



Examining the paradoxes children experience in language and literacy learning

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Abstract

Paradoxes are particularly problematic in literacy as they often complicate learning. However, identifying and examining them can also tell us something about the inherent problems within social, political, and educational systems. This paper reports on an analysis of a total of 205 *AJLL* articles and editorials, published between 2011 and 2021. The purpose of the study was to identify the paradoxes associated with student language and literacy learning. The systematic literature review identified 311 instances of paradoxes across these 205 articles. Thirty instances of paradoxical terminology associated with student literacy learning were selected from the 311 instances. The excluded 271 instances of paradox were associated with policy contexts, teacher performance, and accountabilities, which are outside the scope of this article. The research in the 205 articles found that literacy learning was shaped by the skills of literacy learning, the complexity of student learning through standardised approaches, and textual plurality. The contexts of literacy learning spanned the virtual and real, the implications of national testing on local situations, and the changing nature of text and what it means to be literate. This review identified that students negotiate paradoxes associated with the risks of standardised testing, the narrowing of the writing curriculum, and understanding the variety of textual forms and practices. Identifying and examining these paradoxes will help address some of the persistent problems in literacy learning faced by students and teachers.

Keywords Paradox · Literacy learning · Literacy skills · Literacy context · Becoming literate

1 Introduction

Literacy learners often experience paradoxes. This sign, displayed alongside a busy Yarra River walking trail in Victoria, promotes Odyssey House, a rehabilitation centre for people

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Fig. 1 A paradoxical text

struggling with substance addictions. Imagine a child reading this sign, fresh from learning about land rights in the Australian Curriculum. They might wonder how the sign's Wurundjeri acknowledgment can promote a resilience in responding to historic and contemporary impacts of colonisation while sitting beneath a dominant 'Private Property' header that exploits colonisation legacies. They might question how an organisation can endorse the Wurundjeri as the land's traditional owners while reinforcing Australian laws that institutionalised the dispossession of Wurundjeri land. They might wonder if the images of a ship refer to Captain Cook on the Endeavour, searching for land to colonise, rather than Odysseus' ship on a long journey home to Ithaca. They might reflect on the recent performance of Ziggy Ramo at an AFL game where he sang, 'There will never be justice on our stolen land'. This imagined paradoxical moment for the child is one of many they face in, and as a result of, language and literacy learning at school and beyond (Fig. 1).

The aim of this paper is to consider the paradoxes that children experience in language and literacy learning education in the Australian context. A systematic literature review of the Australian Journal of Language and Literacy over the past 10 years was conducted to identify paradoxes in literacy education research. This focus on student learning of language and literacy excluded paradoxes associated with policy contexts, teacher performance, and accountabilities. Within the Australian learning context, the Australian Curriculum frames learning opportunities for students, which may lead to paradoxical understandings of what literacy is and what purposes it serves.

2 Literacy in the Australian context

Australian understandings of literacy learning have been shaped by pluralistic approaches. Over thirty years ago, Freebody and Luke (1990) articulated a model of four inter-woven literacy practices: text code-breaking practices, text meaning making practices, text user practices, and text analyst practices. Green's (1988) 3D model of literacy also employed a pluralist approach when it parsed literacy learning into three dimensions: cultural, operational, and critical. Pluralistic scholarship and models of literacy have influenced the framing of the

Australian Curriculum: English (AC:E) and the General Capabilities. In the enactment of the curriculum, the ongoing and infinite processes of ‘becoming’ associated with literacy learning is often lost in neoliberal times. In this paper, the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority’s (ACARA’s) definition of literacy in the general capabilities is used as the definition of literacy because this document guides curriculum enactment across the country. The document was a result of consultation with key stakeholders, and many years of literacy research in Australia.

The definitions of literacy found in the general capabilities of the Australian Curriculum cover a plurality of skills, contexts, and ontological dimensions of literacy learning. The curriculum is structured so that students learn the skills of reception and production of texts, and develop skills through, ‘listening to, reading, viewing, speaking, writing, and creating oral, print, visual and digital texts’ (ACARA, n.d., para 1). These skills of literacy learning have been identified to guide students into the development of democratic dispositions and actions (Banks, 2003). Paradoxes are particularly problematic in literacy as they often complicate learning. However, identifying and examining paradoxes can also tell us something about the inherent problems within social, political, and educational systems.

The contexts of language and literacy learning cover both the material settings of young people learning literacy in addition to immaterial settings they inhabit through texts. The contexts of literacy learning are needed ‘to express thoughts and emotions, present ideas and opinions, interact with others and participate in activities at school and in their lives beyond school’ (ACARA, n.d., para 2). Literacy learning in the school context is ‘comprised of the awareness of standards, requirements and writing rules’ (Healey, 2019, p. 190).

The curriculum acknowledges that ‘becoming literate is not simply about knowledge and skills’ (ACARA, n.d., para 3). It also includes ontological aspirations for students to develop behaviours and dispositions to ‘become effective learners who are confident and motivated to use their literacy skills broadly’ (ACARA, n.d., para 3). For instance, within the Speaking and Listening component of the English curriculum, Edwards-Groves and Davidson (2017) noted that students ‘become attuned to the complexities surrounding listening...as they respond and take responsibility in classroom discussions’ (p. 92).

3 Defining paradox

Scholars have identified paradoxes as ‘contradictory, interdependent, and persist over time, demanding strategies for engaging and accommodating tensions but not resolving them’ (Smith & Tracey, 2016, p. 455). A pluralistic approach to literacy learning is a strategy taken on through engaging and accommodating paradoxes between competing theoretical approaches to literacy teaching and learning.

Understandings of paradox have been used to identify inconsistencies between elements that are unresolvable and ‘exist simultaneously and persist over time’ (Smith & Lewis, 2011, p. 26). Corcoran et al. (2019) contend that without confronting paradox ‘we become complicit in a world where accord speaks in monologue’ (p. 1014). Cleland et al. (2018) describe the benefits of tolerating ambiguity that a study of the paradoxical can provide. ‘Relational understanding requires an openness to experience, and a willingness to engage in a dialogue that can challenge self-understanding’ (p. 297). In individual responses to pluralised models of literacy, paradoxical moments of self-understanding may become normalised in times of rapid technological and social change.

4 The research foci

This paper reports on an analysis of a selected decade of literacy research published in *AJLL*. The purpose of the study was to identify where researchers have shown school students encountering paradoxes in literacy learning. The inquiry was driven by the focus question, ‘What paradoxes associated with student language and literacy learning emerge in a review of the Australian Journal of Language and Literacy?’

5 Methodology

5.1 Review protocols and methods

The research focused on articles from the *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy (AJLL)* because it is Australia’s highest quality language and literacy learning research journal. While research about Australian language and literacy learning is published elsewhere, this journal’s aims and scopes are consistent, sustained, and singularly focused on literacy learning.

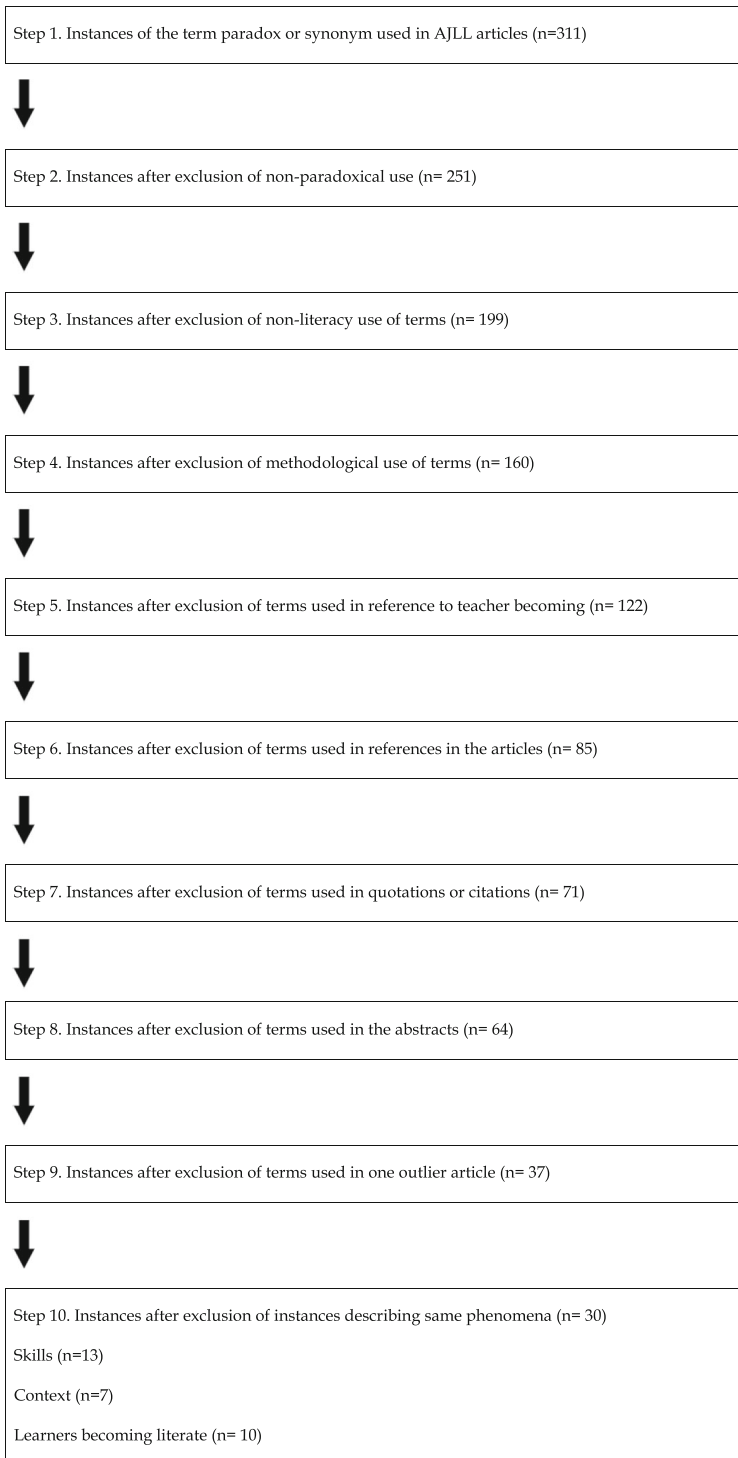
5.2 Selection, inclusion, and exclusion of instances

A total of 205 *AJLL* articles and editorials, published between Volume 34 No. 1, 2011, and Volume 44, No. 2, 2021, are the subject of this review. This ten-year research period was selected to inform future practice and is coincidental to the development and roll-out of the Australian Curriculum. Instances of the word ‘paradox’ or its synonyms were identified in the text of these articles and editorials of the research period. Table 1 outlines the sequence of strategies identified in the review protocols that reduced the 311 instances found in the 205 articles to a review of 30 instances in 28 articles. There was not a 1:1 correlation of instances and articles because two articles used paradoxical terms to describe different aspects of literacy learning.

Paradox synonyms were sourced from the *Macquarie Encyclopedic Dictionary* (McPhee et al., 2010), *Oxford Thesaurus: An A-Z Dictionary of Synonyms* (Urdang & Urdang, 1991), and *Roget’s International Thesaurus* (Hodge, 1992). The synonyms were compiled into an inclusive list of search terms. The following words were identified: contradiction, self-contradiction, self-contradictory, inconsistent, inconsistency, impossible, impossibility, illogicality, nonsense, obscurity, oppositeness, inconsistency, incongruity, conflict, conundrum, dilemma, anomaly, enigma, puzzle, and mystery. The stem of each word was used as the search. For instance, the stem word ‘contradict’ covered ‘contradictory’, ‘self-contradiction’, ‘self-contradictory’, and ‘contradiction’.

Table 1 outlines the process used to identify instances of the term paradox or synonyms across the articles used in this review. Ten steps were followed in the identification and review process.

Step 1 of the process used specific instances of literacy learning identified as paradoxical. These were categorised under one of three headings associated with literacy learning: skills, context, and becoming. A total of 311 across 205 articles were identified. Steps 2 to 9 included the process of exclusions in order to remove instances where the terms were used to describe other things beyond the skills, context, and becoming.

Table 1 The 10 steps used to identify the 30 instances across 28 articles used in this review

Specifically, Step 2 involved the exclusion of instances when the paradoxical terms were used in articles to describe aspects not related to literacy learning. This non-paradoxical use of the terms covered reading as a puzzle (McGraw & Mason, 2020), describing inconsistent words (Eccles et al., 2021), and referring to a murder mystery incursion (Middleton & Curwood, 2020). The non-literacy use of the term or instances where the paradoxical terms were not related to literacy learning was excluded (Step 3). These exclusions included instances where the terms were found to describe creativity (Pantaleo, 2019), describing a visual historical image (Garoni et al., 2021) and describing text structures (Caldwell & White, 2017). Instances used to describe methodology (Step 4) were also excluded. Examples of these include the scope of the topic discussed (Mackey-Smith, 2019) and describing reading enjoyment (Merga & Ledger, 2018). Step 5 involved the exclusion of instances of paradoxes that described teacher practices and teacher becoming where there was no student learning. These included the multiple and contradictory sites of relations in the everyday experiences of teachers (Kostogriz & Doecke, 2013), contradictions in teachers' perceptions of their role in curriculum decision-making (Weaven & Clark, 2015), and describing the conflicting messages in feedback from a tutor (Edwards-Groves & Freebody, 2021). Articles were also excluded where the terms were used in references (Step 6) or as an embedded quote or citations (Step 7), or in the abstract of articles (Step 8). There was one outlying article (Step 9) that focused exclusively on paradoxes and contradictions in literacy learning. Dickie's (2011) article used the terms 27 times to describe the conflicting values of students' interest-based literacy practices to those sanctioned by formal schooling. Finally, duplicates of the terms in the same article were also excluded when they were referring to the same concept of literacy learning (Step 10). At the end of this process, there were 30 instances of the term paradox or synonyms of this term identified in 28 *AJLL* articles. Specifically, there were 13 instances of the terms that were identified within the broad theme of *literacy skills*, seven instances in the theme of *context*, and 10 instances that related to the theme of *becoming*.

5.3 Analysis

Each of the 30 instances (where either *paradox* or a synonym was found in an article) was read to identify themes of skills, contexts, and becoming, following the ACARA description of literacy learning in the general capabilities. Each of the instances was then categorised under one of the three sub-themes for literacy learning. Finally, all 30 instances were further analysed according to the paradoxes by stage of education. These 30 instances of paradox are outlined in Table 2.

6 Findings

6.1 Paradoxes in the skills of literacy

Thirteen instances of paradoxes were identified in the research that were associated with student learning of literacy skills. The range and diversity of skills demonstrate the complexity of student learning through standardised approaches, of textual plurality, across the curriculum, and in linguistically diverse settings.

6.2 Standardisation and literacy skills

The analysis identified instances where the purpose of the literacy learning was often found to be lost through standardised approaches. The standardisation of the literacy curriculum led to paradoxical situations. For example, in their investigation of school writers and authentic writing, Healey and Merga (2017) found that students were given conflicting rules of writing. As a result of the de-contextualised approach to skill-based teaching and the lack of a genuine audience for their work, students did not understand the purpose of writing. Similarly, Shand and Konza (2016) found that the social context of school-based writing and activities become so removed from the authentic textual or social practices of literacies that the school genres became understood by the students as a thing in themselves. In their study of Year 11 and Year 12 contexts, Middleton and Curwood (2020) found that when creative writing is less centred on techniques and more on the students' ideas and ability to convey meaning, students found it impossible to prepare material for a creative writing task/activity. These findings suggest that in order for students to learn the skills of creative writing rather than simply producing rote-learned essays in exams, there is a need for teachers to foster creative writing opportunities for them.

6.3 Skills in textual plurality

Across the identified instances of paradox terms, there were 6 papers that pointed to paradoxes around the conception and enactment of literacy skills with different voices and textual types. Lewis-Spector (2016) highlights the importance of students being exposed to multiple points of view and competing perspectives in texts, arguing that 'in an environment of competing perspectives, we want our students to examine, judge and integrate diverse information, concepts and opinions to arrive at what has a claim to be knowledge' (p. 88).

Similarly, Harden (2015) proposes that students negotiate contradictions and can take on multiple perspectives and points of view in their dramatic textual composition when they develop the skills of dramatic form. In these two examples, students negotiating the potential paradoxes implicit in texts is positioned as a valuable literacy learning skill.

Lynch (2017) identified the false dichotomy of positioning the skills of digital literacy learning and traditional print learning as different. The research showed the facility with which the children developed skills that seamlessly were transferred from paper to screen while the curriculum tended to separate them. In their study of young children's haptics with touch screens, Walsh and Simpson (2014) documented the complexity of the children's interactions with the device. They found it was 'impossible to separate the way layers of screens and modes are interrelated as a student reads, responds, views, writes or produces digital texts in these tasks activated by touch' (p. 103). When students negotiate programs in school that separate literacy learning in digital and print as different, they may find this learning conflicts with the ways in which they experience textual layers as one.

Mills et al. (2014) argue that students need to negotiate more ambiguities when analysing metaphors portrayed through multiple modalities than those occurring in written texts. They argue such complex negotiations are due to the context-dependent and unstable nature of representations in multimodal literacies. Furthermore, Unsworth et al. (2019) identified that there is 'no accessible analysis of image language interaction that may be useful for teachers in reflecting on their practices in developing students' multi-modal reading strategies' (p. 137).

Such views suggest that a curriculum that emphasises both multimodal teaching and standardised tests produces a contradiction for both teachers and students.

6.4 Literacy across the curriculum skills

Results from the review process showed that two articles addressed the teaching of literacy skills in subject History. Allender and Freebody (2016) identified literacy skills in subject history require students to understand that textual resources are often conflicting: from the position of the authors, where the text is located, and what did or did not happen. These findings suggest that students need advanced skills of critical literacy to navigate conflicting sources in the senior History curriculum. Matruglio (2016) researched the writing genre of the NSW Year 12 Modern History course. Results showed that the writing tasks stifled the many voices characteristic of historical events experienced from multiple vantage points. Further scrutiny of these two research articles showed that there was a paradox in that the writing task required students to engage with texts from multiple points of view and then construct their own ‘objective’ evaluation of historic events.

6.5 Skills for linguistically diverse learners

Allison (2011) conducted a text-based analysis of texts written by students who had English as first, and as an additional language, based on the premise that English as an additional language (EAL) learners need skills in ‘understandings of language, more specifically, beliefs about what qualifies as good writing are deconstructed and made explicit’ (p. 196). Results showed that the non-native speaker texts lacked hierarchical essay structures, while at the same time EAL students in a mainstream setting were required to negotiate complexities posed by critical literacy tasks in the curriculum that were beyond the genre format of essay styles that they had been taught. Briguglio and Watson (2014) found that EAL speakers in higher education contexts hear idioms and accents that they find difficult to negotiate. However, they acknowledge the impossibility of removing local idioms and the inescapable reality of global English accents, highlighting that accents and idioms that are taken for granted in a monolingual setting make language learning more complex for EAL students.

7 Paradoxical contexts of literacy learning

The paradoxes identified by the research as pertaining to the ‘context’ of literacy learning were located across virtual and real contexts, and some focused on the implications of national testing on local situations.

7.1 Virtual and real contexts

Digital play, which may be driven by the child’s interest, is an important context of literacy learning for young children. Kervin (2016) identified how the contexts of literacy learning transcend traditional physical boundaries, where very young pre-school aged children can access a wide variety of topics of interest. When children have restrictive access to online environments that contain friendships and networks, the possibilities of meaning-making diminish with this loss of purpose and audience. In the study of one classroom where beginner

school students used iPads to research self-chosen inquiry topics, Lynch (2017) found a paradox between the surface-level openness and choice, and the lack of freedom imposed by the task and the teacher. The study concluded that literacy learning with iPads for young students is contextualised by both the unseen politics of larger knowledge economies and free choice inquiry. Both of these examples highlight some of the contradictions within language and literacy classrooms where devices are used to mediate curriculum learning that is devoid of agentic networks and friendships. In these cases, the choices and affordances of these devices for students are closed down due to classroom controls.

7.2 National impacts on local contexts

The research below identifies ways in which there are uniform expectations for literacy learners across Australia, despite the unevenness of advantage. In their institutional ethnography of a small, economically disadvantaged, rural school, Cormack and Comber (2013) found that the high-stakes national testing did not account for context. Students, in turn, are labelled, grouped, and taught in relation to the deficits that national testing results revealed. ‘They experience a curriculum that focuses on what they can’t do, which also squeezes out other, more helpful and energising, topics and activities’ (p. 87). Cormack and Comber found that this creates a paradoxical situation. They draw on previous work to describe how the help provided to the student creates a situation of ‘near impossibility of “getting out of deficit”’ (Comber & Kamler, 2004, p. 87) with respect to literacy gains.

Dreher (2012) found paradoxes in research on the enactment of National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN), which is bound by the context of contradictions that span the individualised, socio-cultural, and situated nature of student learning and a national standardised testing regime. Similarly, Ryan and Kettle (2012) identified a complexity in the contexts of standardised school writing for linguistically diverse students. Linguistically diverse students are required to respond on national paper-based tests that do not sit well with the emphasis on new communication technologies in the Australian Curriculum. When studying the context of the Australian Curriculum: English (AC:E), Albright et al. (2013) found an emphasis on content rather than a recontextualisation of the student learning experience. This emphasis on content limits the opportunities for students to recontextualise their learning in the AC:E. Friend’s (2017) research on the cross-curriculum priorities of the Australian Curriculum found that student success in literacy learning is dependent on their knowledge of the subject-specific literacy subjects/genres which their teachers in non-English-specific discipline areas may not have. The research presented a dilemma about how to make nuanced ways of making subject-specific literacies explicit to the literacy learners in learning contexts when the teachers may not have a focus on literacy pedagogy.

8 Paradoxes in literacy learning and becoming

The ten instances of paradoxes associated with becoming identified the limitations of excluding student becoming in literacy learning as well as instances where student becoming was supported. The research identified paradoxes associated with learner becoming: the risks of standardised testing, the narrowing of the writing curriculum, coming to understand a variety of textual forms, and lack of support for at-risk learners.

8.1 Risks of standardised testing

Where students' life experiences count as literacy learning, their becoming is embedded in what counts as knowledge. Cormack and Comber (2013) compared the opportunities of student becoming in literacy learning to the experiences of testing where teachers re-organise the curriculum around the test, even though they identify the testing regime as problematic.

Evidence in the journal identified that students' broad literacy learning was put at risk through the highly regimented and over prescriptive practices of school-based writing. Healey (2019) identified that writers need to resolve the conflict of the strictures of writing for school with the freedoms needed to use their imagination. Healey emphasised the agentic experience possible in writing when children can draw upon their own semiotic resources. Social-semiotic resources differ for students based on their social locations and practices so there is a paradox between the school writing and the social-semiotic resources students' privilege through their out-of-school lives. Healey argued that it is 'necessary to seek a rapprochement between incongruent experiences for the child writer to find a balance of the self' (2019, p. 192).

8.2 The narrowing of the writing curriculum

Jesson and Parr (2017) similarly found that the tight control and rigid structures of texts reduced opportunities for students to become problem solvers or enhance their creativity. Likewise, a paradox exists for students expected to follow explicit and stifling writing criteria when asked to pursue their own interests in open-ended writing tasks (Schmier et al., 2018). Shand and Konza (2016) identified that there were contradictory goals held for young people, and that teachers played a major role in them developing their identities as writers, stating that 'individual student writers can have multiple and at times contradictory goals and engage in a multitude of writing practices' (p. 151). Successful students will be able to negotiate plural writing practices as an integral part of developing their identity as a writer.

8.3 Coming to understand a variety of textual forms

While poetry can be a textual form which leads to creative endeavours, Creely (2019) surmised that poetry teaching and learning were limited in school contexts due to some teachers' perception that poetry is obscure and complex. The research found that when teachers see the meaning of the poetic text as obscure and complex there is a contradiction when it is taught to students, who may find it disconnected from their experience and interests. Harden's (2015) research on literacy learning through drama focused on the usage of Heathcote's 'Mantle of the Expert' approach (Wagner, 1976), which relies on the solving of ethical dilemmas. This form of drama teaching works towards students becoming adept at negotiating dilemmas, ambiguities, and paradoxes in dramatic worlds.

8.4 Lack of support for 'at-risk' learners

School-based literacy practices may work against supporting 'at-risk' students. Alford and Jetnikoff (2016) refer to the access paradox which 'recognises that deconstructing texts without providing knowledge of how those texts are constructed in the first

place, excludes learners from powerful language varieties that manifest as linguistic capital' (p. 115). Mantei and Kervin (2021) found that where there are competing ideologies and pedagogical approaches, it can be puzzling for students as they negotiate what is expected and what it means to acquire the literacies of their classrooms. Learners are 'at risk of developing misunderstandings about the nature of literacy as a social practice and potentially challenged to engage successfully across genres, practices and settings' (Mantei & Kervin, 2021, p. 43) in the context of conflicting and competing ideologies. In the context of researching Reading Recovery®, Jaeger (2017) found a contradiction in that teachers reward success, but when students do not understand, they are not rewarded for admitting their difficulties, despite the teachers expecting them to do so. Students need to feel a sense of safety when admitting they do not know aspects of literacy learning as they move towards developing the literacies valued in their school learning environments.

8.5 Paradoxes by stage of education

The themes outlined above referred to all stages of education from pre-school to tertiary (inclusive), with the majority of instances focusing on Primary education ($n = 18$) and Secondary education ($n = 12$). One article examined Preschool education (children aged three to five years), and one examined Tertiary education. The 18 Primary education-related instances ranged in focus from Foundation (the first year of primary schooling) to Years Six and Seven. Four articles did not specify age-groups but were concerned with literacy education in primary school contexts. The paradoxes identified in the 12 articles relating to Secondary education largely occurred in the Senior years of schooling ($n = 7$). Two related to Year 12 (final year of schooling) and two to Year 11, while only one referred to Year 8. Five instances of the paradoxes did not refer to specific Secondary year levels but were related to Secondary literacy education in general. Two of the Secondary education paradox instances were relevant to both primary and secondary education and two articles wrote of literacy education in broader terms, unrelated to specific stages of education.

A distinct issue that emerged for the Early Years (Preschool–Year 2) was identified as the conflict that arises between the restrictive dictates of policy and the affordances of digital technologies to enable learning through play (Kervin, 2016) and child-led inquiry (Lynch, 2017). A similar theme was identified in Years Three to Six (Cormack & Comber, 2013; Healey, 2019) with consideration for how prescriptive school-based practices curtail the affordances of agentic learning and creativity as children continue to develop a sense of 'self'. The challenges associated with teaching literacy across discipline areas were specific to Senior Secondary (Allender & Freebody, 2016; Matruggio, 2016), as were the challenges faced by EAL learners who need specialised support in learning the taken for granted expectations of writing (Allison, 2011). The 'taken for granted' expectations facing EAL learners was a recurring theme identified in the article in tertiary contexts, albeit when referring to students' abilities to understand idioms/accent (Briguglio & Watson, 2014). In the early years, students are required to perform particular competencies that curtail creativity and self-growth while in upper secondary and adulthood creativity is more highly valued. Further analysis identified that paradoxes arising in relation to national impacts on local contexts occurred in both Primary and Secondary education.

Table 2 The reviewed articles sorted by theme

Theme	Articles	No.
Standardisation and Literacy Skills	Healey and Merga (2017) Shand and Konza (2016)	3
Skills in textual plurality	Middleton and Curwood (2020) Lewis-Spector (2016) Harden (2015) Lynch (2017) Walsh and Simpson (2014) Mills, Unsworth et al. (2014) Unsworth, Cope & Nicholls (2019)	6
Literacy across the curriculum skills	Allender and Freebody (2016) Matruglio (2016)	2
Skills for linguistically diverse learners	Allison (2011) Briguglio and Watson (2014)	2
<u>Virtual and Real Contexts</u>	Kervin (2016) Lynch (2017)	2
<u>National impacts on local contexts</u>	Cormack and Comber (2013) Dreher (2012) Ryan and Kettle (2012) Albright et al. (2013) Friend's (2017)	5
<u>Risks of standardised testing</u>	Cormack and Comber (2013) Healey (2019)	2
<u>The narrowing of the writing curriculum</u>	Jesson and Parr (2017) Schmier et al., 2018 Shand and Konza (2016)	3
<u>Coming to understand a variety of textual forms</u>	Creely (2019) Harden (2015)	2
<u>Becoming literate as an “at-risk” learner</u>	Alford and Jetnikoff (2016) Mantei and Kervin (2021) Jaeger (2017)	3
Total		30

9 Discussion

Literacy learning is entangled in a set of contexts that create the paradoxes researchers have identified in *AJLL* across the 28 articles analysed in this review. One of the issues identified in the findings was the question of ‘what counts’ as literacy learning. Many of the paradoxes in the review were from research that identifies how assessment-driven literacy learning problematises the way literacy is named, described, and understood for students outside of this assessment context. Ethical responsibility and critical understanding are not always at the forefront of what is counted as literacy learning, yet these two ideas underpin the moral and political purposes of education. When discussing the radical and critical potential of literacy (as distinct from its basic and fundamental properties) scholars often pick up on the Freirean imperative to develop from reading the word to reading the world (Freire, 1985). However, as these articles demonstrate, the wider mode of critical understanding and engagement that literacy encourages is often in tension with the contexts for literacy learning.

Paradoxes continually arise in classrooms as teachers strive to meet the expectations of a curriculum measured against a narrowly determined, nationally consistent assessment regime

(Albright et al., 2013; Cormack & Comber, 2013; Dreher, 2012; Healey, 2019; Ryan & Kettle, 2012). These paradoxes speak to the curtailing of children’s creativity, agency, empowerment, and sense of self (Cormack & Comber, 2013; Creely, 2019; Jesson & Parr, 2017; Schmier et al., 2018; Shand & Konza, 2016) when school-based genres (Middleton & Curwood, 2020; Shand & Konza, 2016) become the predominant measure of a child’s literacy.

Literacy learning is embedded in a complex set of pluralised texts reflecting the context and changing nature of what it means to be literate. Literacy learners encounter multimodal meaning making while print-based essays are the central currency of formalised literacy learning in schools. The additional modes of communication that digitally infused texts allow continually expand the ‘layers’ of meaning that can be conveyed and created via digital and printed texts (Walsh & Simpson, 2014), adding to the repertoire of understandings needed to navigate texts in all their shapes and forms (Lynch, 2017; Unsworth et al., 2019). It is therefore more critical than ever that children understand the multiple purposes of engaging with and creating different types of texts (Healey & Merga, 2017) and have confidence to present multiple and competing points-of-view (Harden, 2015; Lewis-Spector, 2016), beyond school-based genres to provide a possibility for literate becoming. The opportunities of the digital, and the potential it has for creative and critical participation, can be thwarted by either task-based outcomes that are tightly monitored by the teacher or an overt focus on the device itself, deprioritising the meaning-making involved.

10 Conclusion

This systematic review of recent Australian research identified the paradoxes associated with literacy education in the *AJLL*. This research found that a range of paradoxes exist in/are embedded within literacy learning. The skills of literacy learning were shaped by the complexity of student learning through standardised approaches, of textual plurality, across the curriculum, and in linguistically diverse settings. The contexts of literacy learning span the virtual and real, the implications of national testing on local situations, and the changing nature of text and what it means to develop literacies through formal learning. When learners engage in schooled literacies, they negotiate paradoxes associated with the risks of standardised testing, the narrowing of the writing curriculum, coming to understand a variety of textual forms and practices which work against at-risk students. Evidence drawn from this review of the *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy* shows that literacy learners live with paradoxes and dilemmas. Future research might try to bridge the parallel paradoxical trajectories where teachers and students are often negotiating contradictions that are mostly not resolved and sometimes not even recognised. Like the experience of negotiating the image introduced at this beginning of this paper, language and literacy learners are engaging in ‘relationalities [that] are entangled, complex and always contextually specific’ (Corcoran et al., 2019, p. 1014). These relationalities highlight the pluralism of literacy learning and the associated dilemmas that teachers and children are confronted with in the classroom.

Data availability statement The data from this research is available by searching the catalogue of *AJLL* using the methodology outlined in the article.

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Declarations

Conflict of interest The authors declare no competing interests.

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