Teaching Year Six Boys to Write: A Case Study of Two Melbourne Schools

Jennifer L. Sze

Introduction

In this journal article, I discuss my investigation of teachers' experiences at two quite different schools in Melbourne, Australia, and how their teaching beliefs inform their teaching pedagogy for teaching boys how to construct their writing in upper elementary level schooling. The process of writing is an important, lifelong skill for students that fosters present and future communications between the writer and reader. The focus of this research is about how teachers teach Year 6 boys how to write, and their attitudes toward the role of technology in this process. The questions that drove this inquiry are: How do teachers in two different schools approach the teaching of literacies to boys? How is this aligned with the school culture, particularly, the perceived role of technology in teaching literacies?

In today's teaching environments, access to the internet and digital technology is a part of modern lives for both adults and children. Young people are exposed to a range of technologies both online and other non-print media (Rideout & Robb, 2021). Students have access to the internet at home and at school, they make meaning from multi-modal forms such as music, digital images online from social media and the internet, video, and other diverse new literacies (Gee, 2012; Knobel & Lankshear, 2014). Digital technologies are pervasive in teaching and learning, and influence teachers' understandings and classroom behaviours. I say "virtually" because one of the schools where I undertook this research has a teaching ethos that eschews the explicit use of digital technologies. The other school fosters the use of such technologies in accord with system-wide expectations. Consequently, some teachers in this research have developed a sense of pedagogical role and practice that is framed by their schools' strong belief in integrating technology in their teaching and learning, while others have not. In today's complex teaching life, many teachers develop their teaching pedagogy through the school in which they work (Brown & Heck, 2018). The school's culture shapes the teacher's teaching style (Pillen et al., 2013).

While there is extensive literature on the role and significance of digital technologies in teaching reading and writing, there is less attention to teachers and schools who reject the presence of such technologies. The topic of boys' literacy learning is a contested and ongoing debate amongst many stakeholders such as researchers, teachers, parents, policy makers, and the media who all have their own view as to what are the most effective ways to teach boys (Lingard et al., 2009, 2013). Furthermore, there is an ongoing debate about the reading pedagogy *per se* (Buckingham et al., 2013). Part of the current debate is that boys in particular benefit from the inclusion of technology, but—as will be seen—this is not always how schools and teachers build learning engagement. I explore this gap in current research and address how teachers understand their support of the learning of elementary school boys with or without digital technologies. I intend this exploration to offer a counter narrative to the imperatives of policy that demand the presence of digital technologies in all school teaching and learning (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority [VCAA], n.d.). I hope that through my exploration, teachers and school authorities may acquire a more flexible understanding of teaching boys reading and writing.

In this case study, I investigate how teachers understand their pedagogical role and teaching practices in teaching literacies to boys with particular attention to the inclusion of technology. The focus here is on how teachers work with Year 6 boys in developing their writing. I am interested to know about these educators' teaching attitudes of engaging boys. I also investigate how my participant teachers integrate technology into their pedagogical approaches. In this journal article, I examine the ways each school culture encourages boys' writing. I draw comparisons and offer implications from the ways the teachers use technology (if at all) and understand a range of approaches to support boys' writing.

Literature Review

The focus of this literature review will be teachers' understandings of learning and teaching styles of reading and writing, which may or may not involve the use of technology. In their systematic review of research concerning teachers' understandings, Beijaard et al. (2004) identified "different methods for the collection of data [that] varied from open-ended (life history) interviews to specific teacher materials, such as portfolios and journals" (p. 114). I also found a range of qualitative approaches such as narrative (Goodson & Gill, 2011), dialogic (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011), and theoretical (Tran & Nguyen, 2015). The qualitative case study accords with research in this field.

Teachers understand and construct their work in the context of their school culture (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Beijaard, 2011; Brown & Heck, 2018; Goodson & Gill, 2011; Laurialia & Kukkonen, 2005; Miller et al., 2017). Teachers develop a professional identity as they learn a multitude of skills, gain a breadth of knowledge, and move from novice to experienced practitioners (Edwards & Edwards, 2017; Friesen & Besley, 2013). Teaching is a multifaceted profession and contains many different forms (Lutovac & Kaasila, 2011). It cannot be reduced to technique; it comes from the teacher's integrity and identity (Palmér, 2016; Palmer, 2017). Teacher understandings of pedagogy and practice change with context and experience (Beijard et al., 2004; Chappell, 2001; Mockler, 2011; Tran & Nguyen, 2015; Zembylas et al., 2011). For teachers, "professional identity is not a stable product, but rather a continually changing, active, and on-going process" (Pillen et al., 2013, p. 87). We have to understand ourselves first, then we shape our pedagogy according to who we are. This is encapsulated by the epigram, "We teach who we are" (de Bruin, 2016; Willingham, 2009). Good teaching takes myriad forms, but good teachers share one trait: they are authentically present in the classroom, in community with their students and their subject (Bryant, 2006; Palmer, 2003) The connections made by good teachers are held, not in their methods, but in their hearts—the place where intellect, emotion, spirit, and will converge in the human self, supported by the community that emerges among us when we choose to live authentic lives (Palmer, 2017; Troman, 2008).

Teaching Reading and Writing

Foregrounding the literature from a socio-cultural lens includes Green's 3D model (Durrant & Green, 2000; Green, 2012; Knobel & Lankshear, 2014) and the Four Resources model (Freebody & Luke, 1990). These models approached the teaching of reading to decode and make meaning of texts (Barton et al., 2000; Gee, 2004). One of the two participant schools believed in teaching via phonics, and this frames how the teachers teach reading and writing, particularly to boys. Experts in teaching how to read in the early years agree using the phonics approach can assist at-risk students to read in the early years to ensure that children can decode and read fluently (Castles et al., 2018; Snow et al., 1998). It is important to note

that these researchers also recognise the problem with focusing on only phonological awareness as this approach does not help them to comprehend complex texts in the middle and upper elementary years (Palinscar, 2003; Stahl, 2011).

Reading is defined as "a socially, culturally, and historically located practice" (Rennie, 2016, p. 44). Reading is the ability to decode and to understand (Anderson & Fearnley-Sander, 2015). To achieve comprehension, a reader needs to have prior knowledge, to summarise, to ask questions, and to form conclusions (Kirmizi, 2010). Children who read fluently do so because learning is a cultural process (Kabuto, 2016) that relates to children's homes, where their family and community create a rich environment to support them with their acquisition of the types of language that would be used at school (Raban & Scull, 2013). Reading specialists—particularly those who teach Early Years readers—concur that using the phonics approach helps at-risk students to read in the Early Years to enable these children to decode and read (Adams, 1990; Castles et al., 2018). Nonetheless, there is an acknowledgement that the problems with focusing on just phonological awareness or phonics might help students in the Early Years but may not help students in the middle and upper primary years (Duke & Cartwright, 2021; Palinscar, 2003; Reed et al., 2020; Stahl, 2011).

The focus of this study is Year 6 boys. In Australia, a Year 6 student would be around 11 to 12 years of age. Reading for enjoyment is important for this age group (Fletcher et al., 2012). Boys like to read funny stories and comics with superheroes (Merisuo-Storm, 2006). The more school literacies mirror real-life interests, the more likely that the boys will be motivated to develop their reading and writing (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000).

Writing is a communication practice that involves a conversation between the writer and reader (Christie, 2005). Writing is described as an effortful activity for all ages (Dunn & Sweeney, 2018). To be successful at school, students learn to write, and in order to write, students must learn how to read (Kellogg, 2008). To understand how the participants understand the teaching of writing at the two schools, I need to touch on their beliefs between the teaching of handwriting and keyboarding. At one of the two schools in this study, there is a strong belief in the explicit teaching of handwriting to students from Foundation to Year 6. At the other school, handwriting is also taught, but in the upper elementary years, they incorporated technology into the teaching of handwriting via tablets such as iPads. By selecting two schools with different approaches, I was able to explore teachers' understandings of teaching reading to Year 6 boys.

The two schools where the participant teachers work have quite different teaching approaches to reading, writing, and the use of technology. This reflects the schools' teaching ethos and beliefs that range from phonics and no technology to whole language and the use of technology. I recognise that teachers had chosen to work in schools that may accord with their pedagogical preferences. The research literature employs both quantitative (e.g., Abbott et al., 2010; Reed et al., 2019), qualitative approaches such as ethnography (e.g., Barrs, 2000), and position papers (e.g., Lindsey, 1996). Although based on different research paradigms, there is confirmation that reading and writing are interrelated because both help students to make meanings and connections to their everyday lives.

The Researcher

As an English and mathematics secondary and elementary teacher—and drawing on my personal experience as an English as Additional Language (EAL) speaker—I support

teaching phonics to help students build a solid understanding of the English language, structure, and alphabet sounds, especially in the early years of elementary schooling (Sze & Southcott, 2019; Campbell, 2015). Once students achieve fluency in their reading, I believe teachers should introduce quality books and use them as mentor texts (Roberts & Meiring, 2006). When teaching elementary school students how to write, I emphasise the importance of teaching handwriting (Graham et al., 2000; Mackenzie & Spokes, 2018). Regarding teaching boys, I understand that gender is a social and cultural construct (Davis & Preves, 2017). Therefore, I consider the children's natural learning styles and strive to avoid stereotyping. I also believe that technology can support boys' writing if used correctly (Blink, 2016; Cook & Kirchoff, 2017).

Methodology

The research is a qualitative research paradigm with a constructivist epistemology (Lichtman, 2023). This is a small-scale case study, which is appropriate as it allows for "a holistic understanding of a phenomenon within real-life contexts from the perspective of those involved" (Boblin et al., 2013, p. 2). A case study is a description and analysis of a bounded system and pinpoints the unit of the study—the case (Braun & Clarke, 2012; Merriam, 2014; Yin, 2014, 2018). The bounded system in this case study involves two different schools and the teaching experiences of four different teachers in two different school settings.

I went through a rigorous process to obtain approval. First, I applied to Monash University Human Ethics Research Committees (MUHREC, Project Number: 7978). I initially approached several schools (government and non-government) that were conveniently located for access by me. Of those, two schools agreed. I gained approval from the Department of Education and Training (DET), Victoria, Australia (for the government school).

To provide contextual information about the schools and to support the formation of questions, I looked at schools' websites and policy statements (Middleton, 2012). I also spent time at the schools and took handwritten field notes in a journal to inform my understanding of the school culture, teachers, and students (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018; Stake, 1995). I spent three days a week over a four-week period at each school. These observations allowed me to construct a deeper understanding of the classroom dynamics and the teachers' teaching styles (Kervin et al., 2016). The documents I collected and my observations were used to form interview questions and encourage discussion.

Data Collection. The data collected for this study comprised semi-structured interviews. At each school, I conducted semi-structured interviews, approximately 30 minutes each in length. Sometimes, these interviews took longer; for example, Carol talked for 90 minutes. In case studies, the most common data collection strategy is semi-structured interviews that provide rich data from the participants that reveal the context and practices of teaching and learning in such a way that seems credible, authentic, and trustworthy (Edwards & Edwards, 2017; Whiting & Sines, 2012).

Data Analysis. Following each individual interview with the participant teachers, I completed the transcriptions. My PhD supervisor and I independently analysed the transcripts (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2012; van Manen, 2016). I individually generated codes to capture meanings for data elements "for later purposes of pattern detection, categorisation, theory building, and other analytic processes" (Saldaña, 2013, p. 4). Codes are "summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (Saldaña, 2013, p. 3). Initially, my coding involved marginal line-by-line notes (Kirkham et al., 2015). I agreed that each would code according to what they found. For example, my PhD supervisor was not familiar with the deep-seated divisions in the teaching of literacy in Australia that surrounded the use of phonics in classrooms. These contested debates are termed the "literacy wars" (Snyder, 2008), and this polarisation remains a subject of debate amongst literacy educators (Miller, 2020).

What my supervisor would have glossed over, I would have explained important pedagogical debates in which strongly held positions could be understood as sites of resistance. These two perspectives offered the opportunity to argue about what was important, what was based on assumptions, and what was irrelevant. I each sought patterns based on my own perspectives (Paley, 2014). Once I had built my own patterns, we came together to build shared understanding. Following robust discussion about what I thought I found, I built my analysis. I created my patterns—two dichotomous and the last an overall consensus. These were:

1. Technology seen as a child minder and a distracting gimmick *versus* technology as entrance to shared interactive and collaborative learning.
2. Phonics *versus* whole language instruction.
3. Mainstream *versus* alternative school ethos.
4. Consensus concerning teacher understanding of role based on experience, reflection and investment.

In accord with Rodham et al. (2015), I found that most commonly I had each given a different label to the same idea. I reflected further, and once I reached agreement with my supervisor, I began writing. To give voice to the participants, I have used direct quotes to enrich my analysis (Larkin et al., 2006). I felt that by having different perspectives on the data, analysing independently, and having the opportunity to argue about what I saw, I have strengthened the credibility of my findings and interpretation. Independent analysis recognised the different experiences, assumptions, and biases I brought to the process of sense-making (Mjøsund et al., 2016). I was able to challenge the assumptions I brought to the study.

Introducing the Schools and the Participant Teachers

Two teachers from two different schools participated in this research (Figure 1). In total, there were four elementary teachers—Carol, Charles, Brenda, and Brian (pseudonyms)— who agreed to participate in this study. I recruited the teachers, after getting approval from appropriate institutions, first by sending emails directly to a number of schools across Melbourne, Australia. Creative Kids' Independent School (CKIS) and Beach Elementary Government School (BEGS) had kindly allowed me to come to their campuses to conduct the study. I invited Year 6 teachers in each school to volunteer and accepted all those who did so.

Figure 1
Teacher Research Participants

Creative Kids' Independent School (CKIS)	Beach Elementary Government School (BEGS)
Carol	Brenda
Charles	Brian

CKIS is an independent, alternative elementary school. The school has a relaxed atmosphere and feels like a family home. The school's kitchen is the hub of the school where the students, staff, and visitors gather around the kitchen bench to help themselves with locally produced, cooked food. At CKIS, there are only 70 students from Prep to Year 6 for the whole school. Due to its size, it has an intimate feel that makes it warm and inviting. Carol is the co-founder of CKIS and is the English teacher at the school. She has been teaching for over 40 years. At this school, students have one teacher to follow them throughout the elementary school. This is vastly different from having a class teacher who teaches everything for one year, followed by a new class teacher for the next year. At CKIS, teachers teach each child for 7 years. The argument for this approach is that the teacher knows each child's level, and thus how best to continue to support the child as she or he progresses throughout the elementary school years. Charles teaches English and physical education at CKIS. He has been teaching for over 20 years and had lived and taught extensively in Asia for many years.

Beach Elementary (BEGS) is situated in a leafy, high social economic suburb of Melbourne. The school has approximately 800 students whose demographic is made up of professional parents and middle-class backgrounds. The teachers explained that the parents believe in education and are incredibly supportive of their child's schooling. Most students come from a stable family background and English is their first language. Students and teachers have daily access to desktops, laptops, interactive whiteboards, iPads, and conferencing technology. In the upper elementary classes, all students have access to iPads as it is a Bring-Your-Own-Device learning environment. The school uses Google Classroom for both teaching and learning, the students are being educated about the safe practice of technology, and students are encouraged to independently access the world of information in a variety of formats. The participating teachers at BEGS are Brenda and Brian. Brenda has been a teacher at BEGS for more than 30 years. She is patient, calm, and loves teaching and her students. She is a veteran teacher with over 30 years of experience. Brian is in his early 30s and had been teaching for 10 years. He is an Assistant Principal at BEGS and loves to integrate technology into his teaching with his students.

Findings

I present the research findings in accord with my research questions and in how I understood my data. Some of what I found was descriptive which I have used to position the teachers' understandings of their role and practice. I discuss the use of technology in the teaching of literacies to boys, placing the teachers' views within the contexts of their schools. I do this under three headings that look at attitudes, pedagogies, and understandings of role and practice. In the first, I consider the role of technology as distraction or tool. Under the second, I address how literacy is taught by the teachers within their school ethos. This also addresses school ethos both generally and specifically as related to the teaching of literacy. The third

heading addresses teachers' understanding of their roles based on experience, reflection, and investment. I begin by discussing the cultural contexts in which my participants function as a preface to their comments about the use of technology in teaching and learning.

Attitudes to Technology. The two schools differed significantly in their positions about the inclusion of technology in teaching and learning. This was embedded in the schools' ethos and culture. At BEGS, electronic devices are standard and expected as in all schools in the government system. Using technology to teach can offer benefits for both teachers and students (Ritchie, 2018). At BEGS, the students brought their own tablet device from home as the school uses Google Classroom and other mobile technology apps in their teaching and learning. Teaching and learning Ire was through the use of the iPad. The rationale for using tablets at BEGS included students' engagement, increased motivation, and consistency across their Year 6 cohort (Musti-Rao et al., 2015). At BEGS, the focus is on whole language through inquiry and the integration of technology in their classroom. The school used Google Classroom and educational apps from the students' devices. In this school, teachers and students deem the use of tablets (iPads), their associated educational apps, and the use of YouTube clips to be engaging and helpful in teaching and learning. This aligns with the Victorian Curriculum's inclusion of ICT in the classroom (VCAA, n.d.). For literacy teaching, the teachers would use the Interactive White Board to present the lesson. The students would then work on their assigned tasks on their tablets.

The independent school, CKIS, eschews the presence of electronic devices such as iPads and laptops in classrooms. In stark contrast to BEGS, at CKIS, there was no technology used in teaching and learning. For their literacy lessons, there were only two English teachers for the whole school. At Year 6 level, the students were reading fluently and were all reading the same text: *Wind in the Willows* by Kenneth Grahame. They were all sitting together around a round table with a 'lazy Susan' (like the table in Chinese restaurants) in the school's English room. Afternoon tea was served with proper high tea every Monday afternoon after their literacy lesson. Each student was given an assignment to analyse and critique the text book and Ire working at their own individual learning pace. Once the teacher was satisfied with their responses, they would be allowed to handwrite their drafts into good copies.

> Technologies are here with us, and they are wonderful tools. It would be stupid for us to say that they are not. However, how they are used are essential. Unfortunately, feedback given to me by parents and teachers is that they are often used as a child minder—"finish that then you can go and use the iPad." I don't think technology such as iPad should be used as a child minder. (Carol)

> I try not to use technology in my teaching. I believe in the elementary years; technology interferes with learning. For me, by focusing on the learning without the gimmicks of technology, students can focus on learning and not become distracted. (Charles)

At BEGS, each student has their own tablet, and the school believes in the inclusion of mobile technology in its teaching and learning.

> I provide students time to reflect on their learning, to engage written learning conversation and leveraging things like collaborative learning spaces. I use Apps such as SeeSaw, Google Classroom. In Google Classroom, students would post informal feedback on written learning tasks. (Brenda)

> I think for kids with writing issues, the iPad is a really good tool, but I need to make sure that the iPad is being used in the right way. So, keeping them in check. Lots of boys like visuals for example videos in the classroom, visual on the Interactive White Board and showing and moving things around. (Brian)

The integration of technology into teaching children how to read and write in elementary schools continues to be a contentious topic of debate (Miller, 2020). Both schools and their teachers have shared their reasons for choosing to use or not to use technology in their practice. There is no right or wrong answer with regards to the way the teachers view technology in their teaching practice. What needs to be considered is how effective their teaching is to students within their school community, and how that sits with their teaching beliefs towards the use of technology. Technology is a useful teaching tool, but it should never entirely replace a good teacher.

Over the past decade, research has consistently highlighted the complex relationship between teachers' pedagogical beliefs and their attitudes toward integrating technology into their teaching practices. Ertmer et al. (2012) emphasise that while many teachers recognise the potential benefits of technology in enhancing student learning, their actual integration practices are often influenced by deeply held beliefs about teaching and learning. Tondeur et al. (2017) further illustrate that teachers who view technology as a tool to support constructivist pedagogies are more likely to incorporate it effectively into their classrooms. Despite this, barriers such as lack of resources, training, and support can hinder technology adoption (Koehler et al., 2014). Aydin and Kaya (2019) found that teachers' attitudes toward technology vary significantly across disciplines, with social studies teachers expressing both enthusiasm and apprehension about its use. Overall, while positive attitudes toward technology are prevalent, successful integration requires addressing both belief systems and practical constraints.

Teachers' Pedagogical Approaches. Within the teaching of reading *per se*, there are many contentious opinions and disagreements about how teachers teach students how to read. It is not within the scope of this article to discuss the "reading war" between the teaching of explicit phonics versus whole language. Effectively teaching students how to read encompasses a range of different strategies. At CKIS, the school believes in an explicit phonics approach to teach children how to read in the early stages of their schooling. As Carol explained:
> When I speak, I make talking sounds when I write, I write these sounds. That is what I am doing, I are writing on what I am talking on to the page. Phonics is an excellent teaching approach. (Carol)

Charles echoed similar sentiment as he justified his teaching approach:
> Very simply, phonics work, the other don't in a nutshell. Some opponents to phonics might argue that "I am barking at prints." For us, phonics gives them the tools to read, but you also have to go through with the students and show them how you are reading and how you read for comprehension. You have to have the analysis of the language itself." (Charles)

Carol expanded on the idea:
> I believe that I should teach from the heart, and I should do what is best for the kids. We are blessed to have parents who believed in us. It left us free in the sense that in

an era where whole language was dominant, I was teaching phonics. I did not realise that I was flying in the face of the modern methodology being whole language. I just sat down and worked with my students and worked out a system that would work not knowing that the others did do it that way. (Carol)

Like Carol, Charles's literacy teaching pedagogy is explicit phonics teaching to the children until they reach fluency. They offered different opinions when it came to critical literacy. Carol believed in using quality classic books to teach the students morals such as *To Kill a Mocking Bird* and *Wind in the Willows*. Charles believed literacy should be enjoyed, rather than critically analysed for children in elementary schools:

> So, what I am saying is rather than looking literacy critically and trying to be critical. Let's look at literature as what it is and enjoy it. For me, I teach literature for joy. I try to bring the books to life. Here at this school, I look at all the elements of styles, the choice of words, the ideas behind it, the themes, the author's meanings, how the characters grow and develop? I also use these books to teach the students strengths. For example, when I analyse the characters, I look at their strengths and weaknesses and work out what do they lack and how I can learn from that.

At BEGS, they believe in the Inquiry approach to teach literacy to their students. Again, it is not within the scope of this paper to analyse which is the best literacy pedagogy. It is about understanding the teachers and the choices they make.

> I think the Inquiry approach to teaching at my school opens up to how literacy should be taught. In the early years, they would learn how to read. At this level in year 6, they are reading to learn. My inquiry approach of asking authentic relevant questions to bring a whole sense of purpose to reading, writing, listening and speaking. (Brenda)
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> With reading, I am enhancing comprehension, reading accuracy, expand vocabulary and reading fluency. The key to that is to provide students with a range of text types, a range of text genre and providing students opportunities to discuss the texts and their peers and with teachers. To have conversations with various elements of the texts, to build critical thinking the way they respond to those texts and providing multimodal formats such as video text and images. (Brian)

The two teachers at CKIS focused on reading strategies implicitly through the phonics approach (Koch & Sporer, 2017; Hornsby & Wilson, 2011). The teachers' pedagogical approaches were intertwined with their cultural and educational philosophies at their schools. At CKIS, a school characterised by its deliberate resistance to technology and the whole language approach, teachers like Carol embodied a teaching philosophy that prioritised a combination of explicit teaching of phonics in the early years, then teaching her students critical literacy in the upper primary years. This school foster a culture of professional identity among its staff, who were drawn to the school because of its teaching ethos. The teachers at CKIS were actively participating in a community that championed their shared convictions about teaching and learning. This alignment between personal beliefs and school practices allowed them to teach with authenticity, as reflected in the epigram "I teach who I are" (Howard et al., 2021).

In contrast, the teachers at BEGS, a government school, operate within a more standardised and compliance-driven system. At this school, the expectation to integrate technology into teaching practices was more evidenced, reflecting broader educational policies aimed at utilising technology into their teaching. Despite this, the participant teachers at BEGS navigated these expectations with professionalism. They recognised the importance of aligning with the expectations from institutional norms while striving to maintain their pedagogical integrity. The standardised environment at BEGS presented challenges for teachers who might hold alternative views on using technology, as deviating from the norm required navigating institutional expectations and potential resistance. Even so, these teachers demonstrated their adaptability to change, and they found ways to reconcile their personal teaching philosophies with the demands of a system that prioritised technological integration. This dynamic highlights the complexities teachers face when their pedagogical approaches intersect with institutional cultures and the broader educational landscape (Ottenbreit-Leftwich et al., 2020).

Teachers' Understanding of Role and Practice. The participant teachers' understanding of role and practice was framed within their school cultures which adopted particular stances concerning technology and pursued different approaches to the teaching of literacies. In one sense, it was to be anticipated that teachers would agree with school principles and practices, but I found in my participants that it was more than that. My participants had sought to teach in schools that accorded with their sense of professional identity. They enacted the epigram mentioned earlier, "I teach who I are." I found this to be particularly so at CKIS with its unique approach that was swimming against the tide of the ubiquitous presence of technology in classrooms. Carol described "flying in the face" of both technology and the whole language approach, being proud of her resistance and firm in her convictions that her ways worked. She had founded the school to do just this, gathering like-minded teachers and parents to form a community of resistance. The CKIS teachers I interviewed existed within their school cultures (Palmer, 2003). It can be argued that those at CKIS have gravitated toward a small school that matches their understandings of teaching and learning. The participants who worked at the government school, BEGS, functioned within a much more standardised system which held expectations of compliance. I suggest that it would be a brave teacher who worked in a government school, espoused a rejection of technology in classrooms, and chose to teach in a different way than the other staff.

Carol offered the strongest example of teaching that demonstrated good teachers teach "from the heart." This echoes the work of Palmer (2017) and Troman (2008) mentioned earlier, that good teaching comes from the heart. The other teacher at CKIS school, Charles, also spoke of his belief in the joy of teaching and the importance of modelling and inculcating enjoyment in engaging with literacies. He formulated this around assertions of the importance of a student-centred approach which employed a strengths-based approach (Lopez & Louis, 2009). Carol argued that teachers are active protagonists in their students' learning, asserting that teaching and learning are relational as it is about the relationship between the teacher and the learner which should not be mediated by technology. Carol cited the support of her parent base in this decision, stating that technology should not be a "child minder" either in the classroom or the home. Although not as openly stated, all the teachers in this study considered that their teaching was child cantered, taking into account individual differences, interests and abilities. For my participants, central to their notion of self was being present and proactive in their engagement with their students, striving to be role models who project an authentic self who is enthusiastic and caring. Teaching is personal, emotional work, and

teachers' practice is based on their sense of who they are as teachers. This is founded on experience, reflection, and investment.

One of the common traits amongst the teachers I interviewed is their high expectations of themselves, and this has translated to their high expectations of their students (Soares & Silva Fernandes, 2010). Teacher expectations are "inferences that teachers made about the future academic achievement of their students based on what they know about these students now" (Good & Brophy, 1997, p. 79). This high expectation is crucial as the students can internalise this and rise to meet their teacher's high expectations (McDonald et al., 2016).

Discussion

Even from my limited number of interviews with a small group of participants, it is evident that teaching is a complex and personal profession in which teachers bring their own style of teaching, based on their life experiences, values, and culture (Pillen et al., 2013). The teachers who participated described different teaching experiences, practices, beliefs, and ethos. The most striking of these was the position they adopted about the inclusion of electronic devices in teaching literacy. The teaching approaches of the two schools and their teachers are different, but each school does what they believe is best for their students. I purposely selected two schools that had quite different approaches to teaching reading and writing in Year 6 and the role of technology in classrooms. I was surprised that the teachers at CKIS described an embedded school culture that was resistant to the mainstream demands for the inclusion of technology in all facets of teaching and learning. In some ways, CKIS positioned itself as an alternate school, reminiscent of A. S. Neill's school, Summerhill (Neill, 1960). Despite the extreme differences between the schools' ethos, I found similarities and differences between the teachers.

Although I initially sought teacher views on teaching boys how to write, particularly when they are in the final year of elementary school, the teachers did not differentiate their teaching according to the sex of the students. The teachers adopt an individualised, student-centred approach and teach according to what they believe would be the best for each student. Teaching is a vocation, and the teachers interviewed showed that the profession is their calling. Writing is an important skill to acquire from the moment the student starts school and into adulthood. For boys in particular, the teachers teach the children at their point of need, regardless of gender. For both schools, whether they use technology or not in their practice, or regardless of the literacy pedagogy they believe in, the main purpose is the same: they want their students to enjoy learning and be productive. In this study, the teachers found values at the school that align to their understanding of role and pedagogy. They must believe in what they teach to be effective teachers (Palmer, 2003).

Future Research

In future research, I would be interested to explore how other alternate schools with different ethos, focusing not just on the teachers but also on the parents who select these schools for their children. If possible, a longitudinal study might follow children from alternate primary schools if and when they enter mainstream government schooling.

Future research could delve into the integration of socio-cultural models, such as Green's 3D model (2012) and the Four Resources Model (Freebody & Luke, 1990), with phonics-based approaches to literacy education. Studies could explore how these models can be adapted to

diverse cultural contexts, enhancing both decoding and comprehension skills. Recent literature suggests that combining phonics with socio-cultural strategies may provide a more holistic approach to literacy (Gee, 2020; Knobel & Lankshear, 2018). Longitudinal studies tracking students from early years through upper primary could provide insights into how initial phonics instruction impacts later comprehension abilities addressing concerns about the limitations of phonological awareness alone (Castles et al., 2018; Palinscar, 2003).

Additionally, the role of technology in literacy education warrants further exploration. With varying approaches to handwriting and digital tools in schools, comparative studies could assess the effectiveness of integrating technology, such as tablets, in teaching reading and writing (Leu et al., 2019). This includes examining how digital literacy can complement traditional literacy skills, preparing students for future educational demands. Moreover, research could focus on interest-based literacy programs, particularly for upper primary male students, to enhance motivation and engagement through content that aligns with their interests, such as comics and humours stories (Fletcher et al., 2012; Merisuo-Storm, 2006).

Moreover, understanding the interrelation of reading and writing through integrated literacy instruction could be a valuable area for future study. Recent findings suggest that developing these skills simultaneously can enhance student comprehension and expression, offering a more comprehensive literacy education (Abbott et al., 2010; Dunn & Sweeney, 2018). By exploring these directions, future research can contribute to a deeper understanding of effective literacy practices and inform educational policy and teaching methodologies.

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Dr. Jennifer Sze (Jennifer.sze@unimelb.edu.au) is a Lecturer in Learning Intervention in the Faculty of Education at The University of Melbourne, Australia. Follow her on LinkedIn at www.linkedin.com/in/dr-jennifer-sze-phd-8b3b9831.