Stage 1, for a lot of the teachers especially in the first year, their battles, are the word work, getting their head around the word work because obviously it’s a lot more complex than kindergarten and it takes a bit longer to prepare. So having to do the word work while they are learning how to do it, is dragging out how long they are spending with the group.”

(L3 trainer)

Using L3 resources efficiently in class required a lot of preparation

Prior to reading with groups it was necessary to have all resources well prepared, otherwise the lessons would not run smoothly and time would be wasted.

“Once I had everything set up, the only thing that held you back was that with the engine room. ... Because it is not something you can just go, okay, my students are in front of me, here is my book, now, let me go and get all my letters out. And, if you didn’t have it ready, then you couldn’t do the session properly because you would be quickly grabbing things out.”

(Teacher, school using L3)

Managing students so they were engaged and learning could be demanding

While the teacher worked in the engine room with three students at a time, the remainder of the class were required to work independently. However, teachers noted that independent work could be difficult if behaviour was poor or routines had not been learned.

“But when I was implementing it first in 2017, my kids were – I had a really difficult cohort. They were just really hard. So, you know, just getting them to sit sometimes would be difficult, getting them to do things like sit down. ... So sometimes you can’t do it based on the cohort or based on the needs of the kids that you have.”

(Teacher, school using L3)

Balanced programming and thorough preparation could be compromised through lack of time

Teachers and school leaders remarked that the implementation of L3’s strategies and content placed a heavy load on balancing a class program. For some, concerns focused on the absence of particular components of language acquisition such as phonics and grammatical structures, while others thought the approaches in L3 hindered good balance across reading, writing, grammar and punctuation, and spelling.

“That’s how close-minded your trainers are when they’re saying: ‘No, you don’t need to teach phonics, and no, you don’t need to teach handwriting. And you don’t need to revisit the words that you learned yesterday.’ Well yes, you do.”

(Assistant principal, school using L3)

“Yeah, I think teachers found that because there was no scope and sequence, it was a bit loose and things were getting missed.”

(Executive staff, school using L3)

“Phonics-wise, we found that whilst doing the [L3] word work, they probably weren’t getting quite enough to transfer ... their sounds into their writing.”

(Teacher, school using L3)

Of particular concern was the lack of a sequenced approach in Stage One to text type writing, and the development of good handwriting skills from the start of Kindergarten.

“We weren’t meeting the needs for Year 2 students going onto Year 3 where they were going to be tested in NAPLAN on those genres, and we hadn’t done any structured writing to prepare them for that, and that was the height of my frustration with that program.”

(Teacher, school using L3)

“I don’t have an issue with a formal handwriting lesson. I think, you know, in L3, in its integrity and in its authenticity, handwriting is dealt with. However, using a whiteboard and a whiteboard marker, that’s not always the same as writing on a bit of paper.”

(Principal, school using L3)

Some teachers and leaders agreed that the L3 requirements impacted on the time given to other KLAs which could compromise NESA requirements.

“We were like ‘there has to be a way’. So we got the six reads in every day: one as they walked in in the morning, one before recess, one after recess, one before lunch, etc. ... So we actually managed to do that and our ‘Read Tos’, but we cut down so much on science, so much on art, on geography, so much on everything else.”

(Teacher, school using L3)

Training was considered to be costly to some schools, while others found trainers’ expectations of children unrealistic

Overall, few concerns about the training were mentioned, however, the costs associated with training staff, and the unrealistic standards of Kindergarten and Stage One children in training examples were both raised most often.

The costs of training and replacing staff was a big commitment for some schools

For EAfS schools the time required to train in L3 was a big commitment, while for non-EAfS schools the costs were taxing in terms of both time and money. Principals or the school executive needed to organise relief staff for the sessions off-site and for the coaching and feedback sessions onsite.

“Outside of Early Action for Success what gets in the way, time as always. The commitment. Money. If you’re not an Early Success school it’s significantly expensive. The school services model at the moment is between \$5,000 and \$6,000 a teacher, not including casual cover.”

(L3 lead trainer)

Unrealistic examples and expectations in training made translation into the classroom disheartening

The training sessions utilised videos of children participating in L3 activities. Some teachers believed that the videos created unrealistic expectations of what could be achieved with 'real' students back at school.

“I'd say 'I want real children. I want to see real kids', and that's what beginning teachers want to see or beginning L3 trained teachers. Because it looks like you're a bad teacher because they're like, my gosh they (the children on the video) can do that, they can sit there for like half an hour, and my kids can't.”

(Executive staff, school using L3)

Other difficulties mentioned by school staff were concerned with the time it takes to conduct running records with each student in the class and the variable judgement between teachers regarding the appropriate reading levels for students.

There is currently limited departmental oversight of L3, resulting in fidelity continuing to reduce over time

Changes with regard to the departmental management of L3 has created difficulties in honouring the program as intended. This is particularly evident in the range of different ways schools reported identifying and accessing an L3 trainer, with key differences between EAfS schools (which predominantly work with Literacy and Numeracy Trainers and Instructional Leaders) and non-EAfS schools (which may access a local Principal Implementation Group or may use informal networks to identify a trainer in their local area). We conclude that L3 is being implemented with substantial variability.

“There isn't necessarily a quality control mechanism. People do what they want to do.”

(DoE stakeholder)

“When you take something to scale, and you try to maintain it as an intervention with the kind of intervention fidelity that's required, those things don't match ... When you have so many people involved in the training of it, so many schools involved in it, and you actually have two parallel models being implemented at the same time, then you start to become really unstuck.”

(DoE stakeholder)

Conclusions and discussion

In this review we have examined the design, content and implementation of L3 using document analysis, survey data and interview data. We now present a summary of the findings for each research question, followed by a discussion of our recommendations for future consideration.

Summary of findings

What was the original research base for L3?

L3K originated from the research base of the New Zealand 'Picking up the Pace' program. L3K professional learning focused on an iterative inquiry cycle and ongoing review of data within an instructional leadership model. L3K literacy instruction was based on the works of Marie Clay (1991, 1998) and the three cueing system, and emphasised the use of whole texts, analytic and constructivist approaches.

Landmark reports in the early 2000s emphasised the importance of code-based approaches to reading instruction through explicit and systematic pedagogies in the earliest stages of reading instruction, and L3K did not draw on these approaches. More specifically, L3K did not draw on the 'Simple View of Reading' (Gough and Tunmer 1986, advocated by Rose 2006) or 'The Reading Rope' (Scarborough 2001), and did not include a scope and sequence to systematically structure the introduction of alphabetic code-breaking skills (advocated by Rowe 2005). Children with reading difficulties and children from disadvantaged backgrounds most particularly benefit from code-based approaches to reading instruction as an early intervention (Louden et al 2005; Rowe 2005; Snow, Burns & Griffin 1998).

In summary, while L3K drew on **some** research, it did not draw on **the full range** of available research into early literacy teaching. L3K therefore did not draw on a systematic understanding of the existing research, and those parts which it under-emphasised are of particularly benefit to children with reading difficulties and children from disadvantaged backgrounds. We note also that L3S1 was developed later and drew largely on the same research base as L3K.

How was L3 originally designed and implemented?

Both L3K and L3S1 were piloted in a small number of schools prior to implementation. While schools originally had to apply to participate in L3K and meet particular criteria based on socioeconomic status and NAPLAN results, these requirements were removed in 2010. This meant that L3K shifted away from being a closely monitored and targeted intervention to being perceived as a general literacy program suitable for all schools. This shift from a targeted intervention to a general pedagogy was exacerbated by the fact that the department did not offer any other comparable literacy programs for schools to choose as an alternative to L3. As the use of L3 expanded to reach an increasingly large and diverse range of schools, there was reduction in departmental oversight and implementation monitoring.

The design and implementation of L3 became intertwined with two related departmental initiatives. First, L3 was featured as one component of the Best Start Initiative, which aimed to ensure that all students were on track in their literacy and numeracy learning by Year 3. The inclusion of L3 within Best Start meant that L3 was seen as widely applicable to any school, rather than a targeted intervention for use with particular groups of students at selected schools. Second, the vast majority of the 572 Early Action for Success (EAFS) schools have implemented L3. EAFS involves a set of specific actions for targeted government primary schools whose results fall

in the lowest quartile of NAPLAN performance. L3 has been implemented differently in EAfS and non-EAfS schools. Overall, EAfS schools have better access to L3 training and support than non-EAfS schools. EAfS schools also have access to Instructional Leaders who can facilitate ongoing implementation of L3.

Under Local Schools, Local Decisions, principals in non-EAfS schools have had to collaborate within local networks to identify and share L3 trainers, and have had to independently fund participation in L3 training (which is considered to be expensive). Both of these factors have been barriers to participating in L3 for non-EAfS schools. The department has limited oversight over both access to and the quality of L3 training in non-EAfS schools.

To what extent does L3 reflect current departmental policies and publications?

L3 only partially reflects fundamental elements set out in four documents: the department's Literacy K-12 Policy, the Quality Assurance Professional Learning aims, and the CESE publications 'How schools can improve literacy and numeracy performance' (2017a) and 'Effective reading instruction in the early years of school' (2017b). In particular, by taking an analytic approach, the L3 instructional model provides only limited 'systematic' teaching and a form of 'explicit' teaching that is not consistent with best practice, as set out originally by Mesmer and Griffiths (2005) and more recently by CESE (2017b). Furthermore, L3 does not adequately reflect the phonemic awareness or phonics components in CESE's effective reading literature review, highlighting the philosophical and empirical gap between a synthetic approach and an analytic approach. Finally, L3 is not aligned with two areas of the department's Quality Assurance professional learning aims – L3 is not consistent across the state, in either quality or availability, and L3 does not embed robust support for facilitators to ensure quality and expertise in delivery.

How is L3 currently designed and implemented?

Three in every five schools reported using L3 in 2019. L3 is primarily perceived as a general literacy pedagogy, rather than a tiered intervention (for which L3K was originally designed). L3 has become a pedagogical identity for some teachers, and is often discussed with a personal and passionate intensity. Implementation of L3 varies considerably between schools. 84% of L3 schools reported using additional programs alongside L3 (the most common of which were MiniLit, Jolly Phonics, Daily Five, Reading Recovery and Sound Waves). Two-thirds of schools reported modifying L3.

Implementation of L3 is currently presenting some challenges for classroom management. During fieldwork, there were two conflicting messages about classroom management during guided reading time. Some schools reported that, once they set the expectations and 'trained' their students, their students worked independently. Others reported that, regardless of the different strategies adopted, their students did not work well independently and struggled with limited supervision for a significant period of time.

Running records were the most commonly reported tool used to assess the impact of L3's implementation. Schools agreed that reading level data are important and useful. Some teachers reported concerns about the accuracy of reading level data and a sense of pressure to 'push' students through the reading levels. A limited range of other assessments were also described.

Why did NSW government primary schools choose to use L3?

The demand for teacher professional learning in literacy appears to have driven the use of L3. Schools chose L3 in order to improve teachers' pedagogical understanding and skills; to enhance programming consistency through a shared understanding and meta-language; and to develop stronger ways of tracking student progress. In addition, many were impressed with the training model, in particular the in-school coaching. There was a perception that L3 was rigorous and endorsed by the department, especially as the department did not offer any other comparable literacy programs for schools to choose as an alternative to L3. The interviews also revealed that some principals felt that they had no choice but to adopt L3, particularly those in EAfS schools.

What aspects of L3 are working well?

Teachers reported that an important strength of L3 is the significant change in their knowledge, practice and confidence. L3 fills current gaps in pre-service and in-service training in the fundamentals of teaching reading and writing K-2. Teachers report feeling more confident as a result of participating in L3 training. L3 supports differentiation and helps teachers to target their teaching to meet individual student needs. L3 promotes the use of quality texts and provides specific procedures for how to have conversations with students about texts. Teachers report that L3 provides a structure for setting up a classroom and students benefit from the consistency.

Teachers also note that the L3 assessment expectations create good routines and help teachers identify student needs through greater reflection. Reading levels are useful for a simple 'at a glance' monitoring system. The five-weekly goal setting and use of data to inform teaching practice supports teachers to be reflective practitioners. The L3 training model also helped to create a culture of collaboration and networking, both within and between schools. L3 teachers reported that their students' progress was seen as a whole-school, collective responsibility, so that individual teachers are not judged if a student had not improved.

What aspects of L3 could be improved?

According to participants, L3 pedagogical strategies can be challenging to implement, depending on the specific needs of a class. Teachers report that key groups of students needed more support than can be offered within L3. Teachers found some of the L3 strategies difficult to implement and that using L3 resources efficiently requires an onerous amount of preparation time. Managing students so they were engaged and learning can be demanding while balanced programming and thorough preparation were sometimes compromised by lack of time. Training was considered to be costly to some schools, while others found trainers' expectations of children's work were unrealistic. The lack of realism in the examples and expectations in training made translation into the classroom disheartening. There is currently limited departmental oversight of L3, resulting in fidelity continuing to reduce over time.

Recommendations

During fieldwork for this review, it became evident that there is some anxiety in schools about the future of L3 and the department's intention to continue to support it. Any changes made will therefore require clear messaging and careful implementation. Schools are seeking holistic solutions to the challenges they face with early literacy teaching. With this in mind, we present the following five recommendations for future consideration.

Consider key elements of the L3 PL model for future training

There was strong agreement amongst schools that several elements of the L3 professional learning model are valuable and worth considering for any future training. These were:

- a unified, holistic approach to literacy teaching
- ongoing learning over a substantial period of time
- classroom observations and coaching/mentoring sessions; and
- networking and sharing across schools, especially for small and rural/remote schools.

However, schools also emphasised that the impact of their L3 training was highly dependent upon the quality of the trainer and the relationships they built within their schools. Any future training would benefit from closer monitoring of the quality of the trainers, including standardised training materials that are readily accessible and updated regularly, as well as the provision of ongoing professional learning and support for trainers. Teachers also wanted training examples (such as the L3 videos) to more realistically demonstrate what is achievable in a typical classroom.

Clarify how best to program and implement the K-6 English syllabus

In terms of programming, schools particularly want support to find the balance between scope and sequence or 'big picture' programming and differentiated or emergent programming. In terms of implementation, schools spoke about the need to manage their three key resources – time, physical space and concrete materials. Schools want support to find an appropriate balance between implementing modelled, guided and independent activities across a typical literacy session.

This also relates to a broader concern about the distinction between planning for 'literacy' (which, by definition, sits across all key learning areas) and planning for 'English' as a discrete subject with its own syllabus outcomes and course content³⁵. Linking programming more explicitly to the English syllabus may help to clarify this concern, as well as to ensure that all outcomes and course content are addressed.

In instances where new programs are implemented from the start of Term 1, the department could further assist teachers in planning and to gain confidence by offering the first few training sessions in Term 4 of the previous year prior to starting.

Clarify how best to differentiate phonics instruction in different contexts

Schools were strong in their agreement on the importance of oral language, phonemic awareness and phonics for early literacy instruction, but there was

³⁵ The NSW English K-10 syllabus is available at: <https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/k-10/learning-areas/english-year-10/english-k-10>.

confusion about exactly how these skills should be taught, and what role analytic instruction (as in L3) and synthetic instruction should play. The department should consider providing schools with a recommended standard approach to phonics instruction to be provided to all students, as well as options for how schools might approach supplementary differentiated phonics instruction (Duke & Mesmer 2018; Ramirez Stukey et al. 2019). Any future program should be designed so that phonemic awareness, phonics, handwriting, grammar, writing and spelling are taught explicitly, using a systematic approach that includes programmed content and an intentional scope and sequence (Mesmer & Griffiths 2005).

Clarify the purpose of different assessment tools and how to use the data they generate

Use of data in L3 is widely considered to be a strength of the program. However, as we looked more closely at the use of data in L3, we identified several issues. First, there is a strong emphasis on reading level data in L3. It would be valuable to provide a set of common guidelines on how best to collect and record this data. Whilst tracking reading levels over time gives a broad picture of progress, it does not necessarily provide teachers with detailed information to identify student needs to inform further teaching points. L3K uses two additional assessment tools, but L3S1 does not. It would therefore be valuable to identify what other assessment tools teachers could use to complement reading levels data.

Second, greater use of diagnostic assessments would enable teachers to more closely identify areas of student need. It would also be valuable to provide more explicit guidance on how teachers can actually use the data once it is generated through assessment. Where possible, any assessments should be clearly linked to existing systems (particularly BSKA and PLAN2), as well as to the Literacy Learning Progression.

More broadly, it is also worth considering what oversight the department should have with student data. It would be valuable for the department to collect data on the programs, tools and interventions each school is using and with which specific students. This would enable better tracking of students through different schools, identify what particular programs and interventions students have or have not participated in, and indicate which programs are worth evaluating more closely.

Develop a logic model and an evaluation plan for a comprehensive outcome evaluation of future programs

Any refreshing of L3 or other new literacy professional learning should be evidence-informed and maintain a cohesive focus on improving student outcomes. A program logic methodology should be applied to ensure that there is a clear definition of success; that there is coherence across activities; that there are adequate and robust measures available; and that there is strong, central coordination, enabling continual monitoring and adjustment.

We therefore suggest that future programs be developed alongside a detailed logic model and an evaluation plan to enable a comprehensive outcome evaluation³⁶. Future implementation plans would also benefit from the inclusion of specific mechanisms to maintain implementation fidelity (O'Donnell 2008). Implementation fidelity includes identification of 'core' components of a program that cannot be changed and 'additional' components that can be adapted to meet individual contextual needs. A focus on fidelity would support more comprehensive future evaluations.

³⁶ Resources to support this are available on the evaluation resource hub: <https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/professional-learning/evaluation-resource-hub>.

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Appendix 1: Survey sample

As part of the ongoing evaluation of the NSW Literacy and Numeracy Strategy¹, all 1,666 principals in NSW government schools with K-2 students were invited to complete the K-2 Literacy and Numeracy 2019 Principal Survey in term 3, 2019. This included infants, primary, and central schools. Three relevant questions used in this review are summarised in table 6.

Table 6

Survey questions and response options

Survey question	Response options
What tools does your school use as targeted approaches or interventions in K-2 literacy?	Daily Five, Getting Reading Right, InitialLit, Jolly Phonics, L3K, L3S1, MiniLit, Reading Recovery, Sound Waves, Spelling Mastery and other (up to three choices).
In what ways, if at all, does your school modify intervention X?	Use for less time than intended, use for more time than intended, use with difference stages or year groups, use with a different group size and other.
What tools are used to assess literacy in K-2 at your school?	Best Start, Developmental Reading Assessment, DIBELS, ESL scales, National Literacy Learning Progressions, PAT Punctuation and Grammar, PAT Comprehension, PAT Spelling, PAT Vocabulary, Phonemic Awareness Checklist, Phonics Screening Check, PM Benchmarking, Reading Eggs, Running Records, South Australian Spelling Test, TORCH, Wadding Tests and other (up to three choices).

The overall response rate was 44%, with 731 principals completing the entire survey. Probability weights were applied to ensure that the survey sample more closely aligned to the total population of schools, according to their EAfS status, location and ICSEA value.

¹ For details of this evaluation, refer to: <https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/literacy-and-numeracy/early-action-for-success>.

Appendix 2: Fieldwork sample

Based on responses to the K-2 Literacy and Numeracy 2019 Principal Survey, we identified the schools in each of the six operational directorates² that reported using L3. We then randomly selected two L3 schools in each operational directorate – one EAfS and one non-EAfS to invite to participate in the fieldwork. We also ensured that the overall sample included a mix of schools that had and had not participated in the recent Professional Learning for Effective Reading in the Early Years of School. This meant that we visited 12 L3 schools. We conducted several interviews and group discussions in each school, typically including the principal, executive staff, instructional leader and K-2 classroom teachers. In total, we conducted 35 interviews and group discussions across the 12 L3 schools.

We also spoke to principals in former-L3 schools (n=2), L3 trainers (n=4), L3 lead trainers (n=2), and key departmental stakeholders (n=7). The latter included three senior departmental leaders, two Directors, Educational Leadership, and representatives from the Macquarie Park Principal Implementation Group and the Primary Principals' Association Curriculum Reference Group. In total, we conducted 50 interviews for this review, and this is summarised in Table 7.

We used semi-structured interviews to gain insights into the implementation of L3, perceived benefits and areas for improvement. The conversations covered areas including how L3 is implemented in the classroom, literacy programming approaches, assessment tools and data, the L3 training model, and teacher professional learning.

Table 7

Summary of interview participants

Interview participants	Visits	Interviews
L3 schools	12	35
Former-L3 schools	2	2
L3 trainers and lead trainers	6	6
DoE stakeholders	7	7
	Total = 27	Total = 50

² For information on the six operational directorates, refer to: <https://education.nsw.gov.au/public-schools/going-to-a-public-school/finding-a-public-school>.

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